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HUGH McLEOD

Crows, snakes, pigs, spiders - the zoological similes used by French anti-clericals to express their repugnance towards the clergy were legion. One prominent republican politician, in an after-dinner speech delivered in a wine-growing department, even compared priests to the phylloxera. German anti-clericals less often drew parallels of this kind, but a considerable amount of venom could be injected into the words die Pfaffen? What has modern English to show? The term 'parson', was often used with mildly derogatory intent, but it could also be used as a purely neutral term for a clergyman. 'Crow', 'black boy', and 'black coat' were all sometimes used in the nineteenth century with reference to the clergy, but none was in widespread use. Sky pilot, had some degree of currency in the early part of this century, and is still occasionally encountered. It is more frankly a term of ridicule, but it has never really caught on.

So maybe there is no such thing as English anti-clericalism in the period since 1870? The high point of hostility to the clergy during the last two centuries is generally reckoned to be the burning down of the palace of the Bishop of Bristol in 1831, in reprisal for episcopal opposition to the Reform Bill. During the same period rioting rural labourers threatened or attacked the homes of numerous country clergymen. There is no doubt of the unpopularity which the Anglican clergy suffered during the years round 1830 because of their wealth, their identification with political conservatism, and frequently their direct involvement as magistrates in the defence of the social order and the suppression of protest. However, the leading authority on the history of modern English anti-clericalism, Eric Evans, argues that there was a precipitous decline in animosity towards the clergy after about 1840. He attributes this partly to the effects of the church reforms of the 1830s and '40s, but mainly to increasing religious apathy: it was not that the people came to love the clergy any more, but simply that what the clergy did or did not do seemed to matter less. While the literature on Victorian religion is now very extensive, and a number of substantial books have been written about the clergy, very few historians have shown any interest in anti-clericalism in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. The major exception to this is Eugenio Biagini, whose study of popular radicalism in the age of Gladstone accords anti-clericalism a centrality which no other historian has given it. He notes the support given by the radicals of the 1860s and '70s to the cause of religious freedom generally, and specifically to the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in England and Ireland, non-sectarian education, and the right of the atheist Bradlaugh to sit in Parliament. He mentions their involvement in the agricultural labourers, movement of the 1870s and their attacks on their Anglican clergy who were regarded as its chief foes. And he highlights the interest taken by British radicals in the struggles against the power of the Papacy and the Catholic Church in Italy. But it would be hard to claim any similarly central role for anti-clericalism in British politics for any period after the 1880s.

These examples are taken from Eric Partridge, A Dictionary of Historical Slang (Harmondsworth 1972).
A number of historians of the middle and later Victorian period have introduced anti-clericalism as a minor theme into their narrative. For instance, Obelkevich, in his study of rural religion in Lincolnshire, uses the correspondence of landowners to show that however publicly supportive of the church they might be, they often were privately very suspicious of the clergy. Thus a Whig aristocrat, Lord Monson, wrote in 1851 that 'those fellows in black coats', were 'more eager after money than any other profession', and he particularly deplored the strength of the High Church party, whose aim it was 'to throw an undisputed pow-
er into the hands of the parsons and make the laity nothing'. 7 Paul Thompson and Stan Shipley have found evidence of similar sentiments at the opposite end of the social spectrum; among working-class radicals in London. For instance, Shipley, who has studied working men's clubs, suggests that 'a strong current of anti-clericalism ran through most of the [London radical] clubs'. He quotes the example of the Borough of Hackney Club in the 1870s, where a lecture on science took on a strongly anti-religious character, with many 'sly drives at the clergy, chiefly those of the Church of England, which were highly appreciated by the audience'. 8

One would have to conclude that by comparison with contemporary France, Spain or Italy, or even by comparison with England in the early nineteenth century, English anti-clericalism in the period 1870 to 1914 was a relatively marginal phenomenon. However, the lack of any very powerful anti-clerical movement, and the fact that except for a brief period in the 1870s anti-clericalism was not a major political issue, should not obscure the existence of anti-clerical sentiments of various kinds, which could have a significant influence both on the collective mentalities of certain groups and on the outlook of many individuals.

