

Whately, Richard

by Richard Clarke

Whately, Richard (1787–1863), Church of Ireland archbishop of Dublin, was born 1 February 1787 in Cavendish Square, London, youngest of nine children of Joseph Whately, then vicar of Widford, Hertfordshire, and later prebendary of Bristol, and Jane Whately (née Plumer), whose father William sat as MP for Hertfordshire for nearly forty years. Educated at a private school near Bristol, Whately went on to Oxford University, and was elected to a fellowship of Oriel College, then one of the glittering prizes of academic life, in 1811. It might be argued that Whately's entire life may only be properly understood if he is seen as a born teacher. In Oxford he quickly established a reputation as an enthusiastic and effective if unorthodox tutor.

His involvement at this time with what were known as 'the Noetics' is also of some significance. Not easy to situate intellectually, this was a somewhat diverse in-group of Oxford academics, including Thomas Arnold, Edward Copleston (soon to be provost of Oriel), and Renn Dickson Hampden, later to become a controversial liberal theologian. The group also included John Keble, soon to become equally controversial (although in an entirely opposite direction) as one of the founding fathers of the Oxford Movement. The intellectual ethos of the Noetics was certainly liberal, both politically and philosophically; they were also *sceptics*, not in the technical philosophical sense, but in their concern to debate and question even the most deep-seated tenets of social or ecclesiastical belief and practice. Although never one of the Noetics, John Henry Newman (qv) also came within Whately's sphere of influence in this period.

In July 1821 Whately married Elizabeth, third daughter of William Pope of Uxbridge, Middlesex. They were to have four daughters and a son. This necessitated the relinquishment of his Oriel fellowship, and in 1822 he moved to parish life in Halesworth, Suffolk. He seems to have been a diligent pastor and introduced, characteristically, a number of projects in adult education. He returned to Oxford in 1825 as principal of St Alban's Hall, a hall of residence for students unattached to a particular college, and in 1829 was elected professor of political economy in the university. He was in some respects a pioneer for the fledgling study of economics, opposing Malthusian economics and espousing a utilitarian philosophy of public finance. During his years in Oxford, Whately wrote extensively on myriad different subjects. His *Elements of logic* (1826) became a standard university text. There was also a sparkling riposte to the extremes of Hume's school of philosophical scepticism as directed against Christianity, in Whately's *Historic doubts relative to Napoleon Buonaparte* (1819). To these we may add *The use and abuse of party feeling in matters of religion* (1823), his Bampton lectures of 1822, a commentary on aspects of St Paul's writing, essays on the dangers of Roman catholicism, and other shorter works. It would probably be fair to say that his was a sharp rather than a deep mind,

and there is certainly little evidence of development in his thought. He enjoyed debate and was never afraid of opposition. His famous description of students as 'anvils' gives an indication of a combative and dialectical approach to teaching and learning.

Whately was a thoroughgoing liberal in every respect, but (despite his reputation to the contrary) he was not indifferent to the basics of the Christian faith. His view of the ordained ministry was primarily that of the teacher, he would certainly never have wished to emphasise the more sacramentalist role of the priest, and he strongly urged the centrality of the presbyteral role rather than that of priest-*hiereus*. He was impatient with what he perceived as superstition and anti-intellectualism. He intensely disliked too much fervour, and particularly as apparent in religious intolerance, but his reticence should not be interpreted as indifference. His sermons reveal in places a very personal piety, and he was also the author of a book on prayer. Throughout his life he was seen, however, as an unyielding adversary of evangelicalism. This was, however, less an antagonism to evangelical views than a dislike of what he saw as narrow-mindedness or manipulation, whether emotional or material.

His appointment to the archbishopric of Dublin (1831) came as a shock to many, including himself, and for a number of reasons. He had, as a liberal in every sense, publicly supported catholic emancipation in 1829, he was essentially a teacher rather than an ecclesiastical statesman, and he had shown little interest in Irish affairs. At a time when the very survival of Irish anglicanism seemed to be at stake, his was certainly not the appointment expected or desired by many in the church. Having supported emancipation, it is not surprising that he soon expressed himself as content to see reform of the system of tithes, and also a prepared to envisage a more general reform of the Church of Ireland, as the latter was expressed in the Irish church temporalities bill, reducing the number of Irish bishoprics. Although Whately was never brought into the centre of negotiations on either of these issues (unlike his fellow archbishop in Armagh, Lord John George Beresford (qv)), he gave support to both in principle, although he would sooner have seen the reduction in the revenues of the church, rather than the reduction in the number of dioceses. Not surprisingly, this added to his general unpopularity with many members of the church of his adoption. But his liberalism was utterly consistent. In 1833 he pressed for the passage of a bill for the emancipation of Jews; he believed that the position of lord lieutenant of Ireland should be abolished because of its inherent inefficiency as an office of state; and he held very liberal views of sabbath observance.

His real enthusiasm for economics was such that he endowed (from his personal income as archbishop of Dublin) a chair in political economy in TCD soon after his arrival in Ireland. In the 1830s he also chaired the royal commission on the Irish poor, producing an authoritative report on the condition of the Irish tenantry, which was ignored by the government. He wrote extensively on *laissez-faire* economics and advocated assisted emigration as the solution to the agrarian problems that

led to the Great Famine of 1845–9. He opposed vigorously the 'souperism' that so tarnished the reputation of the Church of Ireland in that period.

In addition to founding the professorship in political economy, Whately worked in vain to found a theological college for the Church of Ireland. He was prepared to give liberally from his own money to set up the college, but was thwarted by what can only be described as envy and prejudice. For Whately, the provision of education was all-important in every context, and his immensely courageous support for public money to be given to Maynooth College in 1845 was based partly on the belief that, while there need certainly be no expectation that many Roman Catholics would convert to Protestantism, there was a moral imperative to find the means to make them better Roman Catholics. He was certainly not an admirer of Roman Catholicism, but his disagreement would have been intellectual rather than cultural. He took an equally unenthusiastic view of the Oxford Movement within his own church, and in 1851 produced, with William Fitzgerald, *Cautions for the times*, a counterblast to the Oxford Movement's famous *Tracts for the times*.

As is often noted, Whately had a companionable relationship with Daniel Murray (qv), his Roman Catholic counterpart in Dublin. Whately's espousal of the national education system, detested by most of his fellow bishops in the Church of Ireland, was of a part with his political liberalism. But he saw also the importance of such an arrangement for social stability and political peace. He argued strongly that it should be possible for scripture classes in schools to traverse the denominations, and he personally prepared school lessons which had the approval also of Murray. There is no doubt that Whately and Murray each believed that a good grounding in scripture would stimulate conversions to his own tradition. Whately certainly believed that improved instruction in scripture would undermine what he saw as Roman Catholic error, but that was not his entire motivation. He was genuinely more interested in the principle of non-sectarian education than in producing large-scale conversions. Inevitably, in the Ireland of the mid-nineteenth century, this viewpoint was not allowed to take root. For many of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, the national education system was barely tolerable, and only as an alternative to a total absence of education. Whately's liberalism certainly had little backing within his own church. And, with the arrival of an ultramontanist and highly energetic Paul Cullen (qv) as Roman Catholic archbishop of Dublin in 1852, Whately was attacked from all sides and left to founder.

If Whately became resentful of ultramontanist Roman Catholicism, he became even more disaffected with proselytising missions in his own church. His final years became ever more miserable, as depression, ill-health, and considerable physical pain began to dominate his life. He also became interested in the possibilities of homeopathic medicine and, to some degree at least, in spiritualism and clairvoyance. The once sociable conversationalist ended his days as a recluse. He died on 1 October 1863 and is buried in Christ Church cathedral, Dublin. His writings, in addition to the titles shown above, include *Essays on some of the*

*peculiarities of the Christian religion* (1825), *Essays on the errors of Romanism, traced to their origins in human nature* (1830), *Introductory lectures on political economy* (1831–2), *Essays on some of the dangers to Christian faith* (1839), and *Reflections on a grant to a Roman Catholic seminary* (1845). Some of his papers survive in the library of Lambeth Palace, London.

---

William John Fitzpatrick, *Memoirs of Richard Whately, archbishop of Dublin* (2 vols, 1864); E. Jane Whately, *Life and correspondence of Richard Whately, DD, late archbishop of Dublin* (2 vols, 1866); D. H. Akenson, *The Irish education experiment: the national system of education in the nineteenth century* (1970); id., *A protestant in purgatory – Richard Whately, archbishop of Dublin* (1981)

Downloaded from <http://dib.cambridge.org> by IP 100.103.238.216 on Tue Jan 19 02:48:16 UTC 2021 Dictionary of Irish Biography Online © 2021 Cambridge University Press and Royal Irish Academy. All rights reserved. Not for commercial use or unauthorized distribution.