‘RABBITS AND HEDGEHOGS’: MONKS AND BISHOPS BEFORE 1850

A paper given at Oscott College on 20 June 2006

In 1904, Dom Alphonsus Morrall, a monk from Ullathorne’s own monastery at Downside, transcribed some important nineteenth-century documentation relating to disputes between the English Benedictine Congregation and the bishops. As he came to the end of his task, Morrall decided to add a few notes at the end, but he chose not to express himself directly, but instead on the last page of his notebook, under the title of ‘the fable of the rabbit and the hedgehog’ he wrote:

> A rabbit had burrowed for herself a very comfortable hole and had long enjoyed it without being molested. One day a hedgehog passed by and spying the rabbit’s hole, said to himself, that will do very nicely for me, as the storms of winter will soon be here. I will look in and if Mrs Bunny is at home, I will make myself agreeable and ask her to give me shelter. She very kindly, but not wisely, allowed him to come in. He at first was very careful not to make himself troublesome, or to crush up against so kind a friend. But as the winter came on and the cold increased, the hedgehog pushed further and further in until his spines so hurt the rabbit that she had to complain. ‘Oh,’ said the hedgehog, ‘I am perfectly comfortable and if you find this place too small for both of us, you had better go elsewhere’.

The documents Morrall had been transcribing, chronicling the main features of one of the longest spats in English Catholic history, evidently led Morrall to identify the rabbit as the English Benedictines, comfortably esconced in the missions they had founded, whilst the hedgehog symbolised the bishops, challenging the claims of the monks to be independent of episcopal control.[1]

[1] DA, VII.A.f, MS 295, pp.102-3.

There had been tensions between the Vicars Apostolic and the monks long before William Bernard Ullathorne became a bishop, but ultimately it was Ullathorne who helped to resolve it. In this paper, I do not intend to focus on Ullathorne's relationship with his fellow English Benedictines after he became a bishop in 1846, but merely to provide some background to an issue with which he was to grapple for the next thirty-five years of his life. First we must set the issue in context, by considering the nature of English Catholic Church in the early nineteenth century, the character of the English Benedictine Congregation, and the attitude of the Vicars Apostolic towards the monks.

The Catholic Church in England in the early nineteenth century

Although toleration had been already granted to English Catholics in the Relief Acts of 1778 and 1791, the crucial legislation granting them political emancipation was a long time coming, and it was to be another twenty years after that before Rome considered that England was ready to have its Catholic hierarchy restored. The first half of the century was an era of great expansion and change. Quite apart from the massive expansion in the Catholic population, there was a significant increase in the building of new churches, presbyteries and schools, especially in the new industrial centres of the Midlands and the North. But there was a more fundamental, less visible change taking place, namely a shift in what one might term 'the balance of power' in the English Catholic church. For two centuries, it had been the gentry who, in the words of Sheridan Gilley 'paid the piper and so called the tune, hiring and firing their chaplains with scant ref to the bishop.[2]' Until 1850 there were Vicars Apostolic rather

[2] S. Gilley, 'The Roman Catholic Church, 1780-1940', in S. Gilley and W. Sheils, *A History of Religion in Britain* (Oxford, 1994) p.348.

than bishops in England, who had large districts rather than dioceses to administer, and with meagre resources for the task. The early decades of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new, confident and increasingly more dominant Catholic clergy. John Bossy has argued that English Catholic clergy shared in the revival of strength and self- confidence that was experienced by churchmen of other denominations in this period, a self-confidence that was gained both through seizing the opportunities for leadership that came their way 'by demographic growth, migration and social transformation, and by the freedom from external restraint' secured by the Catholic Relief Act of 1791.[3] Ullathorne was a good example of this new breed of cleric that was emerging in England: self-assured, well aware of their status in life, and more 'professional' in their approach to their ministry. It should also be remembered that until the late eighteenth century, the majority of priests in England belonged to religious orders, but by 1830 this proportion declined to 30%. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, priests had to cope with new demands brought about by industrialisation, many of them no longer chaplains to gentry families or rural missioners, but facing new problems of poverty and disease in the new urban areas whilst simultaneously struggling to provide new church buildings and schools for the rising Catholic population. Generally, priests of the newer breed preferred their independence by serving missions that had no patron. By the mid-nineteenth century the character of the mission chaplaincies was changing. We get an insight into this from some correspondence now in the archives at Ampleforth from the Benedictine missioner, Ambrose Prest, who was sent as chaplain to the Middleton family at Stockeld Park near Wetherby in 1844. Writing to his friend, Alban Molyneux he complained of the squire's interference in pastoral matters:

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[3] J. Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London, 1975) p.355.