As the examples quoted above would suggest, anti-clerical feelings of various kinds remained the laity of various sects in the private sphere, even if it was tending to be pushed out of the public sphere. Take the example of Charles Booth's monumental Life and Labour of the People of London, published in seventeen volumes, of which seven were devoted to 'Religious Influences'. 9 The published volumes maintained an attitude towards the clergy that was generally respectful, even if quite critical in individual cases. When, however, one turns to the unpublished notebooks on which the volumes were based, one finds that some members of Booth's team of researchers held views themselves, and reported views expressed by others, that were much more frankly hostile. This was notably true of Arthur Baxter, a London barrister, who ran a boys' club in a working-class district of the city, and who was responsible for many of the interviews with clergymen on which the volumes were partly based. He concluded a report on the East End of London by writing:

The only point on which the evidence suggests any new thoughts is the often repeated remark that there is no hostility to religion: in a broad sense this is probably true, but it may be well to remember that nearly all our testimony on this point comes from ministers of religion, and the growing politeness and urbanity produced by education would make such hostility less patent to them even if it existed: but even from the clergy (eg Mr Dalton) one hears that the general opinion of the working man is that the clergy are either knaves or fools, while Mr Bray, a schoolmaster of unusual culture, emphasises this point and seems rather to approve the verdict which he quotes that ministers of religion are 'rather a poor lot', worse rather than better than their fellow men. There is no doubt that this feeling is widespread, and if it does not constitute hostility to religion it does at least show a very considerable prejudice against the churches, a hostility which even men of the undeniable strength and goodness of Dalton or Howard have the greatest difficulty in breaking down. And is not this attitude to some extent justified? No doubt it is true in no small measure to the fact that the churches, with their restrictive doctrines, are bound, even when represented by saints, to be regarded with distaste by the mass of ordinary men. But is it not also largely the result of the sins of the churches? Has not the average man who stands outside the churches some reason for thinking that the intemperance, the impurity, and the gambling against which ministers of religion are always thundering are no worse than the fighting, the lying, and the uncharitableness which fill so large a place in the daily lives of so many of these good people? 10

In a later report Baxter went on to claim that the prejudice against the clergy was such that they would be more effective as lay social workers:

At the back of their minds they must all know that whatever the attitude of the working classes to religion in the abstract, in the concrete there is a feeling towards the minister of religion for which it is difficult to find any other word than hostility: the feeling that we don't want nothing to do with no bloody parsons. 11
Wherever there is a distinction within the church between 'clergy' and 'laity' there is likely to be at least some tension between them; and in any society where the church is a powerful institution, exercising a degree of control over many areas of life apart from the purely 'religious', there is likely to be at least some degree of tension between the clergy and the population generally, including those who have very little involvement in the church. The severity of these tensions will be influenced by many different factors including most notably the extent and nature of the clergy's political activity, their individual or collective wealth, and the degree to which their separation from the clergy is emphasised by such things as distinctive dress, a distinctive way of life (e.g. celibacy), exclusive access to important religious functions (e.g. preaching or administration of the sacraments), or the exercise of special controls over the laity (e.g. through the confessional). Anti-clericalism played at least some part in all Christian societies in the later nineteenth century. But one needs to distinguish between those like France, Spain, or many Latin American countries, where it was central, and those like the United States where it was of minor significance. England lay about midway between these extremes.

My aim in this paper will be to present a typology of anti-clericalism in later nineteenth and early twentieth century England, and to explore the changes over time in the relative significance of the various types. Included in this typology will be most of the forms of hostility referred to by Arthur Baxter or exemplified in his own remarks in the course of the diatribes quoted above. I shall concentrate on hostility to the clergy of the Anglican and Nonconformist churches — those to which the great majority of the population belonged and will leave on one side the rather different issues raised by hostility to the Roman Catholic clergy. In particular, it should be noted that much of the abuse and ridicule heaped upon Catholic priests was an aspect of anti-Catholicism. Anti-clericalism I take to be suspicion of and hostility to the clergy of one's own church, rather than a means of attacking other people's churches.

I have categorised as follows the forms of explicit or implied critique of the Anglican or Nonconformist clergy that were current in England during this time:

(1) the radical, according to which the clergy were condemned as reactionaries,

(2) the plebeian, which accused them of being snobs,

(3) the Protestant, which accused them of priest-craft,

(4) the liberal, which condemned religion, and thus most of the work of the clergy, as intrinsically opposed to science and reason,

(5) the anti-puritan, which presented the clergy as killjoys,

(6) the masculinist, according to which clergymen were not 'real men', and

(7) the realist, according to which the clergy were hopelessly idealistic and did not live in 'the real world'.

The radical critique was directed mainly at the clergy of the Church of England, who were frequently depicted as the supreme enemies of progress, as oppressors of the poor, as preachers of submission to authority. This kind of criticism was most frequently heard in rural areas, and had obvious roots in the fact that the clergy were so frequently a principal pillar of the rural power structure. In the earlier part of the century an important aspect of this was the role of clergymen as magistrates. The proportion of magistrates who were clergymen peaked at over 20% of the total around 1830, rising as high as 47% in the rural county of Lincolnshire. Clerical magistracy subsequently declined, partly because it conflicted with growing emphasis on the set-apartness of the clergy, and partly because of the realisation that the exercise of often highly controversial judicial functions could have an adverse effect on their relations with their poorer parishioners. But the country clergyman continued to be a figure of considerable and highly visible power, exercised through control over large
numbers of village schools and charities, and through personal links with landowners, as well as through the dominant influence which the Anglican clergy still had on the religious life of many rural areas. In a rural parish it was still possible for the parson to be personally known to all of his parishioners, through for instance, visiting their homes, in a way that was seldom possible in the towns. Strong feelings, whether of admiration, respect or affection, or of resentment or even hatred, frequently resulted. In the towns both the power exercised by the clergy and the intimacy of their relationships with their parishioners, were considerably diluted not only by the size of urban parishes, but also by the existence of many other figures of power, including, not least, the ministers of other denominations.

The religious census of 1851 showed that there already existed a high degree of religious pluralism in English towns, and in the great majority of cases, most church-goers were attending Nonconformist churches. This process had gone a step further by the 1880s. In most towns, the Anglican church could still attract large congregations, and in most there were Anglican clergymen who were powerful and respected figures. But this respect had to be earned: it was not inherent in the clergyman's position, in the way that often happened in the village. In so far as anti-clericalism was directed against the power of the church, it was simply less relevant in the towns.

Throughout the nineteenth century, criticism of the Anglican clergy had been a constant element of radical rhetoric, rising and falling in its extent and importance, but always there. After about 1890, as older forms of radicalism declined and socialism increasingly took its place, the older style of radical anti-clericalism also declined. This was partly because socialists were self-consciously rejecting many of the old radical shibboleths, and concentrating their attack on capitalism, the true root of all evil. It was partly, too, because the Church of England was responding to radical criticism by becoming more politically flexible, adapting its style of ministry to the demands of different environments. In this period, a new type of 'slum parson', was coming to the fore, who adapted not only his preaching and ritual, but often his politics as well, to what he identified as the needs and demands of his working-class parishioners. But, the same kind of logic which had driven radicals to attack the Anglican church, sometimes led socialists to attack the Nonconformist churches. In the industrial and mining districts where socialism had its early strong-holds, Nonconformity, most commonly some form of Methodism, was generally the dominant form of religion, and it was as closely identified with the Liberal Party as rural Anglicanism was with the Conservative Party. Many of the pioneers of the Independent Labour Party were themselves Nonconformists, and many of them had experienced opposition from their ministers or from the lay elite of their chapels.

During the period from the 1890s to the 1920s chapels were bitterly divided between proponents of the older liberalism and the newer socialism, and more often than not it was the liberals who came out on top, at least in the short term, as they were more likely to hold key offices, and their higher incomes also gave them leverage. It is significant that Robert Tressell's famous socialist novel, The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists (1914), directs all of its anti-clerical venom at the ministers of the Shining Light Chapel: the Anglican clergy are simply ignored. Tressell's book has enjoyed lasting popularity because of the realism and humour with which he presented the everyday lives of an impoverished working class. But subtlety and nuance are conspicuous by their absence. So far as religion is concerned, Tressell's message is a simple one: working class church-goers are pathetic dupes, and the Nonconformist ministers whose chapels they attend are enjoying a life of comfort by exploiting the naivety of their followers. Tressell has particular fun at the expense of the enormous balloon-like Rev John Belcher, whose health is of such concern to his congregation that they are continually paying for him to have holidays in the south of France.

However, radical anti-clericalism was of rapidly diminishing importance in the twentieth century. Indeed, in working-class areas, it was increasingly the case that those clergymen who intervened in politics did so from a radical or socialist standpoint. One consequence of this was the emergence of a conservative anti-clericalism, which lambasts the clergy for giving moral authority to the Left. This reached a high point in the 1980s, when Margaret Thatcher's government was subjected to frequent attacks by ministers of religion, and Conservative politicians periodically counter-attacked with criticism of the clergy. With characteristic bluntness, Norman Tebbit dismissed the famous church report on urban deprivation, Faith in the City, as 'Marxist rubbish'. And one of his colleagues advised the clergy to 'give up politics for Lent'. A more constant phenomenon has been the plebian anti-clericalism, which also was directed primarily at Anglicans, though again Nonconformist
ministers were sometimes targeted. This arose from the perception of the clergy as members of the social elite - linked most commonly with landowners in the countryside, and with businessmen or doctors in the towns. Even the best-intentioned clergymen could cause suspicion on the part of his poorer parishioners by his manner of speaking, appearance, and way of life. Anglican clergymen tended to live in large houses, they went on holidays, their wives dressed as 'ladies', and their children went to fee-paying schools. They spoke an 'educated' English, often with a distinct 'upper class' accent, and even their physique could be intimidating: Anglican clergymen were frequently tall, healthy, athletic men, towering above their half-starved parishioners. All of this applied less often to Nonconformist ministers, many of whom came from working-class families, and whose income was frequently that of a skilled workman or clerk. Nonetheless there were also 'pulpit princes', commanding very large salaries, and usually living in a very comfortable suburban villa. So there were aspects of the life-style of most Anglican and many Nonconformist clergymen which established a wide gulf between them and the mass of working-class people.

More important than this, however, were questions of how the clergy were seen to treat the various classes of their parishioners. A clergyman who was himself a 'nob' could be acceptable if he was felt to treat everyone alike and to take a personal interest even in the poorest member of his congregation: indeed the latter might be especially appreciative of kindness shown by a clergyman who was evidently 'a real gentleman'. On the other hand, any perceived slight by the clergy could leave a lasting burden of resentment. Complaints of this kind may not often be reported in published literature, but they have often been recorded by oral historians. Here, for instance, are the comments of a Tyneside coach-driver, born in 1900. He stated that the Anglican clergy mixed with a certain class. They didn't do, what they're supposed to do, not in my opinion. Because there's nobody loved the church more than I did. And that's one of the things that turned me against - well, I didn't turn against the church, but it certainly didn't help me with me church. In a church there was a clique, and if there was a clique, and you weren't in that clique, you was as well out...

'They didn't do what they're supposed to do'... 'Plebeian', and 'radical' anti-clericalism, unlike some other forms, were not necessarily irreligious. Indeed they frequently stemmed from a particular conception of Christianity as democratic, egalitarian and humanitarian, and from the belief that clergymen were failing to live up to the standards of the religion they professed, and that they were therefore 'hypocritical' and indeed 'unchristian'.

Many of the same points apply to the third form of critique, which I have termed Protestant. This was an attack on the clergy from within Christianity, and often from within the church. Antipathy to 'priests', and 'priestcraft' was widespread among the laity both of the Church of England and of the Nonconformist churches in the nineteenth century. Indeed, various Nonconformist denominations, including the Quakers, the Brethren, the Churches of Christ and the Independent Methodists, had no clergy, and opened all offices in the church at least to all male members (though some of these churches continued to place considerable restrictions on their women members). The Salvation Army also had no clergy, though they distinguished between those who worked full-time for the Army, known as 'officers', and those who provided voluntary labour in the evenings or on Sundays, known as 'men'. The central figure in a Baptist, Congregational or Unitarian church was the minister, who was pastor and preacher, conducted services and chaired church meetings. But since he also was elected and paid by the congregation, and could be dismissed by

16 See, e.g., Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church, 2 vols. (London 1966-1970), 11, pp 269-286; for the local importance of radical clergymen in various areas of London, see Thompson, op. cit, pp 22-25.
19 Hugo Young, One of Us: A Biography of Margaret Thatcher (revised edition, London 1993) devotes a chapter to Thatcher's disputes with the churches.
22 McLeod, Piety and Poverty, pp 194-195.
them, clericalism and anti-clericalism seldom became major issues, whatever the views on individual ministers might be. Some of the most fervent anti-clericals were themselves ministers, like R. W. Dale, the famous Birmingham Congregationalist, who made a point of dressing like a lawyer or doctor, and who repudiated the title of 'Reverend'. However, it was a different story in the Anglican and Methodist churches, where throughout the century conflicts between clergy and laity were a major source of conflict, and sometimes schism.

In the Church of England the key event was the emergence of the Oxford Movement in the 1830s and the subsequent development of 'ritualism', and 'Anglo-Catholicism'. By the later years of the century Anglo-Catholicism was the most dynamic force in the Church of England, and its influence was spreading to all areas of the church. But when 'ritualism' was imposed in a previously 'Protestant' parish, the resistance could still be fierce. Certain Anglo-Catholic, practices, such as the hearing of confessions, clerical celibacy, and the formation of Anglican monasteries and convents were a cause of special suspicion. All were regarded as manifestations of 'sacerdotalism', and were thus especially suspect to those who believed in 'the priesthood of all believers'.

Clericalism was an even more explosive issue within methodism, where the very word 'priest', was an insult. The tensions between the 'travelling preachers' (increasingly termed 'ministers') and the 'local preachers' (those who had another profession on weekdays and went out to preach on Sundays) was a central issue in the successive schisms which tore Methodism apart in the period from the 1790s to the 1850s. One of the breakaway groups in the 1820s had pointedly named themselves the Protestant Methodists, and the union of a number of the dissident bodies in 1857 assumed the title of United Methodist Free Churches. Freedom meant principally freedom from 'Conference', the governing body of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion, and the supreme bugbear of Methodist radicals and democrats. But since, until 1878, the Wesleyan Conference was made up exclusively of ministers, opposition to its dictates can be seen as a form of anti-clericalism. In this instance it was the 'tyranny' of the clergy which was the main focus of criticism, and certain aspects of the ministerial role took on special symbolic significance - for instance the claim to monopolise the administration of the sacraments, or the question of whether travelling preachers should be separated from those who were merely 'local' by a special training.

By about the 1880s, however, 'Protestant' anti-clericalism was losing some of its edge. Within the Church of England the militant Protestantism of such bodies as the Protestant Association and the Protestant Truth Society was coming to be regarded as 'fanatical' and 'extreme'. Anglo-Catholicism was achieving respectability, and some Anglo-Catholics were becoming bishops. Even Roman Catholicism was winning a degree of reluctant acceptance - which would be definitively confirmed by the First World War, when the Catholic hierarchy was impeccably patriotic and Catholic army chaplains won respect at the front. Meanwhile the trend towards 'higher' forms of worship, which was by then long-established in the Church of England, was even influencing many Non-conformists. It was reflected in the building of more magnificent and more richly decorated churches, the more extensive use of music in services, more formal liturgies, and a greater emphasis on the sacraments.

The spirit of the age was against Protestantism, which seemed incompatible with the new ethos of aesthetic awareness, sensitivity to 'tradition', and nascent ecumenism.

But if Protestant anti-clericalism was beginning to seem oldfashioned, liberal anti-clericalism was advancing. There were of course many Liberals who were also Nonconformists, and whose anti-clericalism was an aspect of their demand for religious freedom and equality. In terms of my typology, their form of anti-clericalism was a mixture of the 'radical' and the 'Protestant'. By 'liberal' anti-clericalism I am referring to the kind of liberalism which harked back to the Enlightenment, which saw reason and science as the only basis for truth, and presented education as the supreme panacea. In the third quarter of the nineteenth century, this form of liberalism was of course very widespread in France, and it had a considerable following in many other parts of continental Europe and Latin America. It was less widespread in England, where the principal bastions of the liberal middle class were not masonic lodges as in France, but Non-conformist chapels. However, in England too, there was a significant minority of religious sceptics in this class, and by the 1860s and 170s they were gaining ground in scientific, literary and academic circles.

Naturally, anti-clericalism was most attractive where there was a visible and apparently dangerous clerical presence. Probably nowhere in England was this presence so conspicuous as in the old High Church stronghold of Oxford University, and by the 1870s it was alleged to contain England's thickest concen-
tration of argumentative agnostics', 29 Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, High Church conservatives had been locked in battle with university reformers, many of them liberal Anglican 'Broad Churchmen', who wanted to open the university completely to non-Anglicans and to broaden the range of subjects taught. Similar battles were taking place within the scientific world where until about 1860 Anglican clergymen had a prominent role. In the eyes of the younger generation of professional scientists, led by the inexcusably bellicose Thomas Huxley, these clergymen-scientists were doubly objectionable, and should be cleared out. In the first place they were 'amateurs', and their continued prominence in bodies like the British Association for the Advancement of Science undermined the efforts of those who were trying to establish the claims of science to be regarded as a profession on a par with, for instance, medicine or law. And secondly, their allegiance to God potentially diverted them from those lines of scientific enquiry that might lead to a questioning of religious orthodoxy. 30 Of course the Darwinian theory of evolution appeared to be a prime example of such a situation, and the theory thus became a shibboleth for Huxley and his allies. Huxley's clash with Samuel Wilberforce, the Bishop of Oxford, at the British Association in 1860 has passed into national folklore, and to this day is periodically cited as evidence for the proposition that clergymen are necessarily obscurantist and anti-scientific - although historical research has suggested that the public memory of this event is as inaccurate as the memory of most other legendary episodes in national history. 31

Another leading propagandist for science, Francis Galton, wanted scientists to become 'a new priesthood'. 32 According to Frank Turner, scientific anti-clericalism diminished after about 1875 as scientists, who had apparently won their battle against the clergy, but failed to achieve the degree of public recognition and financial support that they demanded, increasingly directed their attacks against politicians and businessmen, who were now identified as the chief 'enemies of science'. 33

But it was not long before the clergy were under similar attack from social scientists and advocates of scientifically-based schemes of social reform. A key institution in the period from its foundation in 1884 up to the First World War, and one that reflected powerful trends in contemporary social thinking, was Toynbee Hall, the settlement in the East End of London. 34 Politically, it was mainly Liberal, and religiously it tended towards agnosticism. It helped to shape some of the most significant figures in twentieth century British history, including the later Labour Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, and the 'father of the Welfare State', William Beveridge. The tolerant undogmatic Anglicanism of the founders had created a haven in which those of little religious faith could pursue what really interested them, which was the reconstruction of society on more rational and scientific lines.

While not on the whole hostile to the clergy, Toynbee men tended to regard their efforts as irrelevant. Typical here was Ernest Aves, vice-warden in the 1890s, and later an important Board of Trade official, who assisted Charles Booth in his classic study of poverty, industry and religion in London during the 1880s and 1890s. Aves wanted the churches to concentrate on producing better citizens for a better society. He was not over-optimistic about human capacity but neither did he believe in the need for a sense of sin or a radical change of heart. He wanted facts, social surveys, skilful social engineering. The chief instruments of social improvement were schools and

24 While I would agree with Biagini (p 218) that anti-clericalism was directed primarily against the Anglican clergy, I would not accept that 'the Nonconformist churches were ... virtually invulnerable to anti-clerical hostility'.
26 For Methodist internal conflict, see Robert Currie, Methodism Divided (London 1968).
27 See the discussion of these issues in Hugh McLeod, Protestantism and British national identity 1815-1945, Peter van der Veer, Religious Moralities of the Nation-State (Princeton 1999).
28 See, e.g., Clyde Binfield, "We claim our part in this great inheritance": The message of four Congregational buildings", Keith Robbins, Protestant Evangelicalism: Britain, Ireland, Germany and America c. 1750-c. 1950 (Oxford 1990), pp 201-223.
29 Chadwick, op.cit., II, p444.
33 Ibid., pp 201-228.
34 See Standish Meacham, Toynbee Hall (London 1987).
an actively interventionist local government, but clergymen could help by inspiring those around them with high ideals. In most cases, he believed, they failed to do this, because they were too busy either in trying to save souls, or in pursuing a kind of ecclesiastical imperialism, according to which a big and 'successful' church was something good in itself.35

If the nineteenth century had been a great age of English puritanism, by the 1890s the anti-puritan reaction was in full swing, and clergymen were often among its major targets. In this instance, Nonconformist ministers were attacked with special frequency. Their critics could of course draw on a range of hostile stereotypes from literature, and especially from the novels of Charles Dickens. Since Nonconformist ministers were often the most outspoken critics of drinking and gambling and the most fervent defenders of the sabbath, they naturally came under attack from all those who saw the way forward as lying through 'emancipation', the divine right of self-development, or 'hedonism'.36 One of the most popular routes to such 'emancipation' was through sport, which became a national obsession in the period from the 1870s to the First World War. There was no necessary conflict between religion and sport. Indeed, a characteristic figure of this period was the 'muscular Christian', equally at home in a prayer meeting or a boxing ring. But there were those on both sides who did see a tension. While relatively few Christian preachers at the end of the nineteenth century would have claimed that sport was bad in itself, there were many who claimed that 'pleasure-seeking' had become a dangerously all-consuming pursuit, diverting the youth, in particular, from more serious concerns. The fact that sporting activity often took place on Sundays, or was associated with drinking or gambling, clearly meant that what might be good in principle was often bad in practice. Meanwhile, sections of the sporting press were inclined to ridicule the churches and clergy, and enthusiasts for Sunday sport tended to defend their position by alleging that sport had more beneficial effects than going to church.37

Another route to emancipation was through art, literature and music, and again Nonconformist ministers, in particular, were apt to be pilloried as 'narrow' 'philistine' enemies of culture.38 A third route was through the pursuit of sexual freedom, and ministers of all denominations were liable to criticism from those who were experimenting with new styles of relationship which the churches agreed in condemning.

Masculinist anti-clericalism was directed most strongly at Anglo-Catholics. Punch, the favourite humorous magazine of the middle class, poured constant scorn on the ritualists' taste for fancy vestments, strange scents, and tinkling bells, with the clear implication that they were not 'real men'. 'Parsons in Petticoats' was the title of an article published in 1865, and their cartoonists were fascinated by everything that was 'feminine' about the Anglo-Catholic priest - from his passion for new clothes to his lack of facial hair. From the time of the Oxford Movement onwards accusations of 'effeminacy' were constantly levelled at the Tractarians and their successors. Sometimes this merely implied a lack of 'masculinity', with no further message being intended. But at other times, the references to the large numbers of 'young men' attending Anglo-Catholic churches were clearly intended to imply that they and their priests were homosexual.39 When not accused of homosexuality, the latter might find themselves equally under attack for a crime almost equally heinous in masculinist eyes - celibacy.

However, this was only an extreme form of a kind of prejudice to which most clergymen were vulnerable, although many, from the time of Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes onwards, tried to counter it by a cult of physical strength and fitness.40 In the eyes of many men, churches were 'women's space'.41 Clergymen, if they practised the Christian virtues of forbearance and forgiveness were said to be lacking in the 'masculine' virtues of pride and courage. The heavy drinking, gambling and illicit sex which were sources of status in many male sub-cultures were none of them permitted to the clergyman: if he abstained from these things his masculinity was in question, and if he indulged he could be accused of hypocrisy, so that, as often happened, the clergyman found that he was 'damned if he did, and damned if he didn't'. The clergyman was also in some respects a double outsider. He was excluded by working class definitions of masculinity in terms of physical strength and manual skill, and generally excluded by middle class definitions, which stressed business acumen and ability to make money.

The masculinist perception of the Anglican clergy was brilliantly conveyed by a Punch cartoon of the 1850s entitled 'An Attempt at Converting the Natives',42 which shows a sleek young curate confronting two very rough looking miners, who are leaning against a wall and smoking. The joke is that there is a misunderstanding. The curate says 'Well I do hope I shall have the pleasure of seeing you both next Sunday,'
meaning that he hopes to see them at church, whereas the two miners think that the curate wants to come to the cock-fight which they have planned for Sunday. But the joke is clearly at several different levels. It is a joke about class, and the different ways of thinking and speaking that go with class. (The miners speak a broad north-eastern dialect, which is likely to be semi-incomprehensible to the curate.) And it is also a joke about gender. The miners, with their working clothes, their pipes and their beards are unmistakably masculine, and their proposed manner of spending Sunday in drinking beer and watching a cockfight is also clearly masculine. But the sexual status of the curate is much more ambiguous: he has no facial hair, he wears gloves and carries an umbrella, his nervously erect stance contrasts with the slouch of his interlocutors, and he is proposing to spend Sunday in what is likely to be predominantly female company in church.

Finally, the realist critique of the clergy is encountered throughout this period, and remains with us to the present day. There were many people who regularly went to church and were maybe quite devout, who nonetheless wanted to separate out a sphere into which religion should not be allowed to intrude, whether it be business, politics, the family, or whatever. They were like the Nottinghamshire farmers described by Samuel Butler in his autobiographical novel, The Way of all Flesh, who ‘would have been equally horrified at hearing the Christian religion doubted, and at seeing it practised’. Clergymen naturally wished to assert the principle that religion should influence every area of life. They were consequently accused of ‘meddling’, of ‘ignorance’, of ‘foolishness’ and a lack of practical sense. Many of the potential sources of anti-clericalism were double-edged, since they were also potential sources of devotion to the clergy. For instance, celibacy could be a source of suspicion, but it was also an important aspect of the charisma of some Roman Catholic or Anglo-Catholic saints; similarly, the political leadership provided by the clergy was a major source both of the hostility of some and of the attachment of others. By comparison with, for instance, France, it is the relatively low-key nature of relations between clergy and people in England during this period that is most striking. Neither the furious anti-clerical invective nor the intense loyalty to the clergy, both of which were common in France during this period, was typical of England. It remains true, however, that in the period 1870-1914 ministers of religion were a numerous, familiar, and in many respects powerful group in English society, who exercised a wide-ranging influence, and evoked reactions of many different kinds. Eric Evans goes much too far in his emphasis on the spread of ‘apathy’ or ‘indifference’.

A more fully nuanced account of relations between clergy and laity during this period would have to take account of class and gender differences, of the factors that could make one clergyman ‘popular’ and his successor ‘unpopular’, and also of the ambivalence and complexity in the attitudes of many individuals. Most historical accounts are still lacking in such nuances. Even in a country like England, which has been largely spared the extremes of clericalism and anti-clericalism, the history of the clergy remains an emotive subject, which few historians can approach with detachment.

36 Ibid., pp 239-242.
42 The cartoon is reproduced on the cover of Hugh McLeod, Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth-Century Britain (Basingstoke 1984).
43 Samuel Butler, The Way of all Flesh (Harmohdsworth 1966) [1st published 1903], p 94.
44 Evans op.cit., pp 219-220.
45 One of the best-balanced discussions of these themes is Bartlett, op.cit.; Frances Knight, The Nineteenth-Century Church and English Society (Cambridge 1995), is good on both laity and clergy, but has less discussion of the relationship between them; see also Sarah Williams, Religious Belief and Popular Culture: Southwark, c. 1880-1939 (Oxford 1999), which provides interesting new perspectives on working-class attitudes, using oral history.