

**“A Free and Protestant People”? The Campaign for the
Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 1786-1828’**

Abstract

Protestant Dissenters launched a campaign for Test Act repeal in 1786 that encountered strong opposition. Half a century later a second campaign inconspicuously secured repeal whilst the established Church was preoccupied with the problem of Catholic emancipation. Historians have examined the political narrative of both campaigns and the theories of toleration propounded by some Dissenters. However, little attention has been paid to the symbolic importance of the Test Acts, which Dissenters considered as badges of their exclusion from national citizenship. This thesis will examine the language of the repeal campaigns as a window into wider notions of citizenship and national identity.

The resultant picture of Dissenters' identities and the larger national identities that they contested makes it possible to problematise and refine Linda Colley's *Britons: Forging the Nation*, which expounds a pan-Protestant, anti-Catholic, British national identity. Protestantism and anti-Catholicism were indeed central to the language of the debate, but this language marginalised Dissenters as often as it included them. Several Dissenters therefore united with a parallel Catholic campaign for toleration, whilst very few united with their fellow-Protestant Churchmen against the Catholic threat. The Dissenters' strategies reveal the ambiguity of their relationship to the nation: they were usually seen by Churchmen as marginalised or subordinate though less so than the Catholics. Moreover, overlooked divisions between evangelical and old Dissent, and between Trinitarian and Unitarian Dissent, led different sections of Dissent to pursue different strategies according to their perception amongst Churchmen.

Notions of national identity and citizenship were changing in this period, particularly as a result of the French Revolution and wars. Both Test Act repeal and Catholic emancipation may be situated within long-term processes of state-building and nation-building. Older notions of national identity endured to a greater extent than has been recognised, but adapted to these processes by becoming more inclusive and assimilative. Though Test Act repeal and Catholic

emancipation granted Dissenters and Catholics similar rights, because of the enduring importance of Protestantism to British national identity Test Act repeal signified Dissent's integration into the nation in a way that Catholic emancipation did not for Catholics.

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Abbreviations

<i>ED</i>	<i>Enlightenment and Dissent</i>
<i>EHR</i>	<i>English Historical Review</i>
<i>HJ</i>	<i>Historical Journal</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>JBS</i>	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
<i>PH</i>	<i>Parliamentary History</i>
<i>TRHS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Royal Historical Society</i>

Introduction

The Test and Corporation Acts

On the 18th of June 1828 nearly five hundred guests attended a banquet to celebrate the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. They enjoyed a lavish menu to the accompaniment of a professional band and toasted and cheered speeches until late into the night. The chosen date was the anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo, and thus of special patriotic significance; although, as Lord Althorp declared in his speech, that ‘triumph over the enemies of the country’ was surpassed by this new ‘triumph over intolerance’.¹ The elation with which Protestant Dissenters greeted repeal was well expressed by the Independent Minister Robert Winter, who directed his congregation’s attention to the ‘many events in the history of our highly favoured country, and to many particulars in our civil constitution, and in our religious liberties, which demand our gratitude to Divine Providence’. These liberties were enumerated for his audience: ‘the gradual Reformation from Popery and arbitrary power; the Revolution by King William III.; the confirmation of our liberties, on the accession of the illustrious House of Hanover to the British throne, [and] the continuance and enlargement of these liberties during the last hundred years’.² To this litany of divine favour and national blessings, Winter added Parliament’s repeal eight days previously of the sacramental test. Such hyperbolic sentiments were typical of the Dissenting response to the repeal of the Test Acts, and merit further investigation into exactly what and why the Dissenters were celebrating.³

The repeal of the Test Acts represented the most significant single rupture in the toleration settlement established at the Glorious Revolution one hundred and forty years

¹ *Reports of the Speeches and Proceedings at a Dinner to Commemorate the Abolition of the Sacramental Test* (1828), p. 31.

² Robert Winter, *A Sermon in Grateful Commemoration of the Repeal of the Sacramental Test* (1828), pp. 10-11.

³ ‘Test Acts’ will be used to refer to the 1661 Corporation Act and 1673 Test Act, but not the 1678 Test Act which excluded Catholics from Parliament.

earlier.⁴ The 1661 Corporation Act required all persons elected to municipal, commercial or charitable corporations to have communicated with the Church of England in the twelve months prior to their election. The 1673 Test Act imposed the same requirement on holders of civil or military office, and though its provision that communion need not be taken until three months after election had actually been secured was slightly more generous, it imposed the much harsher penalty of a £500 fine and significant deprivation of legal rights in addition to ejection from office. Whilst the Corporation Act formed part of the Clarendon Code directed against Puritan sectaries, and the Test Act nominally targeted Papists only, both effectively excluded Protestant Dissenters and Catholics alike.⁵ The 'Glorious' Revolution brought the 1689 Toleration Act, by which Trinitarian Protestant Dissenters and subscribing Dissenting ministers were exempted from the most significant penal legislation, but the Test and Corporation Acts were deliberately left in force. In 1718 Parliament granted a measure of security to officeholders proscribed by the Corporation Act by requiring that all prosecutions be made within the first six months of office. This cautious toleration was confirmed by the practice of passing near-annual Indemnity Acts from 1726 onwards, granting exemption to incumbent officeholders who had failed to take communion.⁶ Further inroads into the Church-State alliance were conceded in the face of the growth of heterodox Rational Dissent: the Toleration Act's requirement that Dissenting ministers and school teachers subscribe to thirty-five of the thirty-nine articles was repealed in 1779.⁷ Thus, by the end of the eighteenth century the legal status of Rational Dissent had significantly improved, and all Dissenters enjoyed a greater *de facto* toleration than they had at the beginning; yet beneath this story of progressively

⁴ J. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism: Nonconformity in Eighteenth-Century Politics and Society* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 50-4.

⁵ M. Watts, *The Dissenters. Volume One: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 221-7.

⁶ K. Short, 'The English Indemnity Acts, 1726-1867', *Church History*, 42 (1973), pp. 366-7.

⁷ G. Ditchfield, 'The Subscription Issue in British Parliamentary Politics, 1772-79', *PH*, 7, 1 (1988), pp. 45-80.

expanding toleration, seventeenth-century penal statutes endured along with the principle of the Church of England's privileged relationship with the state.

Dissenters sought intermittently to contest the curtailment of their civil rights. A public campaign in the 1730s, led by the new lay organisation, the Dissenting Deputies, failed in spite of Dissenters' perceived loyalty in the face of the Jacobite threat.⁸ Thereafter they retreated into political docility, until they began to show signs of disaffection under the seemingly pro-Catholic George III, particularly under the impact of the American war. The Dissenting Deputies' campaign of private lobbying brought closely-fought repeal motions to Parliament in 1787 and 1789, but in 1790 a third motion was defeated resoundingly amidst growing alarm at the unfolding of the Revolution in France.

During the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars attention shifted to the numerous, aggrieved and rebellious Irish Catholics. An Act of Union was passed to pacify Ireland, and thereafter Irish agitation for 'Catholic emancipation' – the admission of Catholics to the Westminster Parliament – dominated British politics.⁹ Under the shadow of the intractable 'Catholic question' the Dissenters' campaign for Test Act repeal was quietly revived. The Dissenters adopted a determinedly low profile and a studied neutrality towards the Catholics, and in May 1828 coaxed Test Act repeal from an established Church preoccupied with the more serious Catholic threat. As its opponents feared, repeal dealt a substantial blow to the old constitution, but a far less serious one than the Catholic leader Daniel O'Connell's illegal election to Parliament in July. This finally established the impossibility of denying civil rights to the large Catholic minority, and in 1829 Catholics were admitted to Parliament as well as to the offices denied them by the Test and Corporation Acts. The Dissenters' fortunes were consistently tied to the parallel Catholic question and their eventual success was largely overshadowed by its resolution.

⁸ G. Townend, 'Religion, Radicalism and Conservatism in the Whig Party under George I: The Repeal of the Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts', *PH*, 7 (1988), pp. 35-7; A. Thompson, 'Contesting the Test Act: Dissent, Parliament and the Public in the 1730s', *PH*, 24, 1 (2005), p. 63.

⁹ G. Machin, *The Catholic Question in English Politics, 1820-1830* (Oxford, 1964).

Indeed, the Test Acts were relatively lenient in comparison to the anti-Catholic penal code.¹⁰ Much of this legislation was repealed in 1778 and 1791, but English Catholics remained disenfranchised and excluded from both Houses of Parliament.¹¹ The Irish Catholics' legal situation was only slightly better. They were enfranchised on the same terms as Protestants in 1793, but continued to suffer from an assortment of unrepealed penal legislation incomparable to anything affecting Protestant Dissenters.¹²

Moreover, the Test Acts were rarely enforced, widely circumvented, and significantly diluted to the extent that they had effectively fallen into disuse by the time of their actual repeal. From the outset many Dissenters had bypassed the acts through occasional conformity.¹³ The majority of Dissenting officeholders, including the growing number of heterodox Rational Dissenters for whom occasional conformity was unacceptable, preferred to take 'office with hazard'.¹⁴ The Indemnity Acts indicated official acquiescence in this practice: though designed to protect careless churchmen, their effects on Dissent were undoubtedly understood.¹⁵ Historians David Wykes and James Bradley have found Dissenting office-holding to have been widespread throughout the eighteenth century, to the extent that some municipal corporations, such as Nottingham, were effectively dominated by Dissenters. They agree that where Dissenters were excluded from public life, this reflected their local social standing and the opposition of local oligarchies rather than any insurmountable legal barrier at the national level.¹⁶

¹⁰ C. Haydon, 'Parliament and Popery in England, 1700-1780', *PH*, 19, 1 (2000), p. 50; R. Donovan, 'The Military Origins of the Roman Catholic Relief Programme of 1778', *HJ*, 28, 1 (1985), p. 83.

¹¹ N. Abercrombie, 'The First Relief Act', in E. Duffy (ed.), *Challoner and his Church: A Catholic Bishop in Georgian England* (London, 1981), pp. 174-93; T. Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation: The Catholic Question, 1690-1830* (Dublin, 1992), pp. 121-3; Donovan, 'Military Origins'; B. Ward, *The Eve of Catholic Emancipation: Being the History of the English Catholics During the First Thirty Years of the Nineteenth Century. Volume One: 1803-1812* (London, 1911), pp. 2-4.

¹² *Ibid.* pp. 6-10.

¹³ Watts, *The Dissenters. Volume One*, pp. 264-6.

¹⁴ R. Davis, *Dissent in Politics, 1780-1830: The Political Life of William Smith MP* (London, 1971), pp. 40-1.

¹⁵ Short, 'English Indemnity Acts', pp. 373-6.

¹⁶ D. Wykes, 'Religious Dissent and the Penal Laws: An Explanation for Business Success?', *History*, 75 (1990), pp. 41-4, 56-90; Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, pp. 69-84.

It is therefore unsurprising that historians have often concluded, if only implicitly, that the quiet repeal of these largely unenforced laws was unimportant. Beyond the scholarship of Protestant Dissent, historiographical interest has often rested with the degree to which repeal precipitated 'Catholic Emancipation' in 1829 or the 'Great' Reform Act of 1832.¹⁷ However, to treat Test Act repeal as nothing more than a dress rehearsal for those more serious changes is an anachronism that belies the exaggerated expressions of gratitude with which Dissenters themselves greeted repeal. Moreover, some understanding of the importance of the Test Acts was presumably shared by those who thought them worth defending. This anachronistic tendency is reinforced by the habit of seeing the repeal campaign of 1787–1790 as thwarted solely by the *ex machina* intervention of the French Revolution.¹⁸ Yet the publicity the Dissenting campaign attracted and its seemingly populist and extra-constitutional methods were just as significant. The Dissenters' fortunes consistently turned upon how much attention they drew to themselves: the low profile they adopted in 1828 did not indicate that the battle had already been won, but rather was a sophisticated strategy adopted in a specific political context in order to secure victory in a struggle they had been engaged in for nearly a century and a half.

The Test Acts were important to Dissenters because of what they represented. Colin Haydon has argued that the anti-Catholic penal laws were widely unenforced and probably impossible to implement but were deliberately retained as symbols of the state's Protestantism. This symbolism filtered through into the popular consciousness, manifesting itself in the belief of patriotic 'Church and King' Mobs that their attacks on Catholics were legitimate; indeed they often were connived at by clerical magistrates, those immediate representatives of the Church-

¹⁷ G. Best, 'The Protestant Constitution and its Supporters, 1800-1829', *TRHS*, 5th Series, 8 (1958), pp. 106-7, Cannon 1972, pp. 190-3; G. Machin, 'Resistance to Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 1828', *HJ*, 22, 1 (1979), pp. 115-20; see also J. Clark, *English Society 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology and Politics during the Ancien Regime* (2nd edn., Cambridge, 2000), pp. 513-47.

¹⁸ Watts, *The Dissenters. Volume One*, pp. 482-90; A. Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (London, 1979), pp. 91-8; E. Carpenter, 'Toleration and Establishment: 2. Studies in a Relationship', in G. Nuttall and O. Chadwick (eds.), *From Uniformity to Unity, 1662-1962* (London, 1962), p. 314; U. Henriques, *Religious Toleration in England, 1787-1833* (London, 1961), pp. 65-6; R. Cowherd, *The Politics of English Dissent: The Religious Aspects of Liberal and Humanitarian Reform Movements from 1815 to 1848* (New York, 1956), p. 24.

State alliance.¹⁹ The same is true of the Test Acts. Dissenters repeatedly evoked the shame and infamy that the Test Acts attached, whilst their opponents, though denying that they entailed a meaningful denial of toleration, fully agreed that they represented the principle of the Church of England's exclusive relationship with the state. Moreover, even though the Test Acts were largely ignored, the ambiguity, inadequacy and unpredictability of the Indemnity Acts and the mere possibility of challenges under the Test Acts, which were made as late as 1824, guaranteed numerous inconveniences and an irreducible margin of uncertainty that underwrote Dissenters' status as second-class citizens.²⁰ To both Dissenters and their opponents the Test Acts symbolised Dissenters' exclusion from full membership of the national community and all the benefits this entailed. Rather than asking why these forgotten and meaningless Acts took so long to be expunged from the statute book, we should be asking why they were repealed at all.

Historiography

The Test and Corporation Acts have received substantial historiographical attention, which largely falls into two categories. The first is concerned with the strictly political narrative of the various repeal campaigns and the challenges facing the Dissenting leadership, such as the need to appear respectable to a hostile government or to disguise internal divisions over the Catholic Question. Of these the most important is R. W. Davis's 1971 study of the political career of the Unitarian MP and Dissenting Deputy William Smith.²¹ The second is concerned with the theory of toleration, as expounded by Locke and Milton and embellished by the Unitarian ministers

¹⁹ Haydon, 'Parliament and Popery', pp. 50-1, 60-2; see also J. Bossy, 'English Catholics after 1688', in O. Grell, J. Israel and N. Tyacke (eds.), *From Persecution to Toleration: the Glorious Revolution and Religion in England* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 331-87.

²⁰ Davis, *Dissent in Politics*, pp. 41-3, 124; M. Watts, *The Dissenters. Volume Two: The Expansion of Evangelical Nonconformity* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 418-19.

²¹ Davis, *Dissent in Politics*; B. Manning, *The Protestant Dissenting Deputies* (ed. O. Greenwood, Cambridge, 1952); Cowherd, *Politics of English Dissent*, pp. 15-35; N. Hunt, *Two Early Political Associations: The Quakers and the Dissenting Deputies in the Age of Sir Robert Walpole* (London, 1961), pp. 113-78; Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, pp. 65-98; Carpenter, 'Toleration and Establishment: 2'; E. Payne, 'Toleration and Establishment: 1. A Historical Outline', in Nuttall and Chadwick, *From Uniformity to Unity*, pp. 257-87.

Joseph Priestley and Richard Price. Its key feature is an insistence on the separation of religion and politics, on the basis of a theory of intellectual progress necessitating free enquiry, and an understanding of individual psychology precluding the coercion of private conscience.²²

Notions of citizenship and nationhood feature only marginally in these accounts. This aspect has not been ignored entirely: Richard Barlow concluded that Dissenters conceived of 'a new type of citizenship based on the principle of every man's right to serve his community and his country according to his best abilities', and E. F. Carpenter agreed that 'repeal was an open if long-delayed recognition that membership of the Church of England could no longer be required for full membership of the nation'.²³ Yet the symbolic importance of the Test Acts, though acknowledged in passing, does not function as a meaningful component of these analyses. Instead, the struggle over repeal is presented as one between reaction and enlightened reformism. The repeal campaign is situated within the broader movement for constitutional reform, the Dissenters equated with the middle classes, and their cause with the expansion of liberty and the march of progress.²⁴ For the overwhelming majority of contemporaries, the repeal question turned on the loyalty, trustworthiness and respectability of Dissenters, rather than on the sophisticated theories emphasised by Barlow, Ursula Henriques, and Anthony Lincoln.²⁵ Locke thought that the usual rules of toleration did not apply to Roman Catholics, and Price justified the restrictions imposed on Catholics in Ireland.²⁶ The conflict over repeal concerned different representations of religious minorities, the national community, and the relationship between them, as much as it did religious liberty, toleration, or Church-State relations.

²² R. Barlow, *Citizenship and Conscience: A Study in the Theory and Practice of Religious Toleration in England During the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1962); Henriques, *Religious Toleration*, pp. 1-98; A. Lincoln, *Some Political and Social Ideas of English Dissent: 1763-1800* (Cambridge, 1938), pp. 182-270 and *passim*.

²³ Barlow, *Citizenship and Conscience*, p. 298; Carpenter, 'Toleration and Establishment: 2', p. 316.

²⁴ Davis, *Dissent in Politics*, pp. xiv, 212-3; Cowherd, *Politics of English Dissent*, pp. 7-9.

²⁵ Barlow, *Citizenship and Conscience*, pp. 25-56; Henriques, *Religious Toleration*, pp. 18-53; Lincoln, *Political and Social Ideas*, pp. 101-81.

²⁶ Henriques, *Religious Toleration*, p. 27; Bartlett, *Fall and Rise*, p. 105.

By treating the conflict over the Test Acts in this way, these works leave several aspects of the Dissenting campaign unaccounted for. Most historians acknowledged the anti-Catholicism of the rank-and-file only, contrasting it with their enlightened and liberal leadership. Explanations for the contrast varied: G. I. T. Machin and Henriques, following Elie Halévy, saw the division as a horizontal one between evangelical and rational Dissent, whilst Davis agreed with J. H. Hexter that the root cause of intolerance was poverty and ignorance, and that the doctrinal spectrum merely coincided vertically with the all-important social one.²⁷ Both points of view treat anti-Catholicism as an intrinsically irrational and thus inexplicable phobia: ‘an ugly and persecuting anti-Catholicism which arose primarily out of an intolerant alchemy of xenophobia, social fears and even personal paranoia’, in the words of Martin Fitzpatrick.²⁸ Yet scholars have since noted that anti-Catholicism was an important part of eighteenth-century political culture.²⁹ In the 1730s the Dissenters argued that repeal would unite Protestants against the common Catholic enemy.³⁰ The general absence of this argument in the years 1786-1828 represents a dog that failed to bark. It seems to have been politically inexpedient for the Dissenters to express anti-Catholicism, but it is not clear why this should have been the case when much of the establishment shared this sentiment. Finally, it remains unclear exactly why opposition to Test Act repeal, so intractable throughout the eighteenth century, suddenly became subordinated in the mind of the establishment to the all-important Catholic question in the nineteenth.

