

Reviews

ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN ENGLAND : FROM THE ELIZABETHAN SETTLEMENT TO THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL by Edward Norman. *Oxford University Press, 1965*, pp. vii + 138. £9.95.

BRASENOSE PRIESTS AND MARTYRS UNDER ELIZABETH I by Patrick McGrath. *Francis Ingleby Society, Brasenose College, Oxford, 1965*. pp. 28. £1.00.

NICHOLAS WISEMAN AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF ENGLISH CATHOLICISM BY Richard J. Schiefen. *The Patmos Press, Shepherdstown, 1964*, pp. xvi + 399. n.p.

The three books under review all reflect, in their different ways, the flourishing state of studies in the history of English Catholicism. Two types of book are represented here, each dependent on the other: the general survey by Dr. Norman depends on the basic research of such as Prof. McGrath and Dr. Schiefen, and they need the wider perspectives which his book can offer.

It is 50 years since Archbishop David Mathew's magisterial but idiosyncratic *Catholicism in England* appeared, so that another survey by a professional historian was needed. The general editors of the OPUS series, which has included some important books such as Brian Davies' *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, intended Dr. Norman's *Roman Catholicism in England* to be a 'concise, original and authoritative' introduction to the subject, 'written for the general reader as well as for students'. Dr. Norman calls his book an 'essay', not just because it is short (138 pages) but also, I think, because he hoped it would fulfil the same role as that fine literary genre, the English essay, and would study 'problems, not periods' in a brief and illuminating way.

Though not a Catholic, Dr. Norman writes with more sustained sympathy for his subject than a lot of modern Catholic historians could summon. The Dedication, for instance, is to St. Henry Walpole, an alumnus of his college, Peterhouse. Occasionally the reader may feel that history has thus become the handmaid of doctrine, as in his statement that all phases in the story appear to have 'that unity which the local history of a universal institution ought to disclose to the observer'.

Dr. Norman's qualifications for his task are formidable, however, as appears from two of his major publications, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England* (1968) and *The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century* (1964). It was natural, perhaps, that 31 out of the 45 items in his bibliography should have been devoted to the period 1800—1965, and that he gave proportionately less chapter space to the preceding two and a half centuries. It must be said, however, that most of the good research in the history of English Catholicism over the past 35 years has been on the earlier period, which, broadly speaking, merely needed summarising.

In order to try to make some sense of the past, every historian should put forward an interpretation, but he must ensure that this becomes, not a straitjacket for the facts, but an illumination of them. Over the last ten years or so the dominant school of thought has argued that there were some basic discontinuities in the history of English Catholicism, and supports the regulars in seeing England as *pays de mission* and the Catholics as a denomination like any other. Dr. Norman reacts against these views, taking the seculars' side, seeing continuity rather than change, and understanding the Catholics, not as a denomination, let alone as a sect, but a 'Church', ready to return to normal episcopal government as soon as possible. Religious minorities, he adds, tend to become radicalised and marginalised, and it is the English Catholics' greatest achievement that they avoided this fate. Each interpretation has much to commend it, but Dr. Norman's presentation of his view again gives rise to the uneasy feeling that history is being put to the service of doctrine. In a book of this brevity there is not room to give every generalisation the qualification it deserves, and thus, for instance, his

emphasis on the Catholics' orthodoxy and their loyalty to the Holy See should be balanced by a counter-emphasis on the strong Anglo-Gallican tradition, which went from the sixteenth-century Appellants, via Thomas Preston, Maurus Corker and Charles Butler, to Mark Tierney in the nineteenth century.

Brevity, too, can lead to misunderstandings. To write, for instance, that four Jesuits 'were identified by the Government' as being linked to the Gunpowder Plot is not to state the whole truth. Then there is the problem of calculating how much knowledge to assume in the general reader, as in the statement that Fr. John Hudleston assisted Charles II's escape 'from Worcester', meaning the battle that took place in 1651, followed by the King's perilous journey to the south coast and a second exile. A general survey, moreover, has to contain many clear statements, based, sometimes, on guesswork, where, as in the question of Catholic allegiance in the Civil War, there is a lack of conclusive evidence. Thus 'no doubt' Catholics joined the Royalist side as a continued proof of their declarations of loyalty—a topic, which, like the notorious 'Storm over the Gentry' controversy, has generated more heat than light. Finally—scraping the bottom of the pedant's barrel—I cannot resist noting the appearance on p. 9 of John Leander Jones as 'Jack Jones', a Freudian slip, perhaps? Like the one just man in Sodom or the only good guy in the T.U.C, Leander Jones is every Anglican historian's idea of the acceptable face of Roman Catholicism. When all is said and done, however, we are all in Dr. Norman's debt for this clear and useful summary, which will at least make the undertaking of such a herculean task unnecessary for another 50 years.

When trying to find an explanation of how English Catholicism survived as 'Church', Dr. Norman reacts against the reaction against martyrology. Among Oxford colleges, Brasenose was second only to St. John's in the number of martyrs it produced. Prof. McGrath has filled a gap by giving us a kind of Norrington Table of all the Oxford colleges which had 'Firsts' of this kind, adding some neglected worthies to Brasenose's records of its past, and thus producing some enthralling case studies, put together with the fine accuracy and sense of detail that we should expect from him.

No one but a salamander would risk the stake for the accuracy of a single statement by Lytton Strachey in his portrait of Nicholas Cardinal Wiseman from *Eminent Victorians*. Dr. Norman's portrait, by contrast, is a little too dry for most people's taste, like luncheon sherry at a meeting of history dons. Dr. Schiefen, however, has got it just right. Strachey's stories are still there, but divested of spiteful innuendo. Thus Strachey's, 'I am sorry to say that there is a lobster salad side to the Cardinal', put into the mouth of one of Newman's disciples, becomes 'a lobster salad side as well as a spiritual side'; and to the story of the corpulent Cardinal being addressed by a poor person as 'your Immense' Schiefen adds that Wiseman was apparently delighted. It is nice, also, to find the origin of Strachey's description of Wiseman and his secretary, Mgr Searle, as 'neighbouring mountains' in the statement by a priest, when he saw the two men and the Jesuit Provincial together, 'I thought, Is this, then, the effect of prayer and fasting? Three such mountains of flesh I had never before seen'. (He went on to describe the 'unaffected expansiveness' with which Wiseman greeted him 'frankness even to familiarity'.)

Dr. Schiefen's is a truly superb book, just the sort of monograph that has been relatively lacking in recent studies of nineteenth-century English Catholicism. There is a good deal more to his book than a biography, since it is based firmly on the doctoral dissertation about the organisation and administration of the English and Welsh dioceses in the mid-nineteenth century, which he completed for London University in 1970. Among his sources, he has made use of over 60 collections in the Archdiocesan Archive at Westminster, which only in comparatively recent years has been properly sorted and catalogued. His book is, however, more than a dissertation, but a study that has been widened and deepened by reflection and further research over the past fourteen years. The portrait of Wiseman that emerges, pustules and all, is every bit as photogenic as Strachey's, but it is one which, blackened by time and neglect, has now been carefully restored.

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