> The Squire calls from time to time on poor people and induces them to say that they wish to become Catholics…even when the priest is sent for by poor creatures, he is wanted as the Squire's chaplain and not as God's minister.

Prest declared: 'I am really glad I get a reduced salary because Mr. Middleton can't in decency complain if I do not do all his biddings'. He also clashed with the lady of the house, who complained that he did not take interest in the family. Humorously reporting the incident to Molyneux, Prest wrote that he would need 'six months of lessons from some Prima Donna in Billingsgate' or he would be no match for the Hon. Mrs Middleton, whom he resolved to tell

> to go about her business and be content with her own petticoats and her husband's breeches – she shall not wear the priest's cassock…The family indeed! What are they that I must fall down and adore them? I hope at the last day there will be a carriage road up to heaven, for they will never condescend to walk or fly up with the commonality![4]

We will be meeting Prest again later. His letters from Stockeld Park highlight the difficult transition post-emancipation English Catholicism had to make from a lay-dominated church to a new clerically- dominated institution, where gentry Catholic families, new, socially diverse mission congregations, and the clergy, secular and regular, did not always sit easily alongside one another.

The English Benedictine Congregation

When Ullathorne was appointed Vicar Apostolic of the Western District in 1846, he became the latest of a line of English Benedictines to be raised to the episcopate. Ullathorne was the seventh to be so honoured since the beginning of the century, and the fourth from his own monastic community of St. Gregory's. To the outsider, the

[4] AA, MS 243, no 18, Stockeld Park, 14 March 1845, no 18a, Stockeld Park, 26 May 1845, Prest to Molyneux.

early nineteenth-century English Benedictine Congregation appears to have been a most productive nursery for bishops, but in reality, it was in a precarious state. The Congregation had been re-founded in the seventeenth century as essentially a missionary congregation – the monks being given the mandate by the Holy See to work on the English mission. Until the French Revolution the monasteries were on the continent, but its monks worked mainly on the missions in England, many of them chaplains to the gentry families. After the outbreak of the French Revolution, monks and nuns were repatriated in England 1795, greatly helped by their brethren on the English mission, and families like the Smythes at Acton Burnell, who provided them with shelter. But it took time to establish themselves: The former monks of St.Gregory's, Douai were given a temporary home for almost twenty years at Acton Burnell by the Smythe family, settling at Downside in 1814. The monks of St Laurence, Dieulouard led a nomadic existence until settling at Ampleforth in 1802, and my own community, St Edmund's, having lost their monastery in Paris at the Revolution, did not find a new home until 1818, when the community took over the buildings left by St Gregory's in Douai, and ran a 'petit-seminaire' educating students for the priesthood in England. It would be another century before the Edmundian monks were repatriated in England. When Ullathorne entered Downside in 1823, the monastery in the words of Judith Champ comprised 'a small, cramped set of buildings, with half-built premises combining monastery and school'. [5] The EBC owed its survival after the French Revolution to its missions in England, and although its missionary apostolate was its dominant feature at this point, it was the mission that was to be the source of dispute and contention between the monks and the Vicars Apostolic.

[5] Judith Champ, *William Bernard Ullathorne (1806-1889): A Different Kind of Monk* (Leominster, 2006) p.17.

The dispute – background

The issue had already been a source of conflict for over a century, and largely centred around the question of jurisdiction. Successive Vicars Apostolic had encountered problems in asserting their authority over clergy from religious orders working on the English mission who came, not under the jurisdiction of the Vicar Apostolic, but of their religious superiors.There had been a number of attempts by the Vicars Apostolic to subject the regular clergy to their authority, and they sought support from Rome to strengthen their position.[6] Two decrees were published in 1695 by the Congregation of *Propaganda Fide* which challenged the independence of regulars on the Mission and ordered them to be subject to the Vicars Apostolic in regard to the missions. These decrees were fiercely resisted by the English Benedictines, who produced two documents in their defence: the *Mandatum* of 1628 and the bull of Pope Urban VIII of 1633 called *Plantata*, which upheld the privileges of the monks on the Mission. These missionary privileges were based on the monks' claim to have inherited the chapter rights of the medieval English monastic cathedrals, and along with these, an ordinary jurisdiction on the Mission. From the time of *Plantata*, the monks had appointed cathedral priors from among their number to further their claims, especially that of exemption from episcopal authority. However, as Dr David Lunn pointed out, whilst the English Benedictine Congregation traditionally regarded *Plantata* as 'its great charter of liberties…*Plantata* bore no relation to reality, for it assumed that the (pre-reformation) monasteries still existed and were at the Pope's disposal…the bull was

[6] These early disputes are dealt with in Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone,* pp.63-82.

an irrelevance'.[7] Yet throughout the eighteenth century 'old pretensions based on *Plantata* were again wearily served up to defend the status quo',[8] as can be seen in the monks' revision of the definitive text of *Plantata* in 1748.

Eventually in 1753 the Bull *Apostolicum Ministerium* forced the monks, albeit reluctantly, to recognise the jursdiction of the Vicars Apostolic, who were given full authority to approve, examine and grant faculties to all regular missioners in their districts. Furthermore, by the so-called *sexennium* requirement, every regular missioner was required to return to his monastery on the continent every six years, to live there for three months and to make a fifteen-day retreat. However, the authority of the Vicars Apostolic continued to be resisted by some English Benedictines who were still only grudgingly prepared to present themselves before the Vicar Apostolic for faculties, and for whom their procurator or agent in Rome became increasingly important as a mediator between them and the Roman authorities.[9] An example of this is the tendency of monks on the mission to apply directly to Rome via the procurator for marriage dispensations, rather than going through the Vicars Apostolic.[10]

Benedictine resistance to the Vicars Apostolic can also be seen in the way in which the monks asserted their liturgical and constitutional independence. The General Chapter of the English Benedictine Congregation which met in 1753, the year of *Apostolicum Ministerium*, ordered a new liturgical calendar to be produced, which

[7] Lunn, *The English Benedictines 1540-1688,* p.112.

[8] Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone* , p.68.

[9] Scott, *Gothic Rage Undone,* pp. 75-76.

[10] G. Scott, 'The Privileges of Trading in that Country: The controversy between the Vicars Apostolic and the Benedictines in the late seventeenth century', in D.A. Bellenger (ed.), *Opening the Scrolls: Essays in honour of Godfrey Anstruther* (Bath, 1987) pp.84-89.

appeared in 1755. This was the first formal calendar for monks working on the Mission, and it deliberately segregated them from their counterparts among the seculars and other regulars who had their own calendars. Furthermore, the Constitutions of the English Benedictine Congregation, revised in 1784, contained only one reference to bishops, and then only cursorily.[11] The preface to these Constitutions bolstered the monks' role on the mission by claiming that the conversion of England had been primarily the work of monks, sent by Pope St Gregory the Great in the year 597. Monks working on the English Mission had their own constitutions, first drawn up in 1689, the year after the appointment of the first Vicars Apostolic. It is significant that these contained no reference at all to bishops, and that these constitutions were never revised, until late in the nineteenth century, well after the re-establishment of the hierarchy of England and Wales in 1850, and before the important bull *Romanos Pontifices* in 1881, to which we shall return.

By the early nineteenth century the ecclesiastical structure of English Catholicism was rather *ad hoc* and full of anomalies. The bull *Apostolicum Ministerium* that had attempted to control the religious was written for a different era. By the early nineteenth century, its provisions, which had been drawn up for a largely rural, gentry-dominated clergy, did not envisage a changed world of urban as well as rural missions that were independent of lay patrons. The Vicars Apostolic had limited powers and financial resources to establish new missions to serve the rising Catholic populations, and it was the religious orders, especially the Benedictines, who stepped in to establish new chapels and presbyteries. By far the largest group of the religious in the early part of the nineteenth century were English Benedictines, for although the

[11] *Cf Constitutiones Congregationis Anglicanae Ordinis Sancti Benedicti* (Paris, 1784), 4. 204.

Jesuits (suppressed by the Pope in 1773) were restored in 1814, it took time for their numbers to increase, and even then in London and in other parts of the country English Jesuits were excluded by unsympathetic Vicars Apostolic. The English Dominican province became extinct in 1827 and the English Franciscan province in 1841. Two Franciscan missions at Coventry and Goosnargh were taken by the Benedictines, who also succeeded a long line of Jesuits at Scarisbrick in Lancashire and Stockeld Park in Yorkshire, as well as for a time serving the former Jesuit mission of Richmond. The English Benedictines certainly exploited the untidy English Catholic ecclesiastical map, but as we have already seen, their claim to independence led them on a collision course with the bishops that took the greater part of the nineteenth century to resolve.

Vicars Apostolic perspective

It would be an understatement to declare that the Vicars Apostolic were not universally favourable to religious orders. The Jesuits, for instance, had been suppressed in 1773 by Pope Clement XIV, but had been formally restored in 1814. Nevetheless, the English Vicars Apostolic did not officially recognise the Society in England until 1829 on a mere technicality – arguing that the bull of restoration had never been officially communicated to them. Perhaps the Vicars Apostolic were fearful that in officially recognising the Jesuits in particular, the granting of Catholic emancipation might be jeopardised. Father Francis Edwards suggests other, more practical reasons, namely that among the Vicars Apostolic ‘there was a feeling that the orders were taking men, or vocations and money, from the bishops…that the

orders were drawing off the best, leaving only secondary sources for the bishops'.[12] Not all of the English Vicars Apostolic regarded regulars unfavourably: the Benedictines were fortunate to have the support of Thomas Walsh, Vicar Apostolic of the Midland district, who once declared that his aim was 'to obtain zealous labourers in the vineyard, men after God's heart. Those shall always be cherished by me whether they be regular or secular clergy'.[13] He proved to be a loyal supporter of the English Benedictines over the years, not only sending his students for the priesthood to be educated by the monks at Douai in France, but even encouraging those who wished, to join the Benedictines.[14] Nevertheless, even Walsh could be critical of the Congregation. In 1830 he wrote to the Benedictine missioner at Wootton Wawen, Benedict Deday to complain about 'the disgraceful and disedifying state' of the chapel at Coventry and the slowness in the Benedictine superiors in approving the plans for a new chapel at Redditch. Walsh asserted:

> I consider it my sacred duty to remonsrate with superiors of religious communities to pay proper attention to the wants of the congregations and to unite with me in unremitting exertions to convert to the salvation of souls the favourable opportunities presented to us by Almighty God for that purpose...If monks leave their monasteries for the mission, I am of the opinion their salvation will materially depend on their faithful compliance with their missionary duties of preaching, catechising and converting souls as well as their devout celebration of the adorable sacrifice of the Mass.[15]

[12] Edwards, *The Jesuits in England*, p.175.

[13] AR, vol. 3, p.95, 3 November 1829, Walsh to Augustine Lawson.

[14] DAB, I.378, 25 February 1835, Walsh to Birdsall.

[15] DAB, H138 , 14 October 1830, Walsh to Deday.

Soon after his election as English Benedictine President in 1826, Augustine Birdsall, shrewdly summed up the relationship between the Vicars Apostolic and the monks when he wrote to a confrére:

> The Vicars Apostolic consider the whole business of the mission to be placed in their hands. They consider that the Regulars are useful and available to assistance but they are only assistants. They have their privileges but these do not exalt them to an independence of the Vicars Apostolic, nor to an equality.[16]

These were fitting words from a person who was later described as being 'best suited to wage war with a bishop',[17] and they set the tone for the next phase of the battle to be fought between the monks and their episcopal opponents, namely the controversy with one of their own brethren, the Benedictine Vicar Apostolic, Peter Augustine Baines of the Western District.

The Baines dispute

It is difficult to overestimate the significance of the dispute that broke out in the 1820s between Peter Augustine Baines and the English Benedictines, for it threatened the very heart of the Congregation's existence.[18] Baines was to say the least a colourful character, and had gained an early reputation for flamboyance and high-handedness as a young monk at Ampleforth, challenging the authority of his seniors, and exploiting both the Press and his contacts with the the Catholic gentry, in his attempts to put

[16] Ibid., p. 53.

[17] DA, VII.A.f, MS 295, p.9.

[18] Of all the accounts of the dispute between English Benedictines and Bishop Baines, the best is still B. Ward, *Sequel to Catholic Emancipation*, vol..I pp.15-49. The dispute is also well summarized by E. Norman, *The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century*, pp.89-96.

Ampleforth College on the educational map. He continued to demonstrate these traits at Bath, where he was appointed missioner in 1817. His diaries, published by the Catholic Record Society, reveal how active Baines was in supervising many improvements to the chapel. He also acquired and furnished a new presbytery. He had introduced new ceremonies and music to the chapel which 'attracted the notice of all who witnessed it'[19]. His preaching drew large crowds, and his reputation spread. In 1823 Baines was appointed as co-adjutor to Bishop Collingridge of the Western District. Baines' early conflicts with some of his brethren at Ampleforth and his predilection for grand schemes meant that this appointment was not universally welcomed.

Baines was not a man to dawdle. Soon after his consecration, he wrote to the Prior of Downside, asking whether the monks would be willing to put themselves under his authority once he became Vicar Apostolic, so as to enable him to establish a seminary for the Western District. The monks declined this as well as Baines' further proposal that the communities at Downside and Ampleforth should exchange their land, buildings and properties, surmising that the Ampleforth brethren would be more favourable to him using the buildings at Downside for his new seminary. When the Downside monks refused to co-operate with him in the venture, Baines then approached the Ampleforth monks and persuaded a number of them not only to seek secularisation and transfer their obedience to him, but also to take with them the cream of Ampleforth's pupils and many of its resources for the benefit of the new seminary, which he began to develop at Prior Park on the outskirts of Bath. These sparks of conflict were fanned into a greater conflagration when in 1829 Bishop

[19] AH, vol. 3, p.37

Collingridge died and Baines succeeded to the District. Angered by what he regarded as the 'insolence' of the Downside community, Baines withdrew the missionary faculties of their priests, and also claimed at Rome that the Congregation had been irregularly constituted, and that therefore all English Benedictine vows taken since the repatriation of the monks in England were invalid.. This legal omission, which should have been attended to when the houses of St Gregory and St Laurence were transplanted to England in 1795, was used by Baines to try and bend the monks to his will.

Two monks, the former president, Richard Marsh, and the future bishop, Joseph Brown, were sent to Rome to argue their case against Baines. The monks were able to cite the Rescript of June 1823, obtained by Marsh from the Holy See, which approved the translation of the different monasteries of the Congregation from their former locations on the continent to England, as well as two papal letters, one of 1796 confirming the privileges of the Congregation, and the other of 1814 in which Pius VII expressed his joy that the Congregation had survived the French Revolution. In 1830, Rome issued a *Sanatio*, recognising both the monasteries to be properly erected and the vows valid.

Baines of course knew too much about the English Benedictines. Having been a highly successful and industrious missioner at Bath, he was well aware that 'the mission there had been to the Benedictine body a source of no small emolument' and that there 'was no other mission in the western district that could supply a considerable surplus after supporting its clergy'.[20] Not long after he succeeeded

[20] AH, p.36; DA, 'Statement', p.73.

Bishop Collingridge as Vicar Apostolic of the Western District, Baines' successor at Bath, Jerome Brindle, decided in 1830 to seek release from his monastic vows at Ampleforth, and transfer his allegiance to Baines and the Western District. The indult for secularisation having been granted, Brindle refused to resign his incumbency at Bath and to hand over the mission to the new Benedictine incumbent, his assistant, Maurus Cooper. Instead, Brindle referred the Benedictines to Baines, his new superior, who contested whether the Bath mission canonically belonged to the Benedictines, arguing: 'Monks may be the legal possessors of the Bath property. But are they the Canonical and Equitable possessors to the exclusion of the Bishop? I cannot believe it'.[21] Baines considered it his right not only to appoint missioners to Bath but also his duty to 'diminish the Benedictine attachment' to the mission 'by reducing its emoluments' as much as he could. He boldly attempted to claim the bench rents in the chapel for himself. When this didn't work, the bishop then established a second chapel in the town in opposition to the Benedictines, to the consternation of the Pope who objected to 'the setting up of altar against altar'.[22] It was an extraordinary step to take, and was the second instance of a Vicar Apostolic in England erecting a chapel in a town already served by regulars.[23] The move back-fired because there were not enough Catholics in the town to support a second chapel. Eventually, an inquiry by independent arbitrators appointed by *Propaganda* decided in the monks' favour.[24]

[21] RSRNC (Anglia, vol. 8) fol. 628.

[22] Ibid., p.73.

[23] The first was in Wigan, in 1817. See P. Doyle, *Mitres and Missions in Lancashire: The Roman Catholic Diocese of Liverpool 1850-2000* (Liverpool, 2005) pp.33-4.

[24] AR, vol.4, pp103-4.

There were faults on both sides. Baines was justly reprimanded by the Holy See for withdrawing the missionary faculties of the Downside monks (which *Propaganda* declared could only be done with the consent of the Holy See) and for setting up a rival mission in Bath. He was not averse to embroiling others in his mischief-making, even to the extent of urging them to provide the evidence he needed to support his case.[25] However, the Benedictines were also at fault: whilst Birdsall as President rightly contested Baines' claims concerning the Congregation's canonical status, he showed himself to be bitter, severe and uncompromising, refusing to meet with the bishop and stubbornly resistant to the sound advice given him, both by his fellow monks, and other friendly parties. Even Birdsall's predecessor as president, Richard Marsh, advised a more moderate approach, but Marsh also discredits himself by revealing an anti-episcopal bias, advising Birdsall, 'if you have an interview with Dr Baines you should treat him as an equal and appear his equal in every respect', for 'a chief of an Order as you are should not even bend the knee to a bishop as others do'.[26]

Despite successfully defending themselves against episcopal encroachment, the English Benedictines did not emerge very honourably from the controversy. They had rightly stressed that many of Baines' proposals were unworkable from a Benedictine perspective, but in demonstrating such stubborn resistance to discussion and compromise, to say nothing of expressing anti-episcopal rhetoric, they laid up for themselves unresolved issues which would plague their relations with the bishops in the years to come.

[25] AR, vol. 3, pp.44ff.

[26] DA, 'Birdsall', pp.79, 86.

Monastic-episcopal territorial jurisdiction

Between 1836 and 1842 there was a series of skirmishes between the monks and the Vicars Apostolic in the north west. One of the most notable concerned Aigburth, near Liverpool, where in 1835 the monks were invited to establish a mission by two merchants, Charles and Peter Chaloner. Charles Chaloner promised to pay £50 a year during his lifetime for the support of a priest there, provided it was built within a mile of the brewery he owned.[27] The new mission was envisaged as what the first incumbent, Ambrose Prest, described as 'a filiation of Woolton and not an encroachment on episcopal territory…the chapel will be built by the subscriptions of friends alone, without the influence of the bishop's name'. Prest expressed the hope that 'the bishop would allow even monks' to minister to the people of Aigburth, 'rather than the devil who now holds them in his tender keeping'.[28] Thomas Penswick, Vicar Apostolic of the Northern District, saw things differently and refused to countenance the project, believing that there were insufficient numbers of Catholics in the area to merit a new church, and that there would be insufficient financial support for its maintenance. An appeal to Penswick's coadjutor, John Briggs, met with similar opposition for, according to Allanson, Briggs' 'antipathy to Religious Orders was proverbial'.[29] Briggs eventually agreed to allow the mission to be established as long as an income of £90 a year could be guaranteed, and that the monks promised not to undertake any 'indiscriminate begging' for its maintenance.

[27] The controversy concerning the Aigburth mission is covered by Allanson as follows: AH, vol.2, pp272-279, AR, vol. 4, pp.209-282.

[28] AR, vol.4, p.210. Lytham, 10 August 1835, Prest to Provincial Robinson.

[29] AR, vol.4, p.273.

What is striking about this episode is the strength of English Benedictine resentment towards Penswick and Briggs and the almost contemptuous attitude of the monks to the two Vicars Apostolic. From the very first rumour of episcopal disapproval Ambrose Prest was writing to Penswick in sarcastic tones: 'I of course as a simple Priest', he wrote, 'must receive and be content with an unexplained refusal, if it so pleases your Lordship, but there are many who will think themselves entitled to an explanation'.[30] President Birdsall, writing to the Provincial of the North, Gregory Robinson, believed Bishop Briggs was treating regular clergy who wished to build churches differently from secular clergy, whom, according to Birdsall, were even allowed to incur debts in building. He asserted that the bishops were jealous of regulars and that their 'notorious' treatment of them needed to be reported to Rome.

Three years later, Rome seemed to be support the regulars by issuing a rescript which allowed them to build public churches and to regard them as their own property without any reference to the local bishop. Bishop Baines complained to Thomas Griffiths, Vicar Apostolic of the London District, that 'this rescript would form an anomaly in the church…it is repugnant to all canon law'.[31] The rescript was eagerly seized upon by the new, ambitious Benedictine Provincial of the North, Anselm Brewer, who was keen to build an ornate church at Edge Hill in Liverpool. Briggs again objected, insisting that, on the contrary, Rome had reversed its previous decree, and that episcopal permission was still required for regulars to build churches. Eventually the matter was resolved by *Propaganda*, who decreed that the church at

[30] Ibid., p.215, 25 November 1835, Prest to Penswick.

[31] AAW, III.C. vii, Griffiths papers, Prior Park, 11 November 1838, Baines to Griffiths.

Edge Hill could go ahead, provided that an annual payment of twenty percent of the offerings received there was made to the Vicar Apostolic of the Northern District.

Opposition to the monks' building schemes came not only from the Vicars Apostolic, but from the secular clergy. A petition of 12 May 1840 outlining the opinions of the secular clergy was forwarded to Rome, pointing out that *Propaganda*'s decision to allow the church of St Anne,Edge Hill to go ahead, was likely to have 'injurious influence… in encouraging the regulars in their projects of establishing themselves more strongly and more powerfully in Liverpool'. The petition concluded that 'the Bishop should resist more vigorously and more effectively than he has hitherto done the projects and schemes of the regulars…if the bishop is to govern the flock the regulars must be restrained in promoting their own schemes'.[32] Secular opposition to the Benedictines was voiced most vociferously when in 1839 it was proposed to divide the English Catholic church into eight districts, and to appoint an English Benedictine as Vicar Apostolic to at least one of these. A conference of Manchester secular clergy sent a petition in February 1840 against such a move to Bishop Briggs, and the missioner at Weld Bank near Chorley, Richard Thompson, also wrote to Briggs contending that 'every influence of the clergy should be exerted to obviate such an evil'.[33] Another petition, sent to Rome by secular clergy in London complained that 'regulars cultivate the favours of the rich and while boasting in Rome of their zeal and labours, they accuse seculars of sloth, whose work is chiefly among the poor and who live on a pittance'.[34]

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[32] Archives of the English College, Rome, 73.3.

[33] LDA, Briggs papers, no. 662, Manchester, 6 February 1840, Turner to Briggs, no.650, Weld Bank, 2 February 1840, Rev Richard Thompson to Briggs.

[34] AA, MS 262, no.15, 12 May 1840.

Episcopal control

Once they had heard of the plan to divide the English Catholic church into eight districts, the English Benedictines wasted no time in sending a petition to Rome, asking the Pope 'to restore to our Congregation those rights and privileges enjoyed as long as the hierarchy existed, by our Benedictine ancestors'.[35] They reminded the Holy Father that in England before the Reformation monks had formed the cathedral chapters in certain dioceses, and had the right of electing bishops. It was another example of the Benedictines restating weary arguments, and as Dr Peter Doyle has remarked, the petition is 'indicative of a mentality tuned more to the seventeenth or eighteenth century than to the nineteenth'.[36]

In the event, the monks did gain something, but not what they expected, for in May 1840, Thomas Joseph Brown was appointed the Vicar Apostolic of the new district of Wales. Brown's elevation to the episcopate was applauded by many of his Benedictine brethren who hoped that he would 'counteract the anti-regular spirit of the bishops' and 'defend the monks'.[37] In reality, Brown's appointment turned out to be a mixed blessing for them.[38] Although as bishop he initially attempted to bring the regulars and the bishops together, [39] he soon became one of the fiercest critics of his

[35] This petition is printed in full in B. Ward, *The Sequel to Catholic Emancipation* (Vol II) (London, 1915) pp.254-7.

[36] P. Doyle, 'Lancashire Benedictines: The Restoration of the Hierarchy', *EBHS* (1983) p.4.

[37] DAB, K381, 30 May 1840, R.Pope to Brown; K382, 30 May 1840;Cooper to Brown, K419, 24 August 1840, Cockshoot to Brown.

[38]A. Hood, "'Stirring up the Pool', Bishop Thomas Joseph Brown OSB (1798-1880) and the dispute between the hierarchy and the English Benedictines", *RH*, vol.25 no.2 (October, 2000) pp.312-324.

[39] Archives of the Society of Jesus, Farm Street 'Letters of Bishops and Cardinals, 1753-1853', 26 June 1841, Brown to Glover.

brethren amongst the Vicars Apostolic, and subsquently attempted to reform them by establishing a new seminary and Benedictine chapter at Belmont near Hereford.

In July, 1850, two months before Pope Pius IX restored the English and Welsh hierarchy, the English Benedictines held their quadriennial General Chapter at Downside. The Chapter Fathers were read letters addressed to them by the two Benedictine Vicars Apostolic, Brown and Ullathorne. Brown's epistle was blunt and abrasive, he warned the monks that unless they reformed their attitudes and changed their ways, there would be no place for them in the new Catholic order that would be ushered in by the new hierarchy, and that it was likely that In the new order of things it was highly probable that the secular clergy would dominate, 'who will not fail to be aware that it is contrary to the ecclesiastical canons for regulars to have the care of souls'. Furthermore, 'the special dispensations which regulars will require' would be 'liable to dispute and afford no security for the future'. It was therefore highly likely not only that 'regular clergy will not be allowed to confer parochial sacraments or exercise parochial duties', but also that in the new order, regulars would be excluded from the ranks of the bishops 'as is now the case in Ireland'.[40]

Ullathorne's tone was less confrontational and more measured, but his message was no less hard-hitting: He identified himself with the Congregation, lamenting that 'we have not as yet been able to take up in our character of religious men some of those important positions in the English mission, which new orders have come from abroad to take up'. These new orders, such as the Passionists and the Rosminians, Ullathorne maintained, were demonstrating 'the practicability of a great degree of community life

[40] AR, vol.V, pp.134-6, Chepstow, 16 July 1850, Brown to General Chapter.

on the mission', and therefore, the survival of the English Benedictine Mission in the future depended on its monks living in community, 'especially in important towns', for 'with as much community life as the circumstances of a mission would allow'. Ullathorne concluded: 'we should not only ourselves have the kind of life which is natural and proper to us, but the spirit of our holy order would become understood and fit and generous minds would be drawn towards us and our state of life'.[41]

It was significant that *Propaganda* sent the head of one of these new orders, to which Ullathorne had referred, to England in 1847 to report on the viability of a permanent hierarchy. In one of his reports, the Rosminian, Luigi Gentili remarked:

> in the early days the Benedictines and the Jesuits were real missionaries but now they just run missions and not as well as the seculars… they have the rich missions or the best endowed and they do not obey the bishops...if Bishops Ullathorne and Brown had authority, they could soon build up the order...there would be concord and unity and charity between the Benedictines and the secular clergy, instead of jealousy and the present constant dissension.[42]

At the beginning of this paper we heard how Dom Alphonsus Morrall had suggested the fable of the rabbit and hedgehog as an allegory of the dispute between monks and bishops. Much as the monks may have perceived themselves to be the rabbits harshly evicted by the sharp quills of the hedgehog bishops, much of the material gathered in this paper surely suggests that it was the monks, not the bishops who proved to be the hedgehogs. Despite the vibrancy of their missionary apostolate, by 1850, the monks were in danger of losing their footprints on the map of Catholic England by their prickly and defensive claims for independence. It was to be the task of Bishop

[41] DA, Ullathorne Papers, Box 756, St.Chad's, 15 July 1850, Ullathorne to General Chapter.

[42] See C .Charles CP, 'The Origins of the Parish Mission in England and the Early Passionist Apostolate, 1840-1850', *JEH,* vol. 15 (1964) pp.60-75. For Gentili's reports, see RSNRC (Anglia) vol 12, 1848-51 fol. 63ff.

Ullathorne to try and uphold the need for episcopal authority whilst also respecting monastic autonomy. In the end, Rome, in the bull *Romanes Pontifices,* in May, 1881, supported the bishops, in granting them giving them the authority to conduct visitations of regular missions, but also laid down limits to this authority. The bull equipped the bishops with hedgehog-like quills of authority whilst also respecting the autonomy of the rabbit. Although many English Benedictines resented *Romanes Pontifices* as the triumph of the hedgehog over the rabbit, in many ways its balanced pronouncements owed much to the seasoned Benedictine wisdom of William Bernard Ullathorne.