A reassessment of the campaigns against the Test Acts is the more overdue given their pertinence to the contentious and long-running debate over British national identity initiated by Linda Colley’s *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, which argued that Britons saw themselves

²⁷ Henriques, *Religious Toleration*, p. 147; Machin, *Catholic Question*, p. 7; Davis, *Dissent in Politics*, pp. 229-35.

²⁸ M. Fitzpatrick, ‘Joseph Priestley and the Cause of Universal Toleration’, *The Price-Priestley Newsletter*, 1 (1977), p. 6.

²⁹ C. Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England, c. 1714-80: A Political and Social Study* (Manchester, 1993)

³⁰ Thompson, ‘Contesting the Test Act’, pp. 63-70.

as 'a free and Protestant people'.³¹ For Colley, British national identity was constructed around Britons' common Protestantism and in opposition to a partially-imagined Catholic 'Other', particularly through recurrent wars with Catholic France. Protestantism, famously, is 'the foundation that made the invention of Great Britain possible'.³² Colley is concerned firstly with explaining the larger but often overlooked picture of social stability and concord, and secondly with the relationship between a new layer of specifically British identity and older local and national identities.³³ *Britons* offers the same answer to both these questions: a shared Protestant identity was not unilaterally imposed on a helpless populace, but rather negotiated by patrician and plebeian, metropole and periphery, and underwritten by material prosperity and military success, facilitating social stability and national integration.

A number of historians have objected to what they see as Colley's excessive emphasis on the unifying and stabilising effects of Protestantism. The collection of essays on *Protestantism and National Identity* edited by Tony Claydon and Ian McBride explore the many conflicts taking place within British Protestantism, and provides an important corrective to any over-simplistic impression of Protestant unity.³⁴ Claydon and McBride conclude that 'the picture of national identity that emerges from this volume is less one of a dominant consensus, than of a frequently contested terrain'.³⁵ J. C. D. Clark has similarly accused Colley of reducing national identity to 'a simple dualism of Protestant versus Catholic'.³⁶ Similarly, Peter Nockles has criticised Colley's 'broad-brush... Protestant unity scenario'.³⁷ The unifying theme of this kind of

³¹ L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (3rd edn., London, 2009), p. 51.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 1-54, quotation p. 54.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

³⁴ T. Claydon and I. McBride (eds.), *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c.1650-c.1850* (Cambridge, 1998).

³⁵ T. Claydon and I. McBride, 'The Trials of the Chosen Peoples: Recent Interpretations of Protestantism and National Identity in Britain and Ireland' in *ed. idem.*, *Protestantism and National Identity*, p. 25.

³⁶ J. Clark, 'Protestantism, Nationalism and National Identity, 1660-1832', *HJ*, 43, 1 (2000), p. 262.

³⁷ P. Nockles, 'The Waning of Protestant Unity and Waxing of Anti-Catholicism? Archdeacon Daubeny and the Reconstruction of "Anglican" Identity in the later Georgian Church, c.1780-c.1830', in W. Gibson and R. Ingram (eds.), *Religious Identities in Britain, 1660-1832* (Aldershot, 2005), p. 180.

criticism is that Colley's over-simplistic approach ignores the extent to which national identity was complex, shifting, contested and multi-faceted.

These critics rightly point to the potentially disruptive effect that a greater attention to Protestant Dissent might have on the concept of a 'Protestant nation'. Many other historians have censured *Britons* for its failure to take sufficient account of the political, social and theological conflict between the established Church and Dissent.³⁸ Colley cursorily acknowledges the existence of divisions within Protestantism but quickly concludes that 'these internal rivalries were abundant and serious. But they should not obscure what was still the most striking feature in the religious landscape, the gulf between Protestant and Catholic'.³⁹ Grayson Ditchfield has done the most to exploit this weakness in Colley's thesis in an article identifying three different representations of the national character and history that were articulated in religious conflict. Anglicans could deploy the image of a 'Protestant nation' against Catholics, or an 'Anglican nation' against Protestant Dissenters, whilst Catholics and Dissenters could invoke a non-denominational 'libertarian nation'.⁴⁰

Whilst identifying a real weakness in her thesis, these criticisms have not been very constructive. Part of the problem stems from confusion over the exact meaning of the term 'identity', which has encouraged Colley's critics to focus on demonstrating the existence of divisions within Protestantism on the assumption that this lack of Protestant unity in itself invalidates the suggestion of a Protestant national identity. The preface to the 2009 edition of *Britons* offers a legitimate response to these criticisms, acknowledging 'these internal Protestant fractures' but maintaining that 'as far as most men and women were concerned [they] were usually of a different and lesser order than the religious chasm and contest between

³⁸ Clark, 'Protestantism, Nationalism and National Identity', p. 262; J. Black, 'Confessional State or Elect Nation? Religion and Identity in Eighteenth-Century England' in Claydon and McBride, *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c.1650–c.1850* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 59-62; E. Thompson, 'Which Britons?', in *idem.*, *Persons and Polemics* (London, 1994), pp. 322-3; M. Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain: Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1685-1789* (Basingstoke, 1997), pp. 5-6.

³⁹ Colley, *Britons*, p. 19.

⁴⁰ G. Ditchfield, 'Church, Parliament and National Identity, c. 1770-c. 1830' in J. Hoppit (ed.), *Parliaments, Nations and National Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1660-1850* (Manchester, 2003), pp. 64-82.

Protestantism and Catholicism'.⁴¹ Yet *Britons* does not provide the evidence to support this assertion. A more constructive criticism of *Britons*, then, would attempt to assess the impact of belief in Protestant unity and explore the meaning of conflict between Protestants, rather than simply noting historical instances where the two did not correspond to one another.

The Test Act debate concerned the extent of the political community and therefore provides an ideal case to test the significance of a pan-Protestant national identity in this way. If enough Anglicans believed that the national community ought to exclude Protestant Dissenters, and enough Dissenters believed that the Test Acts did exclude them, then the utility of the concept is brought into question; if Test Act repeal was demanded and won on the basis that Protestant Dissenters were or ought to be legitimate members of the national community, then its utility is confirmed. Moreover, the Dissenters' campaign can be seen in light of the parallel debate over Catholic civil rights: the two interacted in numerous ways, and contemporary observers frequently compared the two causes.

The Test Act debate not only allows us to access political articulations of British national identity, as Ditchfield recognised, but also represents an important moment in the evolution of this identity. *Britons* is imprecise in its treatment of chronological change. Colley places her emphasis on the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, suggesting that Catholic emancipation, parliamentary reform, and the abolition of slavery reflected a new sense of British national identity, based on liberty and moral mission, which sprang up to fill the vacuum left as anti-Catholicism waned into redundancy.⁴² However, anti-Catholicism remained a powerful force throughout the nineteenth century.⁴³ The Test Act debate took place at a time of profound political and social change, and thus at a time when British national identity itself was in

⁴¹ Colley, *Britons*, pp. xix-xx.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 327-84.

⁴³ G. Best, 'Popular Protestantism in Victorian Britain', in R. Robson (ed.), *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain* (London, 1967); S. Gilley, 'Protestant London, No-Popery and the Irish Poor, 1830-60', *Recusant History*, 10, 4 (1970); E. Norman, *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England* (London, 1968); D. Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England* (Stanford, 1992); J. Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain, 1829-60* (Oxford, 1991); J. Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843-1945* (London, 1994).

transition. The evangelical revival and Methodist secession transformed both Church and Dissent. The French Revolution plunged Britain into war with a newly-infidel France, shifted domestic fears from Jacobites to Jacobins, and eventually produced the resounding defeat of France, Britain's ancient enemy. The Union with Ireland, partially a consequence of the Revolution and the pressure towards state formation and national integration it unleashed, transformed the religious composition of the British population and thus the Catholic question also. Did these events change contemporary understandings of Britishness in a way that facilitated the extension of national membership to religious minorities? Or was the extension of civil rights conceded reluctantly, in the face of irresistible political imperative? What, in turn, was the impact of Test Act repeal on British national identity?

Methodology

This thesis will consider the unsuccessful campaign against the Test Acts in the 1780s, and the successful campaign of the 1820s, as contests over the character and membership of the nation, in order to improve upon the three weaknesses in the existing historiography identified above. Firstly, it will seek to provide more satisfactory explanations for certain aspects of the Dissenters' political campaigns, particularly regarding their relationship with the Roman Catholics; secondly, it will try to identify the positive role played by national identity in the conflict, thereby moving the historiographical debate beyond the truism that national identity was contested and polyvalent; thirdly, it will attempt to trace in finer detail the relationship between changes in national identity and political change in these years. It will explore the political language of the accompanying debate without attempting to rehearse traditional narratives of practical politics, and will take as its starting point any discussion of the Test Acts taking place in the public sphere: in parliamentary speeches; in the printed proceedings of local or national societies; in pamphlets, essays, and newspaper and periodical articles; in printed

sermons, speeches and letters; in resolutions adopted at public meetings; and in parliamentary petitions. It will focus on the ways that the Dissenters' political strategies shaped their choice of language - and *vice versa* – in order to afford a view of the larger picture of the national identity with which they were negotiating.

Nationalist language featured prominently in the public discussion of the Test Acts. Ditchfield's exploration of this language treats it as the rhetorical window-dressing to the real substance of political conflict: he cautiously concludes that 'attempts to annex a sense of national identity which was associated with religious values and appeals to the past were fundamental to religious debate in this period. But it was an identity open to numerous interpretations.'⁴⁴ Yet preachers, pamphleteers and petitioners invoked particular images of the nation in order to give a cause legitimacy in the eyes of the public.⁴⁵ They therefore selected culturally available images chosen to resonate with wider public identities. Peter Mandler offers some promising suggestions in this regard:

We [historians] can offer social scientists a lot of useful information about the symbolic world that is available to social actors out of which they construct their group identifications. Social scientists understand much better the *process* by which group identification takes place than they do what determines the *content* of group identifications or even the *salience* of a particular group identification in a given situation.⁴⁶

By situating public expressions of national identity in their political context, and thereby shifting attention towards the availability, content and salience of different languages of identity and away from the construction of identity itself, historians can acknowledge the fact that identity is multiple, unstable and contextual, whilst retaining for the concept sufficient rigidity to make it

⁴⁴ Ditchfield, 'Church, Parliament and National Identity', p. 78.

⁴⁵ J. Bradley, 'The Public, Parliament, and the Protestant Dissenting Deputies, 1732-1740', *PH*, 24, 1 (2005), pp. 88-90.

⁴⁶ P. Mandler, 'What is "National Identity"? Definitions and Applications in Modern British Historiography', *Modern Intellectual History*, 3, 2 (2006), pp. 267-7.

theoretically useful.⁴⁷ A similar methodology has recently been used by Renaud Morieux in his stimulating exploration of the 'discursive strategies' of fishermen on both sides of the English Channel.⁴⁸

Nationalist language is of interest not only because it hints at political identities, but also because it interacted with politics. It is important not to overstate its impact. It is doubtful whether either Test Act repeal or Catholic emancipation would have occurred when they did had it not been for the physical threat posed by millions of Irish Catholics. Nevertheless, as one historian has argued, emancipation was achieved through the combination of the physical force of the Irish Catholics and the moral force of the English Catholics.⁴⁹ The same is true of the Dissenters: it was necessary that they be able to represent their cause as a legitimate one in order to retain the support of their sympathisers, and the degree of their success in doing so mediated the degree of outright opposition they provoked. Moreover, nationalist language came with an internally consistent set of meanings that could not be selectively regarded and disregarded at will. For Dissenters to be able to claim that the continuing existence of the Test Acts was an affront to Britons' national identity, it was necessary for them not only to adopt nationalist language, but also for their language to be perceived as consistent with their behaviour, their history, and their stance on other political issues.

The internal content of nationalist language was therefore important. Newman has legitimately asked, 'what did it mean to think of oneself as British? Colley leaves her readers to assemble this themselves from her scattered discussions of monarchism, conservatism, reformism, Protestantism, toleration of Catholicism, antislavery sentiment, and so forth'.⁵⁰ We should not expect this content to be absolutely consistent. Certainly there was no consensus over the exact meaning of such tropes as monarchism, toleration and antislavery, or even

⁴⁷ R. Brubaker and F. Cooper, 'Beyond "Identity"', *Theory and Society*, 29, 1 (2000), pp. 10-14.

⁴⁸ R. Morieux, 'Diplomacy from Below and Belonging: Fishermen and Cross-Channel Relations in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, 202 (2009), pp. 83-90, quotation p. 89.

⁴⁹ R. Linker, 'The English Roman Catholics and Emancipation: the Politics of Persuasion', *JEH*, 27 (1976), pp. 151-80.

⁵⁰ G. Newman, 'Nationalism Revisited', *JBS*, 35, 1 (1996), p. 123.

Anglicanism, Protestantism and Christianity. Yet precisely because such concepts were so inherently contestable, the trope itself can become entrenched through the struggle over its exact meaning. Mark Knights has commented on this process in the context of the Occasional Conformity debate of the 1710s: 'ironically by agreeing in their stereotyping of each other, whig and tory, low and high church produced a set of inverse identities that had a good deal in common'.⁵¹ In the same way, Churchmen, Dissenters and Catholics invoked significantly different visions of the nation yet shared a considerable common ground that became more enshrined the more it was contested. This process accounts for the promiscuity of particular tropes such as 'liberty' in the repeal debates, and indeed more generally in the political culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

This thesis will consider the debate over the Test Acts in three chronological stages. The first chapter will consider the repeal campaign from the 1786 decision of the Dissenting Deputies to apply for Test Act repeal to the failure of the third repeal motion in March 1790. The abundance of repeal publications appearing in this period offer a comprehensive picture of the key tropes and assumptions of nationalist language at this time, particularly the central place afforded to the closely-related tropes of Protestantism and liberty. Whilst this language did have a positive impact on the repeal campaign, Dissenters did not benefit from it as much as they might have been expected to. The second chapter will consider the period between the 1790 failure to the end of the war in 1815, a time of far-reaching social, cultural and political change during which the Test Acts themselves were little discussed. It will assess the extent to which the language mapped out in chapter one evolved in response to the disruptions of this period. The third chapter will consider the gradual re-emergence of the repeal campaign after the war through to the passage of repeal in 1828, emphasising the changes in British national identity that had taken place since 1786 and suggesting ways that the Dissenters benefitted from these changes. It will argue that the Dissenters were successful because the Irish Catholics'

⁵¹ M. Knights, 'Occasional Conformity and the Representation of Dissent: Hypocrisy, Sincerity, Moderation and Zeal' *PH*, 24, 1 (2005), p. 57.

irresistible demands for political inclusion forced the Church of England to develop a more tolerant and assimilative identity, though one that continued to be defined by many of the same tropes of the pre-war repeal debate. The endurance of these tropes, and their continuing association with Protestantism, meant that this assimilation came with assorted conditions attached – more severe for Catholics than Dissenters.

“The Cause of Truth Cannot Fail in a Free and Protestant Country”:¹ The Toleration Debate, 1786-90

“A Common Interest Must Dictate Similar Feelings”:² The Organisation of the Dissenting Campaign

The repeal question was resurrected in 1786 by the Dissenting Deputies, a lay organisation consisting of representatives from the Presbyterian, Baptist and Independent congregations of London. The Deputies primarily worked to protect Dissenters throughout the country from overzealous clergy, intransigent magistrates and destructive mobs, but they also claimed to speak for Dissenters as a body.³ Confident that in a period of parliamentary stability the support of William Pitt would be forthcoming, the Deputies formed a ‘repeal committee’ in December, together with prominent lay Dissenters and a number of sympathetic MPs. This committee quietly lobbied members of both Houses, and were responsible for repeal motions in March 1787, May 1789 and March 1790. They also sought to drum up public support by publishing and distributing selected pamphlets, including two of its own, a concise *Case of the Protestant Dissenters* and Samuel Heywood’s much longer *Right of Protestant Dissenters to a Compleat Toleration Asserted*.⁴ This chapter will begin by sketching the necessary political outlines of the Deputies’ campaign, before moving on to consider the rhetorical strategies of both sides of the debate, in order to provide a view of the larger picture of national identity that was being contested in these years.

¹ *Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts: Minutes 1786-90 and 1827-8* (ed. T. Davis, London, 1978), c. 105.

² *Ibid.*, c. 64.

³ *A Sketch of the History and Proceedings of the Deputies Appointed to Protect the Civil Rights of the Protestant Dissenters* (1814), pp. 155-81.

⁴ *The Case of the Protestant Dissenters, with Reference to the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1787), Samuel Heywood, *The Right of Protestant Dissenters to a Compleat Toleration Asserted; or an Essay, Containing a Historical View of their Situation under the Laws Imposing the Sacramental Test on Persons Admitted to Office* (1787).

The Deputies were deeply unrepresentative of the kaleidoscopic diversity of Dissent. Quakers and Scots Presbyterians were not represented, and neither showed much interest in Test Act repeal.⁵ More seriously, the Deputies constituted a roll call of lawyers, bankers, merchants and aldermen, selected from and by the respectable London elite.⁶ Their politics, too, were highly distinctive. On the one hand, many Dissenters saw the Deputies' actions as disruptive, dangerous and unnecessary and were dismayed that they claimed to speak for the more conservative mass of Dissenters whom they had failed to consult.⁷ On the other hand, the metropolitan Deputies represented a cautious political tradition equally at odds with the radical elite of provincial Dissent, and in the 1780s, as in the 1730s,⁸ they sought not only to raise popular support, but also to contain its provocative excesses. When the committee promised Dissenters that 'as a common interest must dictate similar feelings, we are confident that in general we express your sentiments whenever we declare our own', they were seeking to paper over these internal divisions.⁹

The picture is further complicated by the heavy overrepresentation of Unitarians amongst pro-repeal Dissenters. A number of Unitarians sat on the repeal committee, including some of its most active members.¹⁰ The radical provincial elite were overwhelmingly Unitarian: notable pro-repeal pamphleteers outside the committee included John Aikin, his sister Anna Laetitia Barbauld, John Disney, Capel Lofft, Joshua Toulmin, Gilbert Wakefield and Joseph Priestley. In December 1789 a number of Dissenters petitioned the committee to take the radical step of organising a public meeting: the signatories included Richard Price, Theophilus Lindsey and Lofft, as well as others with known Unitarian sympathies such as Abraham Rees and

⁵ At this time Methodists were still aligned with the Establishment and Unitarians with Presbyterianism.

⁶ *Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*, cc. 123-4, 135-8, appendix A.

⁷ Stephen Addington, *A Letter to the Deputies, of the Protestant Dissenting Congregations, in and about the Cities of London and Westminster: On their Intended Application to Parliament, for the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts (1787)*, p. 7.

⁸ Hunt, *Two Early Political Associations*.

⁹ *Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*, c. 64.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, appendix A.

Andrew Kippis.¹¹ Unitarians both within and without the committee were engaged in a network of personal friendships.¹² These relationships are a likely source for the contacts between the London committee and provincial Unitarians. The Birmingham merchant William Russell was a county delegate to the committee, who was instrumental in establishing the Committee of Birmingham Dissenters in October 1789 and thence the Midland District Organisation in January 1790.¹³ Another crucial figure was the Unitarian bookseller Joseph Johnson, who, according to Helen Braithwaite, 'was early and closely involved with the Committee's press and propaganda activities'. Of the eighty-nine repeal publications listed in the *Analytical Review* for the first half of 1790, thirty-nine were published by Johnson. Johnson also sold pamphlets from around the country, and appeared to have a systematic working relationship with J. Thompson, a Birmingham bookseller and publisher of Priestley.¹⁴ Russell and Johnson can be seen as key figures tying together a nationwide network of Unitarian radicals partially overlapping with the more cautious London committee.

In seeking to provide a unified voice, the repeal committee often had to work to disguise tensions between Unitarian and Trinitarian Dissenters. Donald Davie has argued that Unitarians were a 'chillingly exclusive' intellectual elite, perceived by Anglicans and orthodox Dissenters alike as 'pernicious and alarming heretics'.¹⁵ More recent work by John Seed and others has corrected the impression that Rational Dissent was marginal and isolated,¹⁶ but Unitarians remained the target of a peculiarly vitriolic brand of Anglican hostility despite their high social

¹¹ *Ibid.*, c. 97.

¹² *Ibid.*, appendix A; *ODNB* entries for 'Samuel Heywood (1753-1828)', 'Thomas Brand Hollis (c.1719-1804)', 'John Lee (1733-1793)', 'William Russell (1740-1818)', 'William Smith (1756-1835)', 'Benjamin Vaughan (1751-1835)'.

¹³ J. Money, *Experience and Identity: Birmingham and the West Midlands, 1760-1800* (Manchester, 1977), pp. 220-1.

¹⁴ H. Braithwaite, *Romanticism, Publishing and Dissent: Joseph Johnson and the Cause of Liberty* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 79, 96, 98.

¹⁵ D. Davie, *A Gathered Church: The Literature of the English Dissenting Interest, 1700-1930* (London, 1978), pp. 66-8, 130-4.

¹⁶ J. Seed, "'A Set of Men Powerful Enough in Many Things": Rational Dissent and Political Opposition in England, 1770-1790', in K. Haakonssen (ed.), *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 140-68.

and political standing.¹⁷ Because of these differences in Anglican perception, the Unitarian leadership sometimes pursued more radical goals and strategies than their Trinitarian followers could stomach.

After the Deputies' initially unprovocative lobbying was quietly but firmly defeated, both support and opposition steadily intensified until Dissenters were overwhelmed by the fully roused force of the established Church. This trajectory is reflected in the divisions over successive repeal motions, which were defeated 178:100, 124:104 and 294:105, indicating the mobilisation of two largely consistent parliamentary blocs rather than conversion amongst MPs.¹⁸ By late 1789, temperatures on both sides had been raised by the unfolding Revolution in France. Though Burke's *Reflections* was not published until November, the nationalisation of Church property had alarmed many, and the Establishment's defence of the Test Acts pre-empted its response to the French Revolution.¹⁹ The repeal committee itself identified the Revolution as the singular cause of their third defeat.²⁰ Historians have often agreed.²¹ Yet contemporaries noted other causes, including disapproval of attacks on Anglican doctrine and attempts to deploy electoral pressure.²² The campaign was not heading for inevitable success before encountering the unanticipated obstacle of the Revolution.

Rather, the arc followed by the campaign reflected the gradual failure of the committee's early strategy of keeping repeal beneath the radar of Anglican opposition. Frustrated by the established Church's tendency to dismiss the issue as unimportant, the committee urged Dissenting voters to support pro-repeal candidates, gathered nation-wide

¹⁷ G. Ditchfield, *The Letters of Theophilus Lindsey and the Cause of Protestantism in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 2007), pp. 19-22.

¹⁸ G. Ditchfield, 'The Parliamentary Struggle over the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 1787-1790', *EHR*, 89, 352 (1974); G. Ditchfield, 'Debates on the Test and Corporation Acts 1787-90: The Evidence of the Division Lists', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 50 (1977), pp. 69-81.

¹⁹ J. Mori, *William Pitt and the French Revolution, 1785-1795* (Edinburgh, 1997), pp. 36-44; H. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 1977), pp. 306-10.

²⁰ *Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*, c. 139.

²¹ See p. 14 fn. 18 above.

²² *The World*, 30 Jan 1790; *Public Advertiser*, 3 Feb 1790.

subscriptions, and eventually invited delegates to form a national organisation.²³ The final months of 1789 and early 1790 saw an enormous number of pro-repeal meetings and the formation of numerous Dissenting organisations around the county. The debate quickly became noisier and more diversified, and a number of more strident voices were unleashed: Disney's catalogue of repeal publications list sixteen titles for 1787, eleven for 1789, and ninety-six for 1790. Thirty-one of the publications listed for 1790 were printed outside London, against just one for 1787.²⁴

As the campaign gathered pace, popular resistance was roused to a widespread and intense hostility. *The World* commented on the sudden burst of activity in January 1790, seeing the established Church's 'printed Declarations, Advertisements, Public Meetings, &c. &c.' as a belated response to the Dissenter's activity.²⁵ Opposition made much of the cracks that were appearing in the Dissenters' campaign. In February 1790 an Independent delegation withdrew from a repeal meeting, announcing that it was dominated by Rational Dissenters hostile to the established Church.²⁶ The incident provoked national controversy and was raised by Burke in Parliament.²⁷ The tendency of the Dissenting campaign to provoke opposition rather than sympathy was perceptively characterised by the *English Review*: 'If, said [Dissenters] to themselves, a certain quantity of bustling produced a certain number of votes, what will a greater produce? They little thought that the decrease of their political friends would be in the inverse ratio of their own activity'.²⁸

²³ *Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*, c. 94, 116, 123-4, 136-8.

²⁴ J. Disney, *An Arranged Catalogue of the Several Publications Which Have Appeared, Relating to the Enlargement of the Toleration of Protestant-Dissenting Ministers; and the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1790), pp. 9-31.

²⁵ *The World*, 29 Jan 1790.

²⁶ Samuel Fletcher, *To Thomas Plumbe, Esq; Chairman of the Bolton Committee, February 18th 1790* (Manchester?, 1790); G. Ditchfield, 'The Campaign in Lancashire and Cheshire for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, 1787-1790', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 126 (1976), pp 118-19.

²⁷ Thomas Cooper, *To the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London?, 1790)

²⁸ *English Review*, 15 (1790), p. 240.

This strategic failure together with the catalysing role played by the French Revolution explains the strength of opposition in 1790, but not the failure to secure repeal. Opposition in 1787 may have been passive, but it was nevertheless intransigent. As one Dissenting writer observed, the initial strategy was misguided anyway: Dissenters 'ought to be more concerned about the principle contended for, than any single immediate consequence of its being admitted. It would be comparatively but a trifling acquisition, were the test laws repealed, - whilst the bulk of the people continue unconvinced of the injustice and impiety of those laws'. According to the same writer, the defeat indicated the survival of Dissenters' 'unjust stigma of being considered as enemies to the constitution of our country, - as unworthy of public confidence, - as unfit to be admitted to the common privileges of British citizens'.²⁹ Opposition was roused, and Dissenting unity broken, as the campaign was increasingly fought on the explicit grounds of Dissenters' exclusion from national citizenship.

"The Briton in my Soul":³⁰ The Language and Imagery of the Debate

Though the detail and extent of Dissenters' demands varied, their rhetoric consistently invoked a particular set of vocabularies and images. Repeal was presented as moderate and reasonable, in accordance with the principles and interests of true religion, the constitution and the nation, and part of an ongoing struggle of progress and liberty against intolerance and persecution. Much of this language mimicked that of their Anglican opponents, reflecting Dissenters' political strategy and goals. They demanded repeal not as a concession to be wrested from the established Church by force, but as a manifestly reasonable and mutually beneficial public good. The committee repeatedly insisted that they sought 'nothing but what is just and reasonable to

²⁹ *Observations Occasioned by the Late Decision in Parliament, in Favour of the Test Laws* (Manchester, 1790), pp. 4, 10-11.

³⁰ Robert Robinson, *A Discourse on Sacramental Tests* (Cambridge, 1788), p. 16.

be asked and safe and honourable to be granted'.³¹ Barbauld mocked the Establishment's fear of 'the naked and unarmed sectary'.³² Dissenters seemed to expect sympathy to be forthcoming, and their political language was chosen accordingly. Yet their language and tactics also reflects the extent to which they were contesting their marginalised status, which would only have been confirmed by an antagonistic assault on the Church's privileges.

The imagery of liberty, toleration and conscience that pervaded Dissenters' rhetoric needs to be seen in this light. Historians have pored over their use of arguments drawn from Locke and Milton: that freedom of conscience is a natural right, persecution impedes the progress of truth, and religion and politics ought to be confined to their separate spheres.³³ Yet Dissenters themselves rarely subjected their language to this kind of detailed unpacking. Heywood found space in his 228-page pamphlet to explain that:

Man in a state of nature is possessed of many rights, some of which he gives up entirely, and others he suffers to be controlled when civil communities are formed... [but] the right of private judgement never could be surrendered to the magistrate, because it never could be within his jurisdiction.³⁴

Far more often, the rhetorical tropes of liberty, toleration and conscience functioned symbolically or emotively; for example, the Dissenters' condition was compared rather hyperbolically to that of enslaved Africans.³⁵ Liberty, toleration and conscience, then, were not only the subject of debate, but also the means through which Dissenters asserted their claim to citizenship.

Dissenters' claims about religious liberty and the rights of conscience rested less on detailed philosophical exegesis than on the invocation of a national tradition of constitutional

³¹ *Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*, cc. 91, 141.

³² Anna Letitia Barbauld, *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (3rd edn, 1790), p. 6.

³³ Barlow, *Citizenship and Conscience*, pp. 25-42; Henriques, *Religious Toleration*, pp. 18-53; Lincoln, *Political and Social Ideas*.

³⁴ Heywood, *Right*, pp. 96-8.

³⁵ *London Chronicle*, 4-6 Feb 1790; David Bogue, *Reasons for Seeking A Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, Submitted to the Consideration of the Candid and Impartial* (1790), p. 22.

liberty. The Independent minister David Bogue thought the Corporation Act displayed ‘a total inattention to the principles of the English constitution’.³⁶ A public meeting of Dissenters at Devizes declared that ‘as Englishmen, we feel for the disgrace which those laws bring upon the national character for liberty, good sense, and humanity’.³⁷ By deploying this kind of language, Dissenters were expressing and appealing to what Ditchfield has characterised as the image of the ‘libertarian nation’.³⁸ Liberty may have been a universal right, but it received its uniquely successful embodiment in the national constitution. Mr. Hudson, a county delegate to the repeal committee, thought that ‘civil liberty, or an equal participation of rights as men and citizens, is the *principle* on which the English Constitution is founded... and is in fact the only principle on which legitimate government can exist’.³⁹ The ambiguity inherent in any patriotic appeal to universal values was captured by the Cambridge Baptist minister Robert Robinson, who asked, ‘would I, a freeborn native of this enlightened country, exchange my christian liberty for... servility? I would not. To say nothing of the gospel, the Briton in my soul (forgive the expression) a laudable pride of birthright would forbid me’.⁴⁰ Robinson’s phrase may have been gently self-mocking, but it was deeply patriotic.

As Robinson’s phrase suggests, for many of the Dissenters and their Anglican sympathisers who invoked ‘liberty’ in the repeal debate, the concept was an essentially religious one. Ditchfield distinguishes the ‘libertarian nation’ from the ‘Protestant nation’, but the distinction was less visible to contemporaries.⁴¹ Protestantism was often defined as the right of private judgement. A pro-repeal meeting in the West Riding emphasised that Dissent’s separation from the Church of England, like the Church of England’s separation from Rome, was justified ‘upon the only principle on which genuine christianity and pure protestantism can be

³⁶ Bogue, *Reasons*, p. 4.

³⁷ *Extracts from Books, and Other Small Pieces; in Favour of Religious Liberty, and the Rights of Dissenters. Number One* (Birmingham, 1790), pp. 26-8.

³⁸ Ditchfield, ‘Church, Parliament and National Identity’, pp. 74-7.

³⁹ [Hudson], *Observations on the Origin and Effects of the Test Act. With Some Hints for the Consideration of the Clergy* (1790), p. 14.

⁴⁰ Robinson, *Discourse*, p. 16.

⁴¹ Ditchfield, ‘Church, Parliament and National Identity’, pp 65-6.

consistently supported, viz., by asserting that the Bible only, contained the religion of Christians, and that she had a right to interpret this bible for herself'.⁴² A letter to the *London Chronicle* urging toleration of the Methodists shared this understanding: 'I hope I am so much a Protestant as never to interfere with the right of private judgment: do not you then, good folks, be Protestants in theory, and Catholics in practice'.⁴³ The repeal committee reprinted a 1719 pamphlet in which Bishop Hoadly had attacked Bishop Sherlock for contravening this first rule of Protestantism:

It is surely somewhat extraordinary, in a Protestant country, to hear a learned and celebrated divine maintain publicly that there were some Christians who have no right to the use of the scriptures... If we are at length come to this, the next question will be, how much this differs from the proceedings in those Popish countries... [?]⁴⁴

This widespread libertarian understanding of Protestantism offered Dissenters a strong platform upon which to attack the Test Acts and defend themselves against the charge of schism.

The Dissenters' opponents invoked remarkably similar tropes – Protestantism, liberty, Britishness – to counter these attacks. Historians have treated these arguments in the same way that they have treated the Dissenters', privileging their logical content, particularly the distinction made between 'civil' and 'political' liberty, over their emotional appeal.⁴⁵ Yet this distinction was significant precisely because it served to prevent Dissenters from wholly appropriating the language of liberty. The Dissenters' opponents were forced to clarify the logical limits to the right of private judgement, explaining that Dissent took a laudable Protestant principle to extremes: after the Reformation, 'these glorious benefits overcame the weak and unsettled judgement of some unenlightened Followers of the Protestant Faith, and

⁴² *Extracts from Books, and Other Small Pieces; in Favour of Religious Liberty, and the Rights of Dissenters. Number Two* (Birmingham, 1790), pp. 21-2.

⁴³ *London Chronicle*, 27-9 Mar 1787.

⁴⁴ *Bishop Hoadly's Refutation of Bishop Sherlock's arguments against a Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts: where the Justice and Reasonableness of such a Repeal are Clearly Evinced* (1787), p. 18.

⁴⁵ Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, pp. 78-9.

hurried them to an ungovernable Enthusiasm'.⁴⁶ In the passage that had aroused Hoadly's ire, Sherlock noted that Anglicans 'had the sense to know, that to leave every man to make the best of his Bible, without any farther direction or restraint, would naturally tend to confusion'.⁴⁷

The opponents of the Test Acts not only countered the Protestant, libertarian language of Dissent, but also actively employed this language themselves. Many High Churchmen sought to steer a *via media* between Puritanism and Popery but were nevertheless able to employ the Dissenters' binary oppositions – liberty *versus* intolerance – against both of these mutually-resembling extremes. The former corresponded to despotic tyranny, the latter to republican tyranny, and the Church of England to the liberal moderation of the British constitution. An Anglican layman argued that 'a Presbytery... being in religion, what a republic is in government, is always a heavier tyranny over individuals than monarchy, as it is composed of a greater number of rulers'.⁴⁸ The same writer thought that Priestley's faith in the inevitable triumph of truth was 'calculated to light up again the fires of persecution, by the principle of infallibility which it holds out'.⁴⁹ A Worcester Methodist and self-professed 'Member of the Church of England' warned that '*Popery and Republicanism are always to be dreaded in this Land of true Liberty*'.⁵⁰ Not only was the Church of England defended on the grounds of liberty, but Dissenters were also attacked as themselves persecuting and intolerant. The *Critical Review* noted 'the intolerant spirit of the Dissenters' and their 'clamorous, aspiring, and intolerant' history.⁵¹ The *London Chronicle* pointed out that Britons now enjoyed 'particularly perfect freedom from persecution on account of our religious opinions, which was by no means the case

⁴⁶ *An Essay on the Origin, Character and Views of the Protestant Dissenters* (Oxford, 1790), pp. 3-4.

⁴⁷ *Bishop Sherlock's Arguments against a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts: Wherein most of the Pleas Advanced in a Paper now Circulating, Styled, The Case of Protestant Dissenters, &c. Are discussed* (1787), pp. 23-4.

⁴⁸ *Cursory Remarks on the Reverend Dr. Priestley's Letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer: Containing Hints, Humbly Offered in Favour of the Establishment, and Opposed to the Principles Contained in that Publication* (1787), p. 10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-9.

⁵⁰ [A Member of the Church of England, Commonly Called a Methodist], *A Word to Discontented Dissenters, especially the Worcester Association* (Worcester?, 1790), p. 9.

⁵¹ *Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature*, 69 (Jan-June 1790), pp. 346, 464.

when the abovementioned sectaries overturned the constitution of this kingdom in the last century'.⁵² Most churchmen thus saw the Church of England as the bastion of the nation's traditions of moderate, liberal Protestantism, thereby equating Ditchfield's 'Anglican nation' with his 'libertarian' and 'Protestant' nations.⁵³

Depictions of the Test Act debate as a confrontation between two coherent intellectual systems have overlooked the extent of this common rhetorical ground. Historians of Dissent have repeatedly taken Dissenting rhetoric at face value and characterised their cause as the cause of liberty.⁵⁴ In fact, both sides were struggling over, and thereby reinforcing, the same language of Protestant liberty derived from shared understandings of the British constitution and the character of the nation. In their demands for religious liberty, Dissenters were not seeking to recreate the constitution in their own image but were rather adopting a deliberately conservative posture in order to be fully admitted to the nation.

*"A Confounded Unsound Part of the Community":*⁵⁵ *Discussions of Citizenship and Nationality*

The Test Act debate, as well as invoking such tropes of national identity as Protestantism and religious liberty, frequently concerned the relationship between Dissent and the nation. The Test Acts, after all, were important precisely because they symbolised the exclusion of Dissent from the full privileges of citizenship. As such, Dissenters were keen not only to emphasise the principle of toleration, but also to establish their peculiar credentials for toleration by invoking their historic loyalty and contributions to the community. Their arguments were frequently clothed in intensely patriotic language. Mr. Hudson implored: 'Oh that my country would listen

⁵² *London Chronicle*, 25-7 Feb (1790).

⁵³ Ditchfield, 'Church, Parliament and National Identity', pp. 70-2.

⁵⁴ Goodwin, *Friends of Liberty*, p. 66; Davis, *Dissent in Politics*, p. 253; Cowherd, *Politics of English Dissent*, p. 21.

⁵⁵ William Hunter, *A Letter to Dr. Priestley, F.R.S. &c. in Answer to his Letter to the Right Hon. William Pitt, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and First Lord of the Treasury, on the Subject of the Repeal of the Test-Act, and the Abolition of Subscription, &c.* (1787), p. 39 (paraphrased).

to the voice of reason! I write it with tears, and I feel myself deeply interested in her prosperity, and would sacrifice my life if it were necessary in her defence'.⁵⁶ In making these protestations of patriotism, Dissenters were able to capitalize on a century of political quiescence. Bogue argued, 'subjects better affected to government than Protestant Dissenters, and more loyal to their sovereign, England does not contain'.⁵⁷ Like many other Dissenters, he pointed to Dissenters' loyalty during the 1715 and 1745 Jacobite rebellions to support this claim.⁵⁸

By deploring the ingratitude they received for their loyalty, Dissenters were also implying that they were unjustly excluded from a nation to which they ought properly to belong. Addressing Dissenters, Aikin declared, 'you have again been solemnly degraded into the condition of aliens, in a land which you have laid under eternal obligations by faithful attachment and essential services!'⁵⁹ Barbauld agreed: 'we wish to bury every name of distinction in the common appellation of Citizen', she told Churchmen. 'It is you, who by considering us as Aliens, make us so.'⁶⁰ Dissenters made it clear that they sought a deeper integration into the national community through repeal of the symbols of their exclusion.

By demanding political concessions as a *quid pro quo* for their loyalty and patriotism, Dissenters were invoking a concept of citizenship, emphasising the common identity of citizens and equating Dissenters' private interest with the public interest. Thus the Test Acts were detrimental not only to Dissenters, but also to the country they wished to serve. Samuel Pearce asked, 'is it not impolitic that such men should have their hands tied, and feet bound, when their patriotic zeal impels them to seek the public good?'⁶¹ Dissenters repeatedly emphasised their contributions to the national community, particularly through taxes and warfare. Mr. Hudson lamented that 'a considerable body of industrious subjects, who are required to pay their full

⁵⁶ [Hudson], *Observations*, p. 40.

⁵⁷ Bogue, *Reasons*, p. 12.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵⁹ John Aikin, *An Address to the Dissidents of England on their Late Defeat* (1790), p. 5.

⁶⁰ Barbauld, *Address*, pp. 16-17.

⁶¹ Samuel Pearce, *The Oppressive, Unjust, and Prophane Nature, and Tendency of the Corporation and Test Acts, Exposed* (Birmingham, 1790), p. 15.

share of all the Taxes, are denied the common privileges of citizens'.⁶² Similarly, David Bradberry, an evangelical Independent minister, was appalled that 'the brave Briton, who has long ploughed the waves, and often hurled the thunders of war upon the enemies of his country', should return home to be faced with a choice between dishonouring his God and dishonouring his country.⁶³ The phenomenally popular prison reformer and philanthropist John Howard, the high sheriff of Bedfordshire in contravention of the Test Act, was often extolled as an example of the Dissenting patriot.⁶⁴

In order to support these claims, Dissenters often invoked the Protestantism they shared with the Church of England. The *Case* promised that repeal 'will tend to the security and strength of the Protestant interest'.⁶⁵ This language was not purely religious, but unambiguously invoked the peculiarly Protestant character of the national community. The repeal committee insisted that 'the cause of truth cannot fail of ultimate success in a free and Protestant country'.⁶⁶ George Walker, the Nottingham radical, thought that the operation of penal laws against Protestant Dissenters was 'almost in violation of the national faith'.⁶⁷ Bradberry expected repeal would be forthcoming from 'a British and Protestant Senate'.⁶⁸ These invocations of Britons' common Protestantism were pleas for integration as often as reminders of existing unity. 'But for these ill-tempered, insulting and irreligious acts', Walker argued, 'the bonds of a common country, a common patriotism, a common law, and we will add a common religion would blend the Dissenter and the Churchman in a frank and unsuspecting

⁶² [Hudson], *Observations*, p. 27.

⁶³ David Bradberry, *A Letter to Edward Jeffries, Esq., Chairman of the Committee, Appointed...to Apply to Parliament for a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, so far as they Concern Protestant Dissenters* (1789), pp. 9-10.

⁶⁴ *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 29 Mar 1787; William Bristow, *Cursory Reflections on the Policy, Justice, and Expediency, of Repealing the Test and Corporation Acts, Addressed to the Nation* (1790), pp. 33-4.

⁶⁵ *Case*, p. 3.

⁶⁶ *Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*, c. 105.

⁶⁷ George Walker, *The Dissenters' Plea, or the Appeal of the Dissenters to the Justice, the Honour and the Religion of the Kingdom, against the Test Laws* (Birmingham, 1790), p. 16.

⁶⁸ Bradberry, *Letter to Edward Jeffries*, pp. 12-13.

intercourse'.⁶⁹ This vision of Protestant unity was shared by the Dissenters' Anglican supporters, such as the Canterbury bookseller William Bristow, who argued, 'we are happy to see the established church flourish, but we must do justice to our fellow Protestants, who are as regular and good Christians as the most pious of our Churchmen'. He added, 'if the Test Laws were repealed, Dissenters would most likely, in half a century, be melted into the general mass'.⁷⁰

Dissenters' use of Protestant language encountered an obstacle in their exclusion from an established national church. Dissenters and their Anglican supporters were too conscious of their differences to ignore them entirely. They therefore sought to conceptualise these differences as notable but ultimately of second-order significance. For this reason, Dissenters and Churchmen were repeatedly likened to quarrelling family members. Bradberry invoked the King as 'common father of the people', asking only that 'while, with paternal fondness, he dandles one son upon his right knee – he will condescend to embrace and sustain another who, without envying his brother, leans with filial confidence upon the left!'⁷¹ Barbauld, rather more aggressively, compared the established Church to 'a mother-in-law who, with the too frequent arts of that relation, is ever endeavouring to prejudice the State, the common parent of us all, against a part of his offspring, for the sake of appropriating a larger portion to her own children'.⁷² The very real conflict between Church and Dissent over the Test Acts did not make the notion of a Protestant national identity appear implausible or impossible. The reverse is true: this conflict encouraged Dissenters to evoke a vision of Protestant fraternity in an effort to overcome their other differences.

The extent to which the Dissenters' demands constituted a quest for national integration is well illustrated by the attitudes of Dissenters who actively opposed them. One such was the Particular Baptist minister John Martin, who published a speech against repeal in 1790. 'To say, that Senators *ought* to see the propriety of our request', Martin told Dissenters,

⁶⁹ Walker, *Dissenters' Plea*, p. 37.

⁷⁰ Bristow, *Cursory Reflections*, pp. 17, 34.

⁷¹ Bradberry, *Letter to Edward Jeffries*, p. 15.

⁷² Barbauld, *Address*, p. 9.

'is to assert, They ought to be governed by *our* judgement, and not by their *own*.'⁷³ Martin undoubtedly possessed strongly authoritarian political sympathies. He had preached a loyalist sermon in 1782, was an administrator of the government's controversial *regium donum*, and in 1798 would be expelled from the London Baptist Board after accusing Dissenters of sympathy with the Revolution.⁷⁴ Yet, after several pages of exhorting Dissenters to loyalty and quiescence, Martin's deeper objection to repeal emerges. The Test Acts represent a barrier separating Dissent from worldly society, and thereby guaranteed an irreducible fund of conscientious piety. The question, for Martin, is, 'whether our temporal advantages are to be preferred to our religious reputation... Is it prudent to risk the losing a real advantage to religion, by the indulgence of intemperate desires for civil possessions?'⁷⁵ The conservative Independent minister Stephen Addington shared this fear:

If these acts are repealed, the Dissenters may and must serve troublesome and expensive offices; some in which Gentlemen of taste would have opportunities of exhibiting their genteel carriages, and liveries, and of spending five or six hundreds a years; but while the disposal of posts of profit is in other hands, in vain may they look for the loaves and fishes.⁷⁶

This counter-intuitive opposition to repeal is suggestive of an attachment to an older Dissenting identity, constituted by persecution, marginalisation and pious withdrawal, which was threatened by the prospect of national integration.

If it is perhaps unsurprising that Dissenters invoked Protestant language in their demands for repeal, then the limited extent to which their opponents challenged these claims is striking. Occasionally, the foreign influences on Dissent, particularly Calvinist Geneva, would be invoked to explain Dissenting intolerance. One letter to the *Public Advertiser* explained how

⁷³ John Martin, *A Speech on the Repeal of Such Parts of the Test and Corporation Acts as Affect Conscientious Dissenters: Intended to have been Delivered before the General Body of Dissenting Ministers* (1790), pp. 17-18.

⁷⁴ Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, pp. 123, 189; ODNB entry for 'John Martin (1741-1820)'.

⁷⁵ Martin, *Speech*, pp. 28, 20.

⁷⁶ Addington, *Letter*, pp. 16-17.

‘during their abode in [Geneva], observing how Calvin governed all things by means of the Consistory, they fell violently in love with that device’, whilst another pointed out that Dissenters had ‘their beginning at Frankfurt and Geneva’.⁷⁷ Yet these devices appear very infrequently and resemble passing snipes rather than central, functional planks of anti-Dissenting rhetoric.

The Dissenters’ opponents instead attacked their assertions of loyalty to the national interest. Whilst anti-Catholicism was fuelled by Britain’s recurrent wars with foreign states, anti-Dissenting sentiment had crystallised around the Civil War. As Seed has argued, anti-Dissenting rhetoric focused relentlessly on their descent from the Puritans of the Civil War era, and particularly their alleged responsibility for the execution of Charles I.⁷⁸ This rhetoric drew upon remarkably long-standing images of subversion, danger, fanaticism and conspiracy, such as the letter to the *Public Advertiser* which described Dissenters as ‘fiery, restless, domineering spirits... always struggling for the mastery, wherever they could once gain a footing; and throwing every thing into confusion, and turning the whole world, in a manner, upside down, in order to obtain it’.⁷⁹

The fixation on the civil war is significant: Dissenters were anarchic, rebellious blasphemers and yet, in the final analysis, members of the national community nevertheless. Samuel Hunter made this widespread assumption about Dissent explicit, conceding ‘that *you are a part of the community*, and a confounded unsound part too. A limb of it, which, should it continue its unfavourable and incurable symptoms, had better be lopp’d off, as in chirurgical cases, than that a mortification should seize on the whole body politick’.⁸⁰ Dissenters, by taking Protestant principles to excess, unwittingly working against their own country’s interest. If the Test Acts were repealed, wrote one pamphleteer, then the entire nation would be reduced to

⁷⁷ *Public Advertiser*, 27 Mar 1787, 13 Feb 1790.

⁷⁸ J. Seed, *Dissenting Histories: Religious Division and the Politics of Memory in Eighteenth-Century England* (Edinburgh, 2008), pp. 179-81.

⁷⁹ *Public Advertiser*, 13 Feb 1790.

⁸⁰ Hunter, *Letter to Dr. Priestley*, p. 39.

the anarchic condition of Dissent, and 'the whole stupendous Structure of reform'd Religion, would forever remain incompleat, and unfinished, *like the Tower of Babel*, from the *Confusion of Tongues*, and the *Disparity of Opinions*'.⁸¹ These attitudes were supported by a rival family metaphor characterising Dissenters as 'impudent Children, who grow *insolent* with their *Years*, till they spit in their indulgent Mother's Face, and kick her out of Doors'.⁸² This echoed John Shebbeare's earlier characterisation of the American colonists as 'a profligate and perfidious progeny'.⁸³

Although Dissenters were usually characterised by their opponents as rebellious and unrestrained members of the Protestant nation, a peculiar virulence was reserved for Unitarians. Unitarianism was often placed beyond the pale of Protestantism: one writer asked, 'are they so elated with a preposterous Veneration for the Truths they maintain, or the Doctrine they Teach, as to set themselves upon a level *with Protestants*'?⁸⁴ Another anonymous pamphleteer went further, describing Unitarians as '*Infidels and Blasphemers*'. He denied that Unitarians qualified for toleration, comparing the anti-Unitarian statutes to 'the Laws against burglarious entries into dwelling-houses, and other species of felony'.⁸⁵ Priestley in particular enjoyed the status of national arch-villain. His comparison of the theological truths of Unitarianism to grains of gunpowder was referred to in the Commons by Sir William Dolben.⁸⁶ Unitarianism was also considered to resemble 'eastern' Judaism and Islam: Priestley was 'one of their principal Rabbis... the folly of his Ways, and his Confidence in Error already make even the Turk to smile, and the Jew to draw the Veil much nearer to his Face'.⁸⁷ Seed has also noted the

⁸¹ *Cursory Reflections, on the Present Intended Repeal of the Test Act. Addressed to the Members of a Certain Meeting, Friends to the Established Church.* (1790), pp. 10-11.

⁸² [A Methodist], *Word to Discontented Dissenters*, pp. 10-11.

⁸³ John Shebbeare, *An Essay on the Origin, Progress and Establishment of National Society* (1776), pp. 118-19.

⁸⁴ *Cursory Reflections, on the Present Intended Repeal of the Test Act*, p. 12.

⁸⁵ [Philalethes], *Remarks on Dr. Priestley's Letter to the Right Honourable Mr. Pitt; in a Second Address to the Candidates for Orders, in both Universities* (1787), pp. 13, 14-15.

⁸⁶ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 29 Mar 1787. J. Priestley, *The Importance and Extent of Free Inquiry in Matters of Religion* (Birmingham, 1785), p. 40.

⁸⁷ *Cursory Reflections, on the Present Intended Repeal of the Test Act*, pp. 26-8.

anti-Semitic colour of much anti-Dissenting rhetoric in this period.⁸⁸ Ditchfield has even suggested that in the late eighteenth century Unitarianism was becoming ‘the Other’ against which British national identity was defined.⁸⁹ Whether or not this formulation is helpful, it is certainly true that the entire Dissenting campaign suffered from the association with the Unitarian leadership. As Davie has suggested, the impression that the campaign was a solely Unitarian initiative was fuelled by memories of the opposition of some Trinitarian Dissenters to the ending of subscription in 1779.⁹⁰ Indeed, given the role played by Unitarians in the campaign, this impression was not altogether illusory.

In spite of this fear of Unitarianism, many Establishment writers urged Dissenters to accept the Test Acts as beneficial to a common Protestant interest. One High Church pamphleteer concluded a particularly vitriolic pamphlet on an unexpectedly conciliatory note, clarifying that ‘the present purpose is not to accuse the Dissenters of a Design to bring so much calamity upon their Country’. He implored Dissenters to accept the Test Acts in the name of the national interest and the Protestant religion:

This Country, therefore, calls upon the Dissenters, in the name of brotherly love, and Christian kindness, to prevent all occasion of contest... a more glorious benefit is justly to be expected; the Protestant Faith will hence prevail by the force of its example, as well as by the exclusive excellence of its doctrines.⁹¹

Similarly, *A Poetical Dialogue* between ‘Jack’ and ‘Martin’ concluded with ‘Jack’ accepting the Test Acts with the words:

Secur’d by Laws, that keep us free
In Person, Faith, and Property;
Their lenient Wisdom I adore, –
Enjoy the Gift, - and seek no more.
In all ESSENTIAL Points agreed,

⁸⁸ Seed, *Dissenting Histories*, pp. 179-81.

⁸⁹ Ditchfield, *Letters of Theophilus Lindsey*, p. 25.

⁹⁰ Davie, *Gathered Church*, p. 132.

⁹¹ *An Essay on the Origin, Character and Views*, p. 8, 26-7, 27-8.

And holding one great CHRISTIAN CREED;
Let Wrangling and Contention cease,
And Peace and Harmony increase⁹²

Dissenters' assertions that they stood within the pale of the national community, made partly though not wholly on the basis of that community's shared Protestantism, were largely accepted by members of the established Church. Yet this was of little use to the Dissenters in the 1780s. Their opponents denied that because Dissenters' swore allegiance to the crown, paid its taxes and fought its wars, they could legitimately lay claim to a corresponding set of rights: 'all the Dissenters urge, respecting their loyalty to the king, and their attachment to the state, is insignificant; because no state does or can reward its subjects for their obedience'.⁹³ The Dissenters' claim to national membership may have been accepted, but their claim to national citizenship was not.

"The Common Protestant Interest against Papists":⁹⁴ Anti-Catholicism and Catholic Relief

The prevalence of a strident language of Protestant national identity in the repeal debates – emphasising the necessary connection between Protestantism, liberty and Britishness – supports Colley's thesis that eighteenth-century Britons saw themselves as 'a free and Protestant people'. However prevalent this language may have been, the Test Act debate itself concerned Dissenters' exclusion from the privileges of the nation: how much of an advantage did this language give to Protestant Dissenters? In order to assess the salience of this language, it is necessary to examine the interaction of the repeal campaign with the question of Catholic rights. Firstly, distinctions between Catholics and Dissenters in the Anglican imagination were

⁹² *Jack and Martin: a Poetical Dialogue, on the Proposed Repeal of the Test Act* (Hereford, 1790), pp. 34-5. Following Swift, 'Jack', 'Martin' and 'Peter' were often used to represent Dissent, Anglicanism and Catholicism respectively.

⁹³ *A Collection of the Resolutions Passed at the Meetings of the Clergy of the Church of England, of the Counties, Corporations, Cities, and Towns, and of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* (1790), pp. 34-5.

⁹⁴ *Bishop Hoadly's Refutations*, p. 45.

brought to the surface by the need to defend the established Church from the simultaneous encroachments of both. Secondly, Dissenters could play upon Anglican attitudes towards Catholicism and attempt to present themselves in a more favourable light by comparing or contrasting themselves to the Catholics. Thirdly, Dissenters' attitudes and actions towards the question of Catholic rights offered a platform upon which to demonstrate their credentials as tolerant, Protestant citizens.

The high degree of interaction was made inevitable by the importance of 'Popery' to British political culture at this time. The language of Protestant liberty that pervaded the Test Act debate had its rhetorical antithesis in the spectre of Popery. A series of binary oppositions – liberty / slavery, tolerance / persecution, rights of conscience / clerical authority, reason / superstition, progress / backwardness – corresponded to the all-important opposition between Protestantism and Popery. Several historians of political ideas have noted the role of Popery in formulating English attitudes towards freedom and toleration.⁹⁵ An Anglican lay supporter of the Test Acts thought that 'a reconciliation between England and Rome, is as impossible as the union of light and darkness, fire and water, or any of the most heterogeneous principles in the compass of nature!'⁹⁶ This kind of Manichean language was not employed against Dissenters in these years.

Just as the language of Protestant liberty proved endlessly flexible during the repeal debate, so the charge of Popery was by no means always attached to Catholicism itself. Bishop Horsley stressed that English Catholics were Gallicans rather than Papists.⁹⁷ Conversely, a pamphlet published by the Birmingham Committee accused the Church of assuming 'a *papal infallibility to herself*', whilst popular aggression towards Methodists and Dissenters often

⁹⁵ C. Fatovic, 'The Anti-Catholic Roots of Liberal and Republican Conceptions of Freedom in English Political Thought', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 66, 1 (2005), pp. 39-40.

⁹⁶ [A Country Freeholder], *The Danger of Repealing the Test-Act: in a Letter to a Member of Parliament* (1790), p. 31.

⁹⁷ Samuel Horsley, *A Review of the Case of the Protestant Dissenters; with Reference to the Corporation and Test Acts* (1790), p. 13.

identified these minorities as 'Papists in disguise'.⁹⁸ It is true that no-Popery could divide Protestants against each other, as Tony Claydon, Ian McBride and J. C. D. Clark have noted.⁹⁹

Yet unsurprisingly, no-Popery found its natural target in the Catholics. This is demonstrated by the tendency for Anglicans to treat Catholics as the greater threat to the nation than Dissenters, even when their arguments were directed against repeal. A common argument against repeal, made by Lord North in 1787, was that it would open the door to the admission of Catholics.¹⁰⁰ Hawtrey objected to Dissenters because 'they will combine even with the Papists for [the Church's] overthrow'.¹⁰¹ This tendency to use anti-Catholicism to vicariously attack Dissenters suggests a conceptualisation of Dissent as the conscious or unconscious ally to the hostile, antagonistic outsider of Popery.

Repeal was not always attacked in this way: sometimes Dissent was compared unfavourably to Catholicism. One High Church author objected to the Dissenters' assertions of 'peaceable, and well-affected conduct', thinking that 'the Quakers, and the Catholics, perhaps, might better urge such a claim'.¹⁰² A letter to the *London Chronicle* supporting Catholic relief even blamed Dissenters for the original passage of the intolerant anti-Catholic statutes. Yet the writer went on to argue that 'some distinction ought to be made, between the established religion which [government] *encourages*, and the *sects* which it *tolerates*... The Protestant Dissenters of Great Britain enjoy this toleration in its utmost extent'.¹⁰³ In the same way, Horsley thought that Catholic relief was justified since the threat from Popery had receded, but that this 'would by no means justify the removal of those restraints, to which the peace and safety of the State require that Dissenters of all denominations should be subject'.¹⁰⁴ In other

⁹⁸ Pearce, *Oppressive, Unjust and Prophane Nature*, pp. 27-8; Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism*, pp. 248-9.

⁹⁹ Claydon and McBride, 'Trials of the Chosen People', p. 14; Clark, 'Protestantism, Nationalism and National Identity', p. 262.

¹⁰⁰ *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 29 Mar 1787.

¹⁰¹ Charles Hawtrey, *A Letter to Earl Stanhope, on the Subject of the Test, as Objected to in a Pamphlet Recommended by His Lordship* (Oxford, 1789), p. 19.

¹⁰² *An Essay on the Origin, Character and Views*, p. 16.

¹⁰³ *London Chronicle*, 18-20 Feb 1790.

¹⁰⁴ Horsley, *Review*, pp. 13, 14-15.

words, Dissenters and Catholics ought to be equally tolerated but neither qualified for full admission. Even where the polemical purpose was to attack Dissenters as less deserving than Catholics, then, the two threats to the Protestant nation were treated as equidistant at worse.

There were thus important, qualitative differences in the ways that Dissent and Catholicism were perceived and treated. Of course, the Church of England could be intensely hostile to both Catholicism and Dissent, particular theological tendencies within Anglicanism could be more or less sympathetic towards the one or the other, and the extent and nature of this hostility depended heavily on context. Colin Haydon therefore sees many parallels between the statuses of different religious minorities, all of which were 'subject to hostile stereotyping'.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, those stereotyping consistently distinguished between the figures of the subversive Dissenting revolutionary and the hostile Catholic alien. This insider/outsider distinction has also been noticed by Jan Albers.¹⁰⁶

Their relatively favoured position meant that Dissenters could attempt to make themselves appear more favourable in Anglican eyes by contrasting themselves with the dangers posed by Roman Catholics. Yet this argument was not an immediately obvious part of Dissenting rhetoric. As Black has observed, 'rarely did [anti-Popery] advocate open hostility to English Catholics. Rather, the religious persecution and social disruption implied by such hostility were often denounced as "popish" in themselves'.¹⁰⁷ The centrality of toleration to Protestant identity made it difficult for Dissenters to actively exploit Anglican anti-Catholicism.

Dissenters nevertheless sought to passively benefit from surreptitious and non-provocative reminders of the primacy of the Catholic threat. Above all, the argument that the Test Acts were only directed against Papists was made repeatedly, superficially as a rhetorical demonstration of the Acts' absurdity but with obvious anti-Catholic implications. A pamphlet

¹⁰⁵ Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism*, pp. 245-52, quotation p. 246.

¹⁰⁶ J. Albers, "'Papist Traitors" and "Presbyterian Rogues": Religious Identities in Eighteenth-Century Lancashire', in J. Walsh, C. Haydon and S. Taylor (eds.), *The Church of England c.1689-c.1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 324.

¹⁰⁷ Black, 'Confessional State', p. 63.

published by the Birmingham Committee argued that ‘the original object of the Test and Corporation Acts was to prevent the introduction and establishment of *Popery*, and *arbitrary power*... It is a perversion, therefore, of those laws to give them validity against the Dissenters, who are adverse to popery’.¹⁰⁸ In the Commons, Henry Beaufoy emphasised that repeal could be achieved without admitting Catholics, who were excluded by the Oath of Supremacy.¹⁰⁹ These arguments have often been deemed irrelevant by historians more interested in the theory of toleration. Bernard Manning cited four clauses of a Dissenting pamphlet from the 1730s in full, but omitted the fifth: that the Test Act was designed against Papists only.¹¹⁰ Yet this argument was a crucial part of the Dissenters’ strategy.

In order to avoid the appearance of intolerance, anti-Catholic arguments for repeal often took the form of historical anecdotes. Dissenters often told the story of Alderman Love, a Dissenter who had supported the passage of the Test Act, declaring that Dissenters ‘were willing to lie under the severity of the law, rather than clog a more necessary work with their concerns’.¹¹¹ Only the machinations of the despotic Charles II had prevented the passage of Bills to correct the collateral inclusion of Dissent.¹¹² Similarly, in 1688 the Lords had protested that ‘the taking [of] the sacrament, which was enjoined only as a means to discover Papists, is now made a distinguishing duty among Protestants, to weaken the whole by casting off a part of them’, adding, ‘a hearty union amongst protestants is a greater security to the church and state than any test that can be invented’. The pan-Protestant, anti-Catholic language of this protestation was cited by the Birmingham Committee and, in a letter to the *Manchester*

¹⁰⁸ *Extracts from Books. Number One*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ *The Debate on the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, in the House of Commons, May the 8th, 1789* (1789), p. 8.

¹¹⁰ Manning, *Protestant Dissenting Deputies*, pp. 30-1; compare *Sketch of the History and Proceedings of the Deputies*, pp. 9-12.

¹¹¹ Heywood, *Right*, p. 22.

¹¹² [Hamden], *Two Letters on the Test Act, Signed Hamden. Printed in the Gazetteer of Jan 20th and March 1st, 1790* (1790), p. 3

Chronicle, the London repeal committee chairman Edward Jeffries.¹¹³ Dissenters could thereby articulate anti-Catholic arguments against the Test Acts without tainting themselves with the charge of intolerance.

The resonance of this insinuated anti-Catholicism to contemporaries is confirmed by the reaction of the cisalpine priests Joseph Berington and Alexander Geddes to *The Case*, which argued that the Test Acts could not guarantee the exclusion of Papists 'because many of them hold the Church of England to be no Church, her Ministers no Ministers, and her Sacraments no Sacraments'.¹¹⁴ Upon reading the pamphlet, Berington declared, 'my mind recoiled' at the 'insinuations, *false* and *malevolent*'.¹¹⁵ Both Berington and Geddes described the pamphlet as intolerant.¹¹⁶ They had perceptively identified the pamphlet's tactics: 'you wish to hold us out as the only obnoxious party; as if in the proportion we shall appear guilty, your innocence will be prominent... All this you did not say in *express* words; but you said it by *insinuations*'.¹¹⁷

The repeal committee had no choice but to back down from the damning charge of intolerance. *The Right of Protestant Dissenters*, which included many of the same passages as *The Case*, was republished in 1789, Heywood now promising that the offending passages had been removed. He told Catholics 'he heartily wishes them success' in their application for relief.¹¹⁸ Yet the offending passages had been toned down rather than omitted entirely. Heywood maintained that Dissenters 'heartily concurred in the passing an act which then affected very few of their brethren, and to which, however indefensible it may be in its principle, we are, perhaps, indebted for the portion of liberty we now enjoy'. He continued to note that

¹¹³ *Extracts from Books. Number One*, pp. 12-15; [A Dissenter], *To the Printer of the Manchester Chronicle* (Manchester?, 1790?), p. 4. For the origin of the letter, see Barlow, *Citizenship and Conscience*, p. 243.

¹¹⁴ *The Case* (1787).

¹¹⁵ Joseph Berington, *An Address to the Protestant Dissenters who have Lately Petitioned for a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (Birmingham, 1787), p. 30, 3.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3; Alexander Geddes, *Letter to a Member of Parliament, on the Case of the Protestant Dissenters; and the Expediency of a General Repeal of all Penal Statutes that regard Religious Opinions* (1787), p. 21.

¹¹⁷ Berington, *An Address*, pp. 22, 53-4.

¹¹⁸ Samuel Heywood, *The Right of Protestant Dissenters to a Compleat Toleration Asserted; Containing an Historical Account of the Test Laws, And Shewing the Injustice, Inexpediency, and Folly of the Sacramental Test* (1789), p. iv.

Papists could be excluded without the Test Acts.¹¹⁹ Much more seriously, a wholly unmodified *Case* was republished in 1789.¹²⁰ The Deputies' anti-Catholicism, then, was not expunged entirely but merely contained within the limits of political acceptability.

The resonance of Dissenters' surreptitious anti-Catholicism is further confirmed by the reactions of sympathetic Anglicans, who were able to repeat these arguments far more explicitly and unambiguously. Bristow earnestly reported that 'Dissenters of all descriptions have given the strongest proof of their attachment to the constitution, and their detestation of Popery; on the latter head, so much so, that they united with churchmen in passing the laws that abridged the privileges of those who omitted to qualify'. He thought that 'the oaths of allegiance, and renunciation of the absurdities and intolerance of the Roman Catholic religion, seem sufficient sureties for any description of Protestants'.¹²¹ It took an Anglican, secure in his membership of the Protestant nation, to articulate the insinuated subtext to the Dissenters' arguments.

Dissenters' efforts to emphasise a pan-Protestant British identity with anti-Catholic language were fully accepted by opponents of repeal, who responded by urging Dissenters to accept the Test Acts for the sake of the Protestant interest. 'A Country Freeholder' acknowledged Dissenters as 'my fellow-protestants and fellow-citizens, actuated as they are with a true zeal, becoming Britons, both for civil and religious liberty', who 'glory in the merit of having contributed considerably to the establishment of the Test-Act in its original direction against the Papists'. Nevertheless, he considered Dissenters to have unwittingly 'served [Popery], more than they have hurt it, by the excesses of their antipathies'. Dissenters, therefore, ought to unite around 'the bulwark of protestantism, the Church of England', so as to be 'united against such an invidious and powerful adversary as Rome is!'¹²² In this view, it was Dissenters' agitations against the Test Acts, not the Test Acts themselves, that disrupted Protestant unity. The rhetoric of national identity that the 'Country Freeholder' was articulating

¹¹⁹ Heywood, *Right* (1789), pp. 13, 75.

¹²⁰ *The Case of the Protestant Dissenters, with Reference to the Test and Corporation Acts* (1789).

¹²¹ Bristow, *Cursory Reflections*, pp. 8 fn., 24.

¹²² [Country Freeholder], *Danger*, pp. 9-10, 10-11, 16-17, 21, 34, 44.

emphasised the need for Protestant strength and uniformity in the face of a real and immediate Popish threat. In doing so it justified the subordination and political marginalisation of Dissent.

If Dissenters were perfectly happy to invoke the Protestantism they shared with the established Church, and even to underline this argument with passing snipes at Catholicism, then they might be expected to have actively opposed Catholic admission and used this opposition to strengthen their demands for repeal. Yet in practice this political position was wholly absent from the debates of the 1780s. Most Dissenting pamphlets deliberately avoided explaining whether or not their arguments and demands ought to be applied to the Catholics. The stance of one Worcestershire pamphleteer was typical: 'it is not our province to determine whether the reason remains for continuing this law as it stands with respect to [the Catholics], but surely it is high time that the hardships unintentionally occasioned by it to Protestant Dissenters, should cease'.¹²³ Others retained their neutrality by arguing that the exclusion of Catholics was a political, not a religious question. In a pamphlet published by the Midland District Association, Walker responded to the common argument that concessions to Dissenters would open the door to Catholics:

This is not *our* inference, though we shrink not from the inference, as it would be to renounce the only ground on which religious liberty can stand.... [But] they have forgotten to annex the very important condition of civil allegiance and fidelity, and the security to the magistrate for the performance of this engagement, which the Dissenters have subjoined... Now the Roman Catholic knows best what answer he can make to this demand, and it is his to plead his own cause.¹²⁴

By retaining the caveat of 'civil allegiance' Walker was effectively stating his neutrality, since the exclusion of Catholics was usually understood to rest on their civil disloyalty.

¹²³ *Hints Respectfully Addressed to the Members of the House of Commons, on the Subject of the Test Laws, and Recommended to the Candid Attention of Every Member of the Church of England* (London, 1790?), p. 1.

¹²⁴ Walker, *Dissenters' Plea*, p. 15.

The Dissenting organisations were even reluctant to commit themselves to the less controversial question of Catholic relief. A Catholic campaign against the remaining anti-Catholic penal laws was running alongside the repeal campaign: a new Catholic Committee was elected in May 1787, were engaged throughout 1789 in a high-profile debate over concessions, and achieved a second Relief Act in 1791.¹²⁵ In 1789, the General Body of Ministers hoped that 'all penal Laws for the Direction of Men's Consciences in the Business of Religion, shall be repealed'.¹²⁶ The next year, the Midland District Association condemned 'the iniquity and injustice of all penal statutes in matters of religion, which is a concern wherein the civil magistrate can have no right to interfere, upon any pretence whatever'.¹²⁷ Like Walker's pamphlets, these statements meant little without clarification. The repeal committee remained notably silent. Its successor passed resolutions in favour of the Catholic Committee's application for relief in February 1791, imminently before it passed and long after the repeal campaign had collapsed.¹²⁸

There were a small number of Dissenters who publically asserted that Dissenters and Catholics ought to be treated equally. A heavily disproportionate number of those who did so were Unitarians, including Priestley and Barbauld.¹²⁹ Unitarians' greater willingness to concede toleration to Catholics was often a cause of tension with a less sympathetic Trinitarian Dissent.¹³⁰ This might seem unsurprising, given the strength of Enlightenment values amongst Unitarians. However, religious liberty and freedom of conscience were often used to justify the exclusion of Catholics. Moreover, Martin Fitzpatrick has noted that, even amongst Unitarians, anti-Catholicism was widespread before the 1780s: he suggests that this was abandoned

¹²⁵ The 1661 Corporation Act and the 1673 Test Act, as well as the 1678 Test excluding Catholics from Parliament, remained in force.

¹²⁶ Doctor Williams's Library, MS.38.106: Three Denominations, Minute Books of the Body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers of the Three Denominations in and about the Cities of London and Westminster. Volume Two. 22 Dec. 1789.

¹²⁷ *At a Meeting of the Committee of the Midland District, held at the Flying Horse Inn, in Nottingham, on Thursday June 17, 1790* (Nottingham?, 1790)

¹²⁸ Barlow, *Citizenship and Conscience*, p. 282.

¹²⁹ *Public Advertiser*, 18 Feb 1790; Barbauld, *Address*, pp. 40-1.

¹³⁰ Seed, "'A Set of Men Powerful Enough in Many Things'", p. 159.

between 1787 and 1789 under Priestley's enlightening influence.¹³¹ This overlooks the element of self-interest that led Unitarians to emphasise the tolerant face of Protestant identity only when the repeal campaign was underway. Support for Catholic rights could be made to reinforce Dissenters' claims to be tolerant Protestants: one Birmingham pamphlet thought the sacramental test historically justified by 'an extreme dread of Peter', but now thought 'it is high time for both Martin and Jack to unite once more in rolling away this reproach from themselves and their country'.¹³² That so many of the Dissenters who took this line were Unitarians reflects their greater interest in a universal, inclusive toleration, given their particularly unfavoured status in Anglican eyes.

If few Dissenters spoke out for the Catholics, fewer still publically declared that the Catholics ought to be excluded from the constitution. Dissenters simply did not argue for Test Act repeal on the grounds that it would strengthen the Protestant constitution against Catholic encroachment; in fact, supporting repeal but opposing relief appeared to have been a rhetorical impossibility. One of the few Dissenters to publically oppose Catholic admission was Addington, whose letter to the Deputies opposed the campaign against the Test Acts on the grounds that it would encourage the 'Papists, and their friends'.¹³³ Likewise, Martin's 1790 speech against Test Act repeal did not mention the Catholics, but his was the single dissident vote against the Ministers' resolutions against religious penal laws.¹³⁴

Dissenters may have embellished their arguments with emotionally resonant appeals to Protestant unity, but in practice their campaign posed a substantive challenge to the exclusive, Anglican constitution. As one anti-repeal pamphlet pointed out:

Dissenters cannot mean to argue for the admission of Catholics to offices in the state; for if they do, they contradict the Principles, which they have always

¹³¹ Fitzpatrick, 'Joseph Priestley', pp. 11-19, quotation p. 18.

¹³² *An Address to the People to the People of England, Respecting the Test and Corporation Acts* (Birmingham, 1789), pp. 6-8, 9-10.

¹³³ Addington, *Letter*, pp. 25, 28, 29-30.

¹³⁴ Barlow, *Citizenship and Conscience*, pp. 253-5.

maintained; and if they do not, their favourite Argument, the Injustice of a Disqualification upon the account of Nonconformity, is instantly done away.¹³⁵

This pamphlet was one of many who turned the Dissenters' Protestant language against them: the inference was that the Dissenters should stick to their principles, not 'their favourite Argument'. Yet Dissenters seemed reluctant to follow this argument to its logical conclusion. Part of the explanation is that coupling repeal to the question of Catholic admission, or even Catholic relief, might have alienated Parliamentary supporters unnecessarily. Yet as the Unitarian minister Lindsey recognised, the Dissenting cause could potentially benefit from the passage of Catholic relief.¹³⁶ Few but Unitarians seemed willing to exploit the potential tactical advantage to be gained from Catholic admission. Most Dissenters were thinking of the identity they were projecting to the established Church: toleration of Catholicism appears to have been a necessary consequence of their arguments, yet Dissenters were reluctant to be seen to be pro-Catholic when such a large part of their case for repeal rested on the imagery and language of Protestant identity.

Dissenters' ambivalent stance on Catholic rights contrasts strongly with Catholic attitudes to repeal. The Catholic Committee made its support for repeal well known.¹³⁷ Catholics often sought to align themselves with Protestant Dissenters. Sir Harry Englefield, another Catholic Committee member, failed to find 'one single external mark to distinguish us from other Dissenters'.¹³⁸ This tendency found its strongest expression in the 'Declaration of Protesting Catholic Dissenters' adopted by the Catholic Committee, which publically disclaimed Popery.¹³⁹ Whereas it was in Dissenters feared having their campaign dragged down by the

¹³⁵ *An Essay on the Origin, Character and Views*, p. 15.

¹³⁶ Quoted in Barlow, *Citizenship and Conscience*, p. 282.

¹³⁷ *Public Advertiser*, 27 Mar 1787.

¹³⁸ Harry Englefield, *A Letter to the Author of the Review of the Case of the Protestant Dissenters; with a Short Address to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of St David's* (1790), pp. 23-4.

¹³⁹ Robert Edward Petre, *A Letter from the Right Honourable Lord Petre, to the Right Reverend Doctor Horsley, Bishop of St David's* (1790), pp. 27-33; see E. Duffy, 'Ecclesiastical Democracy Detected: I (1779-1787)', *Recusant History*, 10, 4 (1970), pp. 193-209; *Idem.*, 'Ecclesiastical Democracy Detected: II (1787-

Catholics, Catholics sought to attach themselves to Dissenters and demand a universal toleration. For Berington, 'the only question then must be, whether Peter, or John, or Paul be *men*. You and I are men; so is the Jew, so is the mahometan'.¹⁴⁰ Like Unitarians, Catholics had a stronger interest in seeking a universal toleration: it was impossible to conceive of a nation that included Catholics but excluded Dissenters.

Conclusion

Colley's emphasis on the importance of Protestantism to British national identity has frequently been criticised for its failure to consider conflict between Church and Dissent. During the Test Act debate in the late 1780s, which was a particularly important instance of this conflict, both Dissenters and their opponents sought legitimacy by invoking a set of interlocking values – nation, constitution, liberty, toleration, reason, progress – held together by the lynchpin of Protestantism. Although different emphases could be made within this, the consistency and coherence of this language is striking: polemicists did not simply select whichever national image was best suited to their purpose, as Ditchfield's analysis implies, but were forced to negotiate with a widespread sense of national identity which possessed its own internal logic and meaning.

Neither was this meaning wholly fixed and immutable. A useful model is offered by Oliver Zimmer's distinction between the 'symbolic resources' and 'boundary mechanisms' of national identity: Anglicans, Dissenters and Catholics alike struggled over - and thereby reinforced - the symbolic resources of Protestantism and liberty, but could use these values to define different boundaries that suited their political purpose.¹⁴¹ One of the reasons why the

1796)', *Recusant History*, 10, 6 (1970), pp. 309-31; *Idem.*, 'Doctor Douglas and Mister Berington – an Eighteenth-Century Retraction', *Downside Review*, 88, 292 (1970), pp. 246-69..

¹⁴⁰ Berington, *Address*, p. 24.

¹⁴¹ O. Zimmer, 'Boundary Mechanisms and Symbolic Resources: Towards a Process-Orientated Approach to National Identity', *Nations and Nationalism*, 9, 2 (2003), pp. 177-81.

role played by religion in British national identity was so complex is that religion could provide both 'symbolic resources' and 'boundary mechanisms'.

Despite the frequency with which Protestant values and a sense of Protestant commonality were invoked during the conflict over the Test Acts, this was not merely a second-order squabble between usually affable Protestants, but a serious conflict with meaningful stakes. Opposition to repeal was powerful even without the intervention of the French Revolution. Dissenters may have been fellow Protestants and may have made much rhetorical use of Protestant values, but this did them little good in the 1780s. This does not mean that the language of national identity was meaninglessly disconnected from social reality: it had a positive impact on the repeal campaign, particularly in encouraging the strategic differences between Trinitarian Dissenters, Unitarian Dissenters and Catholics. Yet Anglicans were perfectly able to defend the exclusive constitution as the bastion of true Protestantism, and Dissenters' arguments for repeal logically necessitated an inclusive, indiscriminate widening of the nation's borders, making the challenge posed by the repeal campaign more substantial than Dissenters themselves were comfortable admitting.

The ambivalence of Dissenters' attitudes towards Catholics reflected a wider contradiction in Protestant identity, uncertain over the extent of liberty to be conceded to despotic Popery: officially, there had been a gradual move towards a more inclusive and optimistic understanding of toleration since the 1770s in response to the political imperatives of empire. By the 1780s, Dissenters were seeking to take advantage of these developments. There are obvious parallels here with the abolitionist movement, which, as Christopher Brown has argued, sought to actuate passively held tenets of national identity following the crisis of the American Revolution. Abolitionists – many of whom were Dissenters – could use this moral regeneration to propel themselves towards the centre of the nation.¹⁴² In the same way, the Protestant values of British national identity were not sufficient to guarantee Dissenters political

¹⁴² C. Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, 2006).

integration, but they did offer a vision of potential Protestant unity. Yet, it would take the French Revolution and wars and the rise of the Catholic question for the Dissenters' claims – that, as loyal citizens, they ought to be rewarded with a corresponding set of rights – to be accepted.

“Peaceable and Obedient Subjects”:¹ The Toleration Debate, 1790-1815

“More Disposed to Favour the Roman Catholics?”² The Impact of the French Revolution

The decisiveness with which repeal was defeated in March 1790 made any further application virtually impossible. The widespread hostility to Dissent that the repeal campaign had ignited continued to be fuelled by the unfolding of events in France. The repeal committee disbanded in May 1790, and the standing committee that succeeded it did little but quietly wait for the political climate to improve before itself disbanding in 1796.³ Constitutional reform was a dead letter in the 1790s: in May 1791 a Bill to grant members of the established Church of Scotland exemption from the Test Act was defeated 149:62, despite its supporters’ best efforts to avoid any appearance of radicalism.⁴ Most Dissenters turned away from Test Act repeal, their confident optimism shaken by the unanticipated intensity of opposition, and towards alternative causes such as evangelism, abolitionism, and opposition to the war.

This period saw a number of important legislative developments: a second Catholic Relief Act in 1791; the failure in 1811 of Lord Sidmouth’s Bill to amend the Toleration Act and restrict the licensing of itinerant preachers; the repeal of the Five Mile and Conventicle Acts in 1812; a Unitarian Relief Act in 1813; and, following Union with Ireland, unsuccessful but closely fought Catholic Emancipation Bills in 1808 and 1813. The Test Acts themselves received relatively little public discussion in this period, in stark contrast to the abundance of publications appearing in the years 1786-90, though a number of pamphlets were published in response to

¹ Guildhall Library, MS.03083 - 4: Protestant Dissenting Deputies, Minute Books of General and Committee Meetings. Volume Four. 23 Feb 1813.

² William Parry, *Thoughts on such Penal Religious Statutes as Affect the Protestant Dissenters; Most Respectfully Submitted to the Consideration of the Honourable Promoters of the Bill in Favour of Protecting Roman Catholics* (1791), pp. 43-4.

³ *Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*, cc. 122-4.

⁴ G. Ditchfield, ‘The Scottish Campaign against the Test Act, 1790-1791’, *HJ*, 23, 1 (1980), pp. 53-61.

the persecution of Dissenters in the early 1790s, the controversy over Dissenting evangelism in the 1810s, and the question of Catholic rights. This chapter will set these texts in their changing political and social contexts, and thereby chart the ways in which the prospects for repeal had changed by the time that the Dissenters revived the issue after the end of the war.

Even if repeal itself was not seriously discussed again until after the end of the war, the events of the intervening period had a profound impact on the opportunities and obstacles that Dissenters faced. Events in France initially sharpened the established Church's traditional hostility to Dissent. Yet the Revolution did not have a single, immediate and definitive impact: as Mark Philp reminds us, it was 'not a single event, so much as a complex, evolving political and social process'.⁵ Levels of hostility to Dissenters and Catholics – which were, as ever, closely related – were continually oscillating throughout this period. In 1793, perceptions of Dissent were very different from what they had been in 1790, and they were very different again after 1800. In many ways the language of national identity – mapped out in chapter one – endured the turbulent period of the 1790s, but it also underwent some important evolutions. In particular, the longer-term impact of the Revolution was to shift the established Church's concerns towards the social disruptiveness of Dissent and the social utility of religion, altering both the tone of hostility and the conditions for admission that Dissenters were striving to meet.

From 1793, Britain's sense of itself as a Christian nation was heightened by the experience of war with an avowedly atheistic France. As Stephen Conway has argued, 'an emphasis on the unity of all Christians against the atheistic regime established in Paris was a natural consequence' of the Revolution.⁶ For example, the eleven editions of the popular pamphlet by 'Job Nott' published between 1793 and 1798 declared:

⁵ M. Philp, 'Introduction', in *ed. idem, The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 11.

⁶ S. Conway, 'Christians, Catholics, Protestants: The Religious Links of Britain and Ireland with Continental Europe, c. 1689-1800', *EHR*, 124, 509 (2009), p. 853.

Dissenter, – Churchman, – Catholic,
Whatever their persuasion,
Good subjects are to me alike,
Of all denominations.⁷

Conway has also noted the frequency with which European Christian unity was invoked against French infidelity.⁸ For many Britons, the unprecedented ideological stakes of what was a truly global conflict brought to the fore a sense of Christian identity, and this was an identity that often transcended nation.

British and Irish Catholics benefited hugely from these developments. In the first place, the demands of war and the need for military recruits added a new political urgency to Catholic relief, continuing a trend towards official toleration underway since the American Revolution.⁹ Yet Catholicism also benefitted from a growing popular sympathy. Whilst the 1778 Relief Act had sparked the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots, there was a startling absence of opposition to the 1791 Relief Act and subsequent Acts for Scottish and Irish Catholics. The damage inflicted on the Catholic Church by the Revolution made it appear far less threatening. More fundamentally, Catholicism was increasingly seen, in Conway's words, 'as a conservative buttress to the established order rather than, as hitherto, a dangerous threat to that order'.¹⁰ England and Jersey had welcomed 2,500 exiled French Catholic priests by September 1792; by December, this figure had risen to nearly 6,500.¹¹ Their generous reception by the British government, public and established Church would have been unthinkable earlier in the eighteenth century: even the Oxford University Press extended its charity by publishing a Vulgate Bible.¹²

The Revolution may have engendered an unprecedented level of sympathy with Catholicism, particularly from sections of the Right and the High Church, but this does not mean

⁷ Quoted in R. Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order in England, 1760-1832* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 107.

⁸ Conway, 'Christians, Catholics, Protestants', pp. 860-1.

⁹ Bartlett, *Fall and Rise*, pp. 82-5.

¹⁰ Conway, 'Christians, Catholics, Protestants', p. 853.

¹¹ D. Bellenger, *The French Exiled Clergy in the British Isles after 1789: An Historical Introduction and Working List* (Bath, 1986), p. 3

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 11-34.

that British Protestants were being reconciled to 'Popery' itself. This impression is sometimes given by the chronological gap in the historiography of anti-Catholicism, which tends to stop with the 1780 Gordon Riots and recommence at or after Catholic emancipation in 1829.¹³ If nineteenth century anti-Catholicism is disconnected from its eighteenth-century foundations, then it is easy to see it as an atavistic, plebeian xenophobia, principally a reaction to mass Irish immigration. For example, Colin Haydon suggests that the Revolution caused a 'drastic redirection of hatred; the Pope was displaced from the seat of commination and in his place was elevated Tom Paine'.¹⁴ He notes the endurance of popular no-Popery into the nineteenth century, but suggests that this became 'the badge not of the Protestant nation, but of *ultra Protestants*, Methodists, and Nonconformists, largely associated with particular parts of the country like Lancashire and Glasgow'.¹⁵ However, the fact that the established Church's barricades against Catholicism had become temporarily less relevant did not mean that they were abandoned altogether. Many Protestants welcomed the downfall of the Catholic Church, hailing it as the opening stages of the end days.¹⁶ As Gallicans, the émigré clergy were perceived to be half way to Anglicanism already and ripe to leave the Roman church altogether.¹⁷ The declaration against Popery required by the Relief Act, which deeply divided the Catholic community, indicates the conditionality of toleration and the importance of no-Popery to British national identity even in the 1790s.

Dissenters had been reluctant to entangle themselves with the Catholics during the repeal campaign, but by 1791 many spoke in favour of a measure that now looked much likely than Test Act repeal. The standing committee announced its support in February.¹⁸ This did not prevent Dissenters from maintaining that they stood closer to the centre of a Protestant nation

¹³ Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism*; R. Donovan, *No Popery and Radicalism: Opposition to Roman Catholic Relief in Scotland, 1778-1782* (New York, 1987), and the works cited in p. 12 fn. 43 above.

¹⁴ Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism*, p. 264. Haydon quotes E. P. Thompson's description of the impact of the Revolution on evangelical Dissent, but considers his words to have a wider applicability.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

¹⁶ Conway, 'Christians, Catholics, Protestants', p. 859.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 838-9.

¹⁸ Barlow, *Citizenship and Conscience*, p. 282.

than the Catholics did. The Unitarian and radical Whig William Belsham made it clear that the no-Popery laws were originally justifiable, but he also thought that Catholics ought to be tolerated now that the threat from Popery had receded.¹⁹ Heywood also distinguished Catholicism from Popery whilst retaining the latter as a foil for Protestant unity. He promised that Dissenters:

Teach their youth to look towards the established Church with respect, and even affection, and instead of an enemy, to treat her as a friend and ally in the common cause of protestantism, against popery. Hence strong prejudices in favour of the Church, and perhaps unjust ones against Catholics, still hang upon many of the Dissenters.²⁰

Similarly, the Essex Independent minister William Parry thought Catholics ought to be proselytised 'with reason and benevolence... But, if this method fails, why should [Protestants] persecute the Roman Catholic?'²¹ He assumed that the Church of England would agree that the imbalance left by the 1791 Act was anomalous, lest it appear 'more disposed to favour the Roman Catholics, than her fellow Protestants'.²² As these attitudes make clear, Dissenters could use support for Catholic relief to advance their own vision of a tolerating but nevertheless Protestant nation.

Unfortunately for Dissenters, this vision found little sympathy from the established Church. Sympathy for Catholicism often went hand-in-hand with political suspicion of Dissent.²³ Of course, Foxite Whigs continued to support measures of Dissenting relief, and many low churchmen were happy to cooperate with evangelical Dissenters. But amongst those hostile to

¹⁹ William Belsham, *Observations on the Test Laws, in Reply to "A Review of the Case of the Protestant Dissenters"* (1791), p. 35.

²⁰ Samuel Heywood, *High Church Politics: Being a Seasonable Appeal to the Friends of the British Constitution, Against the Practices and Principles of High Churchman, as Exemplified in the Late Opposition to the Repeal of the Test Laws, and in the Riots at Birmingham* (1792), p. 139.

²¹ Parry, *Thoughts*, pp. 13-14.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 43-4. Dissenters continued to be affected by the Five Mile Act, the Conventicle Act and various anti-Unitarian Statutes.

²³ J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, c. 1760-1832* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 201-2, 227-30.

the Revolution, Dissenters were deeply implicated by 'the common view that Catholics tended to despotism and extreme Protestants to republicanism'.²⁴ 'Church and King' mobs, though unperturbed by the second Catholic Relief Act, targeted Unitarians in Birmingham in July 1791 and Manchester in July and December 1792, and Dissenters around the country were subjected to a more continual pressure of threats, intimidation and lower-level violence.²⁵ This hostility was not confined to the lower orders: the Priestley riots continued for three days before the state intervened, and all but five of the 52 rioters brought to trial were acquitted.²⁶ The *Anti-Jacobin Review* identified Rational Dissent as the engine behind the American Revolution, the campaign against the Test Acts, and English Jacobinism.²⁷ Unitarians may have loudly disowned Paine, but Price's role in provoking Burke's *Reflections* was well known.²⁸ In particular, Dissenters suffered from the praise they had heaped on the Revolution in its early stages, which was often turned against them later.²⁹

In this context Dissenters were forced to present a public face of unambiguous loyalty. For example, in November 1792 John Reeves's Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers (APLP) printed a pamphlet accusing Dissenters of responsibility for the American War, and thus the crippling size of the national debt.³⁰ Grey unsuccessfully moved to prosecute the APLP for libel, given the role of the pamphlet in provoking the Manchester rioters.³¹ After the Deputies and the Ministers submitted declarations of loyalty to the constitution in December, Reeves wrote to Edward Jeffries, the chairman of the Deputies, apologising for the accusations and promising that the offending

²⁴ Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order*, p. 106.

²⁵ D. Wykes, "'The Spirit of Persecutors Exemplified': The Priestley Riots and the Victims of the Church and King Mobs', *TUHS*, 20, 1 (1991), pp. 18-31.

²⁶ N. Murray, 'The Influence of the French Revolution on the Church of England and its Rivals, 1789-1802' (Univ. of Oxford DPhil Thesis, 1975), p. 153.

²⁷ Mori, *William Pitt*, p. 43.

²⁸ Murray, 'Influence of the French Revolution', pp. 133-4.

²⁹ Bogue, *Reasons*, p. 21; [A Churchman], *Some Strictures on a Late Publication, Entitled "Reasons for Seeking a Repeal of the Test Acts"* (1791), p. 21.

³⁰ William Jones, *One Penny-Worth of Truth, from Thomas Bull to his Brother John* ([1st edn.], London?, 1792?).

³¹ *Parliamentary History of England, From the Earliest Period to the Year 1803* (London, 1817), vol. 20, pp. 128-37.

passages had been removed from a new edition of the pamphlet. Though the new edition did not name Dissenters specifically, the attacks on the Colonists and contemporary reformers remained, and Jeffries's reply considered 'the alterations since made, so trifling as scarcely to merit attention, - the allusion remaining the same'.³² The incident indicates the high stakes resting on Dissent's ability to adopt a loyal posture.

Any further agitations against the Test Acts would have contradicted this posture. Any application to Parliament could easily backfire: a Unitarian petition for relief had provoked the Manchester rioters in July 1792.³³ Indeed, if the Test Acts were significant as a symbol of hostility to Dissent, it would have done Dissenters little good to have achieved repeal but aggravated popular hostility. After all, the first Catholic Relief Act had provoked the Gordon Riots, and a hostile popular reaction had even succeeded in getting the 1753 'Jew Bill' repealed.³⁴ Moreover, the Deputies were preoccupied with the increasingly important business of protecting Dissenters from the practical manifestations of popular hostility, and legislative amendments were not on their list of priorities.³⁵

If the short-term impact of the Revolution was to freeze any prospect of repeal, in the longer term it served to significantly recast relations between the Church and Dissent. As Robert Hole has argued in his *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order in England*, the spectacle of social anarchy in France led all denominations towards a new concern with social stability and hierarchy. Hole describes this as a paradigm shift away from earlier defences of the *status quo*, which had emphasised the rights of political authority, and towards arguments against social disruption.³⁶ Dissenters were already beginning to exploit these changing priorities in the 1790s. Belsham stressed that Price and Priestley may have sought radical reform, but never intimated

³² Protestant Dissenting Deputies, Minute Book. Vol. 3, 12 Dec 1792; Three Denominations, Minute Books. Vol. 2, 20 Dec 1792; *Sketch of the History*, pp. 69-72; William Jones, *One Penny-Worth of Truth, from Thomas Bull to his Brother John* ([2nd end.], London?, 1792?).

³³ Ditchfield, 'Campaign in Lancashire and Cheshire', pp. 130-1.

³⁴ Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism*, pp. 235-6.

³⁵ Davis, *Dissent in Politics*, pp. 80-88.

³⁶ Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order*, pp. 248-52.

'that a reform ought to be attempted by other than legal and peaceable methods'.³⁷ The real enemies to British society were not Rational Dissenters but their demagogic opponents, whose arguments were 'admirably calculated to inflame the passions and awaken the terrors of the vulgar'.³⁸ Heywood's *High Church Politics* also made much of High Churchmen's willingness to provoke the passions of the mob, and stressed the continuity between the Sacheverell and Priestley riots.³⁹ After all, the Unitarians, traditionally the focus for the most intense Anglican hostility, were unquestionably respectable in social terms. Though the 1792 Unitarian petition was strongly defeated, it was the degree of support for what was once an unthinkable measure that was surprising.⁴⁰ The Revolution may have stifled the repeal campaign, but it potentially offered Dissenters powerful new arguments in their favour.

Of course, this new concern with social order did not necessarily entail sympathy with Dissent. In fact, sections of the established Church were becoming increasingly concerned with the socially disruptive figure of the itinerant village preacher. As Deryk Lovegrove has documented, the 1790s witnessed an explosion in the numbers and organisation of evangelical Dissent.⁴¹ Additionally, by the early 1800s Methodism was reluctantly beginning to identify with Dissent, reacting against growing hostility from the established Church.⁴² Whilst low-church Anglicans were often happy to cooperate with Dissenting evangelicals,⁴³ to much of the Church of England, and to the High Church in particular, Dissenting evangelism was a challenge not only to the Church's ministry but also to social order and hierarchy more generally.⁴⁴ A Bill to restrict the licensing of itinerant Dissenting preachers was therefore considered in 1800, and in 1811

³⁷ Belsham, *Observations*, pp. 14, 21.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 52-3.

³⁹ Samuel Heywood, *High Church Politics*, pp. 23-62.

⁴⁰ G. Ditchfield, 'Public and Parliamentary Support for the Unitarian Petition of 1792', *ED*, 12 (1993), pp. 28-31.

⁴¹ D. Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People: Itinerancy and the Transformation of English Dissent, 1780-1830* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 14-40.

⁴² D. Hempton, 'Thomas Allan and Methodist Politics, 1800-1840', *History*, 67, 219 (1982), pp. 13-18.

⁴³ R. Martin, *Evangelicals United: Ecumenical Stirrings in Pre-Victorian Britain, 1795-1830* (Metuchen, NJ, 1983), pp. 40-55, 80-95, 148-68.

⁴⁴ Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People*, pp. 121-7.

Sidmouth announced his intention to bring a similar Bill to Parliament. The opposition to Sidmouth's Bill institutionalised a split between old Dissent, represented by the Deputies, and evangelical Dissent, represented by the newly founded Protestant Society for the Protection of Religious Liberty.⁴⁵

The large-scale conflict provoked by Sidmouth's Bill indicates both the changes and the considerable extent of continuity in Anglican attitudes towards Dissent since 1790. The stakes of the controversy over evangelical itinerancy were very different to those of the Test Act debate, when Dissent's exclusion from national citizenship was under discussion. In 1811, it is true that 'the issue of toleration, and what it meant, was at the heart of the debate over the bill'.⁴⁶ The opponents of itinerancy emphasised the low social standing of village preachers, the encouragement they gave to schism, and their tendency to undermine all forms of authority. Whilst attacks on itinerancy were thus substantially different from earlier attacks on Unitarianism, polemicists rarely plucked their imagery and vocabulary out of thin air. Instead, they tended to draw upon long-established, powerful and emotionally resonant rhetorical traditions and employ them in new ways. Evangelical Dissent was attacked as proud, rebellious, conspiratorial, restless, subversive and anarchic, in the same way that Rational Dissent had been in the 1780s and 1790s, and in the same way that Puritanism had been before that.

Therefore, the rhetoric that Churchmen deployed against orthodox, evangelical Dissent in the 1800s and 1810s brought with it many of the traditional assumptions about the relationship between Dissent and the nation. In the 1780s, Dissenters had often been attacked not as serious enemies to the nation in their own right, but as conscious or unconscious assistants to the common Popish enemy. That enemy was now French atheism. In 1800 Samuel Horsley argued, in a flagship attack on Dissenting evangelism, that an international conspiracy of French atheism had unsuccessfully attempted to establish itself in Britain under the guise of Unitarianism; that 'stratagem' having failed, the conspiracy now began to exploit schismatic,

⁴⁵ M. Rutz, 'The Politicizing of Evangelical Dissent, 1811-1813', *PH*, 20, 2 (2001), pp. 189-199.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

enthusiastic, Protestant orthodoxy.⁴⁷ Horsley considered it 'a dreadful aggregation of the dangers of the present crisis in this country, that persons of real piety should, without knowing it, be lending their aid to the common enemy, and making themselves in effect accomplices in a conspiracy against the Lord and against his Christ'.⁴⁸

Just as vitriolic attacks on evangelical itinerancy tended to assume that Dissenters were badly behaved members of the nation, High Church rhetoric continued to treat Catholics as outsiders even whilst expressing sympathetic sentiments towards the Catholic faith. Horsley had little to say about Catholicism, though he defended the Gallican Church from the charge of having provoked the Revolution.⁴⁹ Another High Church author, the Westminster schoolmaster John Ripplingham, published a *Letter to the King* in 1808 that contained very similar arguments against itinerancy to those employed by Horsley. Ripplingham's advocacy of the adoption of some of the more populist features of the Catholic Church pre-figured the later Tractarian movement.⁵⁰ He distinguished between the destructive impact of Dissenters on the established Church and the inoffensive behaviour of Catholics and Jews, explaining 'I am by no means disposed towards judaism or papacy; but an allowance may be made to individuals, who profess opinions maintained by a long chain of ancestry, to which these modern traders in religion can have no just claim'.⁵¹ In other words, Catholics – like Jews – were necessarily separate from the Church, whereas Dissenters were undermining Protestantism from within; one could not choose whether to be a Protestant or a Catholic, but one could choose whether to be a Churchman or a Dissenter.

These assumptions were an important reason for the failure of Sidmouth's Bill and the enlargement of the Dissenters' religious liberty that quickly followed. A crucial factor in dissuading the government from antagonising Dissent was a reluctance to divide the Protestant

⁴⁷ Samuel Horsley, *The Charges of Samuel Horsley* (1830), pp. 101-3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁵⁰ John Ripplingham, *A Letter to the King, on the State of the Established Church of England* (1808), p. 37.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

interest at a time of heavy pressure for Catholic emancipation.⁵² In the debate on Sidmouth's Bill, Lord Liverpool, the government leader in the Lords, declared, 'I am apprehensive that if the measure in question is to be persevered in, we may unite the Catholics and all other Dissenters in the same cause'.⁵³ Thus, in spite of the intense hostility that Dissenting evangelism had provoked, the government's impulse was to unite with the Dissenting insider against the Catholic outsider when Catholic emancipation became a real threat. This does not mean that Dissenters were conceded the citizenship that they had been denied in 1790. They benefited from the fact that they were perceived to be seeking religious liberty rather than the political rights sought by the Catholic campaign.⁵⁴ The main development was a new willingness to tolerate Unitarians: a similar Unitarian Relief Act had been strongly defeated in 1792. But it is this continuity – in spite of the disruptions of the 1790s and the novel nature of the conflict over Dissenting evangelism – that makes the failure of Sidmouth's Bill significant.

"The Principles of our Venerable Forefathers".⁵⁵ Dissenters and the Catholic Question, 1800-1815

The government's willingness to drop its attack on Dissenting evangelism for the sake of Protestant unity seems surprising given the extent to which the Church's sympathies had swung away from Dissent and towards Catholicism during the 1790s. Yet in many ways the 1790s were a distinct moment. The French Revolution had been avowedly irreligious and aggressively ideological, but following Napoleon's coup d'état in 1799, his negotiation of the Concordat of 1801, and his coronation as emperor by Pope Pius VII in 1804, Britain was once again fighting an absolutist regime supported by the Catholic Church, and Popery appeared to be recovering

⁵² Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People*, p. 137.

⁵³ Davis, *Dissent in Politics*, p. 171.

⁵⁴ [Socia], *A Letter to a Protestant Dissent, in Answer to the Question, "Shall the Dissenters Join with the Roman Catholics in their Petitions to Parliament?"* (4th edn., 1812), pp. 14-15.

⁵⁵ Joseph Ivimey, *Neutrality the Proper Ground for Protestant Dissenters Respecting the Roman Catholic Claims* (1813), p. 23.

much of its lost influence. The majority of émigré priests returned home after 1801.⁵⁶ The war with Napoleonic France still had an ideological aspect, but the sense of an international struggle between religion and atheism that had marked the 1790s was starting to recede.

On top of this, the Union with Ireland and the emergence of an Irish Catholic campaign for political emancipation meant that the 'Catholic question' no longer concerned the toleration of English Catholics but the full admission of Irish Catholics. Additionally, rebellions in Ireland in 1798 and 1803 and the publication of Richard Musgrove's *Memoirs of the Different Rebellions in Ireland* in 1801 had awoken old fears of Catholic uprisings and massacres, particularly amongst Irish Protestants.⁵⁷ The sympathy for Catholicism from the political right that had been forthcoming in the 1790s therefore began to give way to an intense no-Popery that would become one of its defining features.⁵⁸ Of course, large sections of the Church of England and the British political elite did support emancipation: in 1813 the Commons rejected an emancipation Bill by just 251 votes to 247. Yet the strength of support for Catholic emancipation reflected a resignation to the inevitable and not any waning of hostility towards Catholicism itself: it was this combination of political necessity and cultural unacceptability that made emancipation such a divisive and intractable problem. For example, Fox told Grenville that he thought Catholic emancipation 'absolutely necessary', though ideally he would prefer a compromise that might 'operate as a substitute for emancipation'.⁵⁹

Anglican rhetoric was once more made to defend the exclusive constitution against both Catholics and Dissenters, by urging Dissent to accept political subordination for the sake of Protestant unity. The Norwich barrister William Firth published a *Letter to the Right Rev. Henry Bathurst* in 1813 aimed equally against Catholic emancipation and state funding of Dissenting

⁵⁶ Bellenger, *French Exiled Clergy*, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Bartlett, *Fall and Rise*, pp. 274-6.

⁵⁸ Sack, *Jacobite to Conservative*, pp. 238-51.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Bartlett, *Fall and Rise*, pp. 279-80.

education.⁶⁰ Like Ripplingham had done in 1808, Firth attacked Dissenters' unruly, disobedient behaviour by contrasting them with the Catholics, who were at least 'attached to Uniformity and Establishment rather than given to self-appointed, private interpretation of the Scriptures, democracy, and tumultuous change'. Firth nevertheless emphasised that Catholics, unlike Dissenters, 'have a Superior in a foreign land... Such an immense engine of Foreign Power over the Parent State is incompatible with its safety and welfare, nay, its very existence'.⁶¹ Firth therefore warned Dissenters:

Should the Roman Catholics obtain the removal of all restrictions and obstructions... the major part of Protestant Dissenters, so far from being tolerated at all, would be extirpated with fire and sword... Did the simple Socinians but consider this, they would at least pause before they became the clamorous advocates for the Catholic Claims.⁶²

Firth inherited the distinction between Dissenting insider and Catholic outsider that had been made by Ripplingham in 1808 and by the opponents of repeal in 1790; like them, he saw this as no reason to admit Dissenters to the state.

As Catholic emancipation became a political possibility, the Dissenting elite, particularly Unitarians, moved towards a cautious if ambiguous support. The Deputies delivered a parliamentary petition in favour of the removal of all penal laws in religion in 1813.⁶³ The Ministers delivered a similar petition in April 1812 and resubmitted it in February 1813.⁶⁴ Though retaining some ambiguity, these petitions gave the impression of supporting the emancipation Bill that was then being discussed. These petitions therefore encountered some resistance: the Deputies' petition was opposed by twenty-five deputies of a total of over ninety,

⁶⁰ William Firth, *A Letter to the Right Rev. Henry Bathurst, D. D. Lord Bishop of Norwich: On the Tendency of Some of his Public Opinions, and the Benefits Likely to Accrue to the Establishment in Church and State, by the Repeal of all the Disabling Statutes Against Roman Catholics and Protestant Dissenters, and the Lancastrian System of Education* (1813).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁶³ Protestant Dissenting Deputies, Minute Book. Vol. 4, 23 Feb 1813.

⁶⁴ Three Denominations, Minute Books. Vol. 3, 21 Apr 1812, 2 Feb 1813.

whilst in 1812 the Ministers' petition passed by only thirty-one votes to twenty-five, with twelve ministers remaining neutral.⁶⁵ The Ministers' minutes reported that 'different Speakers avowed their Concurrence in the principles maintained in the Resolutions; but several were of Opinion that the present was not a proper Time for addressing Petitions to the Legislature for the Repeal of all penal Laws'.⁶⁶ Thus the impression that the Dissenting leadership succeeded in presenting was that Dissent was uniformly supportive of a broad religious toleration, though a few dissident voices worried that appearing to take a public stance on the Catholic question was inappropriate.

The Ministers' 1813 petition generated a small-scale public controversy which hints at the extent and meaning of the conflict disguised by the minutes. Specifically, it reveals the extent to which the Ministers were divided by the question of Catholic emancipation, but were led into an ambivalent support by the logic of their arguments for repeal. After the 1813 petition was resubmitted, Joseph Ivimey, a Particular Baptist minister, wrote to the Wesleyan Methodist MP and member of the anti-emancipation Protestant Union, Joseph Butterworth, explaining that the superficially unanimous petition had encountered significant opposition:

We did not object to the Petition itself, but to any Petition being presented at this time, lest it should be considered *as being in favour of the claims of the Roman Catholics*. This was, however, expressly disavowed by the movers of the Petition; which, in my opinion, was the cause the motion for presenting the Petition was carried.⁶⁷

Objecting to the accusation, John Evans, the chairman of the Ministers, agreed that 'the Petition made no mention of the Catholics. We merely state our case on the broad basis of Protestant Dissenters. We meet as such – and petition of such – of course we must appear to aid all who

⁶⁵ Ivimey, *Neutrality*, p. 16.

⁶⁶ Three Denominations, Minute Books. Vol. 3, 21 Apr 1812.

⁶⁷ John Evans, *Complete Religious Liberty Vindicated. A Letter to a Friend in the Country, Respecting the Petition for Abolition of all Penal Statutes in Matters of Religion, Unanimously Voted by the Dissenting Ministers of London and Westminster* (2nd edn., 1813), pp. 16-17.

are similarly oppressed'.⁶⁸ Ivimey therefore objected that the supporters of the petition had misleadingly manipulated the Ministers into appearing to support emancipation: 'it was strongly suspected, by many of the Ministers, that this measure was *intended* to promote the cause of the Catholics, and subsequent events have strengthened, if not fully confirmed that opinion'.⁶⁹

Just as the supporters of the petition could not explicitly support Catholic emancipation for fear of appearing to sympathise with Popery, so Ivimey, though he believed that Catholics 'have no claim to such an equality in a Protestant country' until they renounce their Popish intolerance, told the Ministers:

I have not opposed the Roman Catholics, sir, by signing any petition against them, lest I should recognize a principle which I do not believe, namely, that civil governments have a right to legislate on the subject of religion! But while I have done nothing to oppose the Catholics, I most certainly will do nothing to promote their wishes.⁷⁰

Ivimey's virulent anti-Catholicism may have placed him at the lunatic fringe: he angrily recounted how his denunciations of Popery were interrupted by a quip from the Theophilus Lindsey, which he was unable to answer because the ministers had erupted into laughter.⁷¹ What is nevertheless significant is the way that the Ministers' actions were constrained by the public identity they sought to present. They were pulled in two directions by the contradiction at the heart of a Protestant identity that defined itself against intolerant anti-Catholicism, making both outright support for and outright opposition to emancipation impossible. Given the growing likelihood that Parliament would publically define the exclusion of Catholics as an act of intolerance, rather than a barrier against intolerance, the Ministers cautiously began to emphasise the tolerant aspect of this identity.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶⁹ Ivimey, *Neutrality*, p. 15.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 14.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Unitarian ministers were most concerned to stress the tolerant aspects of this identity whereas Trinitarian and especially Baptist ministers were more likely to wish to avoid associating Dissent with Catholicism. Ivimey depicted the petition as the work of a clique of Unitarians – ‘the Soul that animates that Body’ – under the leadership of Lindsey.⁷² Indeed, of the nine active sponsors of the petition named by Evans, six were Presbyterians.⁷³ Unitarians were numerically weak and could not carry the petition alone, but they were overrepresented amongst the petition’s signatories: the forty-eight ministers who signed included twenty Presbyterians, nineteen Independents and nine Baptists.⁷⁴ In this sense, Ivimey’s belief that Dissenting support for emancipation came wholly from Unitarians is more of a reflection of his fear of Anglican perceptions: unlike the Unitarians, Trinitarians did not need to be dragged down by taking on the Catholic cause, since a nation that included them but excluded Catholics was perfectly feasible.

Dissenters who supported emancipation retained a strong streak of anti-Catholicism even as they advocated toleration. One of the more pro-Catholic Dissenters was the Unitarian minister Thomas Belsham – the brother of William – who thought that emancipation would ‘tend, most directly and powerfully, to improve the national character, and to establish and enlarge the national resources... by promoting a spirit of loyalty, of liberty, and of fraternal concord and union’.⁷⁵ He asked:

What is the crime which the catholic has committed, to be thus treated as an outcast in his native land? to be denied the rights and privileges of a free-born citizen? ... [That] he professes the religion of his forefathers: of those brave Englishmen, who, while they acknowledged a spiritual subjection to the see of Rome, at the same time, firmly and successfully resisted the arrogant encroachments of the papal power; and who wrested, from a capricious and

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁷³ Evans, *Complete Religious Liberty*, p. 10. Unitarians were not yet identified as a distinct denomination. The Presbyterians, by far the smallest of the three denominations, were heavily Unitarian.

⁷⁴ Ivimey, *Neutrality*, p. 35.

⁷⁵ Thomas Belsham, *A Plea for the Catholic Claims* (1813), pp 10-11.

insolent tyrant, on the plains of Runnymede, the Magna Charta of British liberty.⁷⁶

Belsham may have supported the integration of patriotic Catholics into the nation and conceded the legitimacy of the Pope's spiritual authority, but he still defined the nation by Protestant liberty and opposition to papal power. Other Dissenters considered reason and toleration - rather than persecution - to be the only legitimate and effective weapons against Popery. Evans approvingly cited George Campbell's warning: 'we exclaim against Popery; and in exclaiming against it, we betray but too manifestly that we have imbibed the character for which we detest it. In the most unlovely spirit of Popery, and with the unhallowed arms of Popery, we would fight against Popery!'⁷⁷ Similarly, Dr Pye Smith told the Ministers that 'if he saw his enemy hunger, he should feed him; and if he heard even his enemy calumniated, he ought upon the same principle to defend him'.⁷⁸ Though Pye Smith supported the petition, his words echoed those of Thomas Allan, the Methodist lawyer, who began an anti-emancipation pamphlet by proudly recalling how 'multitudes of the Romish church... were received into the bosom of this Protestant country, and their wants supplied by the benevolence, and out of the funds, of a Protestant people'.⁷⁹ Belsham, Evans and Pye Smith were not abandoning the Protestant character of the nation: they were confident in the power of toleration to assimilate the Protestant nation's Catholic minority.

In contrast to this optimism, the small number of Dissenters who published against the 1813 emancipation Bill feared the danger that Popery posed to the Protestant nation. Ivimey feared that 'to plead for intolerant men being in power is to plead for intolerance'.⁸⁰ Allan warned Dissenters that emancipation 'will place the *Roman Catholics* on an equal footing with *Protestants*, and the former will be as eligible to possess POLITICAL POWER as the latter; which may

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

⁷⁷ Evans, *Complete Religious Liberty*, pp. 25-6.

⁷⁸ Ivimey, *Neutrality*, p. 21.

⁷⁹ Thomas Allan, *An Appeal to the Protestants of Great Britain and Ireland, on the Subject of the Roman Catholic Question* (1813), p. 7.

⁸⁰ Ivimey, *Neutrality*, p. 12.

ultimately lead to the *ascendancy of the Romish Church*'.⁸¹ The Bristol Independent minister William Thorp published a speech against emancipation that began by praising Catholics' qualities as good citizens, but, after considering their religious doctrines, rose to a violent and alarming crescendo. He compared Catholicism to:

A serpent, whose poison is instant death, lurking undiscovered until he has inflicted the fatal wound – a hungry lion, sharp set, and ready to seize his prey – the vapour of pestilence, which depopulates an empire – a fury entwined with scorpions – an ideal monster, that is sour, livid, full of scars, wallowing in gore, disgusted with every object around, and most of all disgusted with itself.⁸²

Evidently the prospect of Catholic emancipation could still invoke powerful emotions from particular sections of Dissent. The fact that Pope Pius VII had been imprisoned by Napoleon in 1809 made little difference: Ivimey warned that the Pope was now 'subject to the most powerful enemy of England', whereas Allan thought that this made Napoleon the 'instrument' of the Pope.⁸³

These Dissenters who publically opposed emancipation were invariably happy to see the Test Acts unrepealed. The argument that Test Act repeal would strengthen the Protestant constitution against the threat of emancipation was, once again, wholly absent, even though this plausible argument might be expected to follow from the pan-Protestant anti-Catholicism which Colley emphasises. Ivimey thought the Test Acts 'a foul blot in our fair and excellent constitution', but acknowledged their spiritual value as 'a powerful *test* by which to try the strength of attachment to the principles of Dissent'. He warned Dissenters that they already enjoyed religious liberty and would risk granting Catholic political power if they sought to have the Test Acts repealed.⁸⁴ Similarly, Allan warned Dissenters against seeking the 'abolition of

⁸¹ Thomas Allan, *Letters to a Protestant Dissenter, Relative to the Claims of the Roman Catholics: Both as they Affect a Protestant Government, its Established Church, and Protestant Dissenters* (1813), pp. 9-10.

⁸² William Thorp, *Catholic Emancipation: the Substance of a Speech, Intended to have been Delivered at a Meeting Convened at the Guildhall, in the City of Bristol* (1813), p. 7.

⁸³ Ivimey, *Neutrality*, p. 14; Allan, *Appeal to the Protestants*, p. 43.

⁸⁴ Ivimey, *Neutrality*, pp. 8, 12-13.

those laws protect their own liberties... it may be doubted whether they can possibly be worth such a sacrifice'.⁸⁵ Allan used Dissenters' opposition to emancipation to champion their claim to be good Protestant citizens but left the question of repeal in the hands of the legislature, hoping that Parliament would repeal the Test Acts on its own initiative:

As to what degree of political power other nonconformists should have I shall not now inquire; this is not the matter in discussion; but I will venture to say, in justice to them, that all our nonconformists are thoroughly British, and have no foreign connexions, to govern them spiritually or politically; admitting no foreign influence in the appointment of their ministers, or the officers of their Church, they cannot have any interest, or ambition, or vanity, which can be gratified by the prevalence of an power or hierarchy, foreign or adverse, to the Protestant succession to the throne, or to the Protestant ascendancy, which is necessary for the maintenance of civil and religious liberty.⁸⁶

In exactly the same way, Thorp proudly described himself as:

A consistent Protestant Dissenter. An enemy to intolerance, and therefore to Popish Government. A friend to liberty, established as it is by a constitution, and guaranteed by a law, which exclude [*sic*] Roman Catholics from the legislative and executive branches of the administration; and therefore tremblingly apprehensive of every movement in the empire that menaces the destruction of this noble monument of British patriotism, cemented by the blood of Dissenters, Heroes and Patriots.⁸⁷

Opposition to emancipation could be used to demonstrate Dissenters' patriotism, but it sat uneasily alongside demands for repeal.

Conclusion

In July 1791, Joseph Berington wisely refused to attend Priestley's 'Revolution Dinner', thereby escaping the Priestley Riots that the Dinner occasioned. Berington supposedly replied to

⁸⁵ Allan, *Appeal to the Protestants*, p. 33.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

⁸⁷ Thorp, *Catholic Emancipation*, p. 14.

Priestley's invitation: 'No Sir; we Catholics stand better with Government than you Dissenters, and we will not make common cause with you'.⁸⁸ Whether or not these were Berington's exact words, the story indicates the unprecedented extent of hostility towards Dissent and sympathy towards Catholicism that marked the 1790s. Yet this was a short-lived phenomenon, and the established Church was once more willing to unite with Dissenters once Catholic emancipation threatened the Protestant constitution in 1813. There were clear limits to the extent of Protestant unity that the Church of England found palatable. It may have grudgingly put aside its very real fears of evangelical Dissent in 1813, but it was certainly not willing to repeal the Test Acts on the sole grounds that Dissenters were not Catholics.

It was this ambiguity in the Dissenters' status that accounts for their uncertainty as to how to proceed over the Catholic question. If Dissenters had belonged unambiguously within the Protestant nation, then they might have come out in force against the 1813 Catholic emancipation Bill, taking the opportunity to deplore the division between Protestants created by the Test Acts. Yet they did no such thing: few Dissenters opposed the Bill, and those who did were decidedly lukewarm about Test Act repeal. Allan, Ivimey and Thorp – a Methodist, a Particular Baptist and an Independent respectively – were all evangelicals and therefore found it easier to believe in the need for Protestant unity against the Popish threat than the more overtly persecuted Unitarians did. If Dissenters such as these were happy to overlook the disruption to Protestant unity created by the Test Acts, most Dissenters were reluctantly led into ambiguous and qualified declarations in favour of religious liberty that stopped short of active support, grudgingly recognising that the case for their own admission rested more on the Protestant principle of religious liberty than on the pan-Protestant language of Anglican rhetoricians.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order*, p. 106.

“Their Right in Common With All Their Fellow Men”:¹ The Toleration Debate, 1815-1828

The Revival of the Dissenting Campaign

The post-war campaign has had less historiographical attention devoted to it than the campaign of the 1780s, largely due to the degree to which it was overshadowed the question of Catholic emancipation. The primary account of the post-war campaign remains Davis’s biography of William Smith which provides a comprehensive political narrative. During the war with France any agitation for constitutional reform would have risked bringing the charge of disloyalty upon Dissent, yet even after 1815 the Dissenters continued to shy away from actively campaigning against the Test Acts. The deputies announced that they were going to campaign for repeal in 1824 but did virtually nothing until 1827: the older and more cautious tradition exemplified by Smith repeatedly vetoed the radical tendencies of the younger generation. A more significant obstacle was the extent to which Parliamentary opinion was fractured over the Catholic question, blocking any political commitment to Test Act repeal: anti-emancipation Tories feared that repeal would open the door to the Catholics; conversely, pro-emancipation Tories and Whigs feared that, once repeal had been conceded, Dissenting anti-Catholicism would damage the prospects of emancipation. Moreover a united front was made impossible by the divisions within Dissent. In particular, the Protestant Society was reluctant to support repeal for fear of inadvertently assisting the Catholic campaign. Once convinced that repeal would be kept distinct from the Catholic question they eventually joined the Deputies, Ministers and recently-formed Unitarian Association in a ‘United Committee’ in April 1827. The unity and moderation

¹ Taylor, *United Committee’s Statement*, p. 12.

of the United Committee's strategy eased the passage of repeal once Parliamentary circumstances became favourable.²

Whilst Davis's narrative is hard to fault, the limited analysis he offers is often problematic, especially when seen in the light of newer scholarly perspectives on religion and political culture. Davis concludes that 'it was a shift in the Parliamentary situation rather than a forceful display of an organized public opinion that carried repeal'.³ Machin agrees that 'the sudden emergence and passage of a repeal bill in 1828 is explained more convincingly by political circumstances than by long-term social trends or the rapid growth of dissent', particularly 'the view of the whigs, the traditional champions of repeal, that the time had come in 1828 to revive Fox's effort of 1790 and take up repeal as a parliamentary question'.⁴ Though this is undoubtedly true as a short-term explanation, this does not explain why opposition within and without Parliament had become so muted when compared to established Church's hostility in 1790: only twenty-eight petitions were submitted against repeal in 1828.⁵ For Davis, the primary challenge facing the Dissenting leadership was 'to suppress the religious bigotry which might have fatally marred their demands for religious liberty'.⁶ Yet Davis's teleological perspective fails to explain why the repeal campaign should have been jeopardised by Dissenting anti-Catholicism, when this 'religious bigotry' was shared by most of the country and a significant proportion of Parliament: only with hindsight does repeal without emancipation seem impossible. Most seriously, Davis assumes the tolerance of middle-class Dissenters, and sees Dissenting anti-Catholicism solely as an atavistic, plebeian phenomenon: 'Only in the sense that the evangelical revival had a special appeal for those classes which were already violently anti-catholic did it have any connection with the question. The English lower classes had been strongly anti-catholic for centuries: they simply brought their bigotry with them into the

² Davis, *Dissent in Politics*, pp. 212-48.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁴ Machin, 'Resistance to Repeal', p. 117.

⁵ *Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*, pp. xx-xxi.

⁶ Davis, *Dissent in Politics*, p. xv.

revival.⁷ Other historians have seen Dissenting anti-Catholicism as the product of evangelical enthusiasm, contrasting with the liberality and sobriety of Rational Dissent.⁸ However, given the importance of anti-Catholicism to British political culture and national identity, Dissenting anti-Catholicism cannot be dismissed as either religious fanaticism or primordial xenophobia.

This chapter, then, will begin by examining the arguments used by Dissenters and their opponents, comparing them to the pre-war debate in order to suggest ways in which attitudes to Dissent had changed during the intervening period. It will then reassess the interaction between the Dissenters' campaign and the Catholic question, emphasising the extent of anti-Catholicism amongst both pro- and anti-emancipation Dissenters, therefore treating Dissenting opposition to emancipation as a coherent political strategy rather than as irrational spasms of uncontrollable prejudice. As it became increasingly clear that the continued exclusion of Irish Catholics simply was not viable, Dissenters finally were able to rally around the tolerant, Protestant nationalism that now represented the only plausible solution to the intractable political problem created by Union with Ireland.

"Enlightening and Directing the Public Mind":⁹ Continuity and Change in the Language of the Debate

Neither the Dissenters' arguments nor their opponents' had undergone any radical transformation since 1790. Indeed, several pamphlets from both sides of the 1786-90 debate were reissued.¹⁰ A number of new pamphlets appeared, but the question of repeal did not receive anything like the degree of public discussion it had received in 1790, largely because the

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

⁸ Machin, *Catholic Question*, p. 7; Henriques, *Religious Toleration*, p. 147.

⁹ Protestant Dissenting Deputies, *Minute Book*. Vol. 6, 19 Mar 1824.

¹⁰ *Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*, c. 161; Protestant Dissenting Deputies, *Minute Book*. Vol. 6, 27 Nov 1824, 3 Dec 1824. *Bishop Sherlock's Arguments Against a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts (1827)*, FAVELL, SAMUEL, *A Speech upon the Corporation and Test Acts, Delivered in the Court of Common Council, on Wednesday, the 9th of May, by Mr. Favell: with an Appendix, Containing Extracts from Mr. Serjeant Heywood's Pamphlet (1827)*.

Deputies and the United Committee succeeded in containing the voices of Dissent within their own official pronouncements. Dissenters continued to make it clear that they sought not only religious liberty, but also a deeper integration into the national community. One Unitarian petition argued that the Test Acts:

Deprive England of the benefit of the talents and energies of a multitude of her sons... equally able and ready, as any class of Englishmen whatever, to promote the wealth, the freedom, the moral and intellectual character and the honourable repute of their mother-country... splitting this great nation, the union of whose inhabitants is her strength and security, into angry parties.¹¹

Despite this considerable degree of continuity, there were also significant but subtle shifts in emphasis as particular points of conflict became more or less important. This is often obscured by the historiography's tendency to quickly pass over the post-war campaign's arguments for repeal and instead emphasise the political narrative, assuming that the intellectual case had already been articulated in the 1780s, if not before.¹²

Above all, the established Church's arguments against repeal were greatly affected by the extent of preoccupation with the far more serious Catholic question. Defences against the Test Acts were concerned overwhelmingly with the threat of Catholic emancipation and the fear that repeal would be the thin end of a wedge, rather than with any danger from the Dissenters in their own right.¹³ This may have been politically frustrating for Dissenters, but it did make their cause appear far more favourable since the arguments against Catholic emancipation were wholly inapplicable to Test Act repeal. Anti-emancipation arguments relentlessly invoked Catholics' otherness and allegiance to a foreign power and presented the admission of Catholics as fundamentally antithetical to the principles of the British Constitution. John Bowring, a Unitarian Association delegate to the United Committee, pointed out 'our case is even

¹¹ *Christian Reformer*, 14, 158 (1828), pp. 52-7.

¹² Henriques, *Religious Toleration*, pp. 18-98; Barlow, *Citizenship and Conscience*, pp. 221-71; Davis, *Dissent in Politics*, pp. 212-48.

¹³ Machin, 'Resistance to Repeal', pp. 120-6.

unembarrassed by the difficulties which in the opinion of some attach to that of the Catholics: we own no papal authority; we cannot be accused of offering allegiance, either civil or religious, to any foreign church or potentate'.¹⁴ The Church encountered no comparable difficulties in the 1780s, when the question of Catholic relief – as opposed to emancipation – had been relatively muted and uncontroversial.

The shadow that the Catholic campaign cast over repeal therefore tended to bring to the surface the distinction between Dissenting insider and Catholic outsider that had been consistently assumed since the 1780s. Of course, this distinction did not necessarily entail support for repeal. Robert Morres, the Prebendary of Salisbury, spent the first half of a sixty-page pamphlet explaining why any dissenter from the established Church was necessarily hostile to the constitution before devoting the second half to arguments specifically applicable to Catholics. He argued that 'the Constitution of this country is, in its very name and character, protestant; opposed expressly, and as it were, solely, to Popery... Protestant Dissenters are rather like fellow-subjects who are of a different party; but Papists are nothing less than avowed enemies'.¹⁵ Similarly, the *British Critic* situated Dissent halfway between the entire allegiance of the Churchman and the divided allegiance of the Catholic, urging Dissenters to accept their own exclusion on the grounds of their 'restricted allegiance'.¹⁶ An anti-emancipation pamphlet published in 1827 made the same assumption: neither Catholic nor Dissenter could offer the entire allegiance of the Churchman but, unlike a Catholic, 'if a Protestant Dissenter acknowledges, either an individual, or any body of men, as forming the spiritual head of his own party, such person or persons are still the subjects of his sovereign'.¹⁷ It was not rhetorically impossible for Churchmen to argue against Dissenters and Catholics in the same breath, but

¹⁴ John Bowring, *A Letter to the Right Hon. George Canning, on the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1827), p. 6.

¹⁵ Robert Morres, *Reflections on the Claims of Protestant and Popish Dissenters, Especially of the Latter, to an Equality in Civil Privileges with the Members of the Established Church* (Salisbury, 1824), pp. 31-3.

¹⁶ *British Critic*, 3, 4, (1828), pp. 441-52.

¹⁷ *Protestant Principles: Exemplified in the Parliamentary Orations of Royal Dukes, Right Rev. Prelates, Noble Peers, and Illustrious Commoners* (1827), pp. 231-2.

doing so tended to sharpen into greater clarity the relatively sympathetic assumptions that were usually made about Dissenters' relationship to the nation.

For this reason, the Dissenters' opponents gave far more attention to belittling the practical impact of the Test Acts and emphasising the effective immunity granted by the Indemnity Acts. This was Peel's main line of argument against repeal.¹⁸ In a Commons debate on a Catholic petition of 1819, William Smith had to correct the lawyer and MP Joseph Phillimore, who had assumed that the full emancipation of Catholics would have meant equivalency with Protestant Dissent, by reminding him of the existence of the Test Acts.¹⁹ Dissenting rhetoric therefore devoted far more energy to addressing the Indemnity Acts: three pages of the United Committee's sixteen-page *Statement*, and four pages of the sixteen-page petition adopted by the Deputies in 1827.²⁰ By contrast, in 1787 Heywood's 228-page *Right of Protestant Dissenters* devoted just three pages to the Indemnity Acts, and the eleven-page *Case* did not mention them at all.²¹ Though the established Church's tendency to play down the severity of the Dissenters' exclusion was a serious political obstacle to repeal, and was certainly frustrating for Dissenters, this change of emphasis was a crucial reason for the limited intensity of opposition. In the 1780s many Churchmen had insisted that the Dissenters' admission would entail the collapse of Church and State: no comparably emotive sentiments were expressed in the 1820s.

Dissenters continued to present themselves as loyal, obedient subjects and offered examples of their historic loyalty. The Deputies announced that they 'fearlessly challenge a comparison as to allegiance and attachment to the Sovereign and obedience to the Law, with any men or class of subjects which the Kingdom can produce', citing Dissenters' loyalty since

¹⁸ Machin, 'Resistance to Repeal', p. 123.

¹⁹ *Morning Chronicle*, 5 Mar 1819.

²⁰ *Statement of the Case of the Protestant Dissenters under the Corporation and Test Acts* (3rd edn., London, 1827), pp. 8-11; Protestant Dissenting Deputies, Minute Book. Vol. 6, 25 May 1827.

²¹ Heywood, *Right* (1787), pp. 47-8, 55-6, 85-6; *Case* (1787).

1688.²² When their opponents associated them with the ongoing threat of Jacobitism, as the Andover clergyman William Stanley Goddard did in 1819, Dissenters could respond by invoking their loyalty during the French Wars, noting the King's 'firm reliance on the loyalty of his Protestant dissenting subjects' who formed 'a considerable part of the volunteer corps' in spite of the risks of prosecution under the Test Acts.²³ However, these arguments had become palpably less important to the Dissenters' case. In the 1780s, the Dissenters' descent from regicidal Puritans was invoked again and again to emphasise the continuing threat they posed to the nation. This argument was almost wholly absent from the later debates, as Lord John Russell noted approvingly.²⁴ The Dissenters' historic record of loyalty continued to function as one arena of the repeal debate, but a much less important one than it had been in the 1780s.

Dissenters were more likely to be attacked on the grounds of their disruptive impact on the social order and their irresponsible appeal to the disreputable masses. This reflected the broader paradigm shift in the arguments used in defence of Church and State that has been identified by Robert Hole.²⁵ Goddard denounced Dissenting proselytism as 'an abuse of the true spirit of religious liberty', arguing that 'it cannot be supposed, that by Liberty we are to understand absolute independence of all control; no private family could be so conducted', whilst Bishop Bloomfield noted the similarities between the seventeenth-century regicides and contemporary 'enthusiasts' and '*Methodists*'.²⁶ Meanwhile Bishop Howley thought that the Dissenting leadership was 'respectable' but 'unintentionally seconded' the 'promiscuous multitude of confederate sectaries'.²⁷ After the French Revolution the established Church's arguments against Dissenters were far more likely to emphasise their immorality or the

²² Protestant Dissenting Deputies, Minute Book. Vol. 6, 25 May 1827.

²³ William Stanley Goddard, *On the Use and Abuse of Religious and Civil Liberty* (Andover, 1819), p. 16; Thomas Bingham, *An Appeal to Scripture, Justice & Reason, in Reply to the Unfounded Charges Brought against Protestant Dissenters, in a Sermon Preached by Dr. Goddard* (Southampton, 1819), p. 20.

²⁴ *Report of the Speeches*, p. 17.

²⁵ Hole, *Pulpits, Politics and Public Order*.

²⁶ *The Black Coats; or, Priestcraft Detected. Being Remarks on Mr. Thorp's Assize Sermon* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1818), p. 16; Goddard, *Use and Abuse*, pp. 7-8, 12.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

encouragement they gave to social disruption than they were to discuss Dissenting theology, Christology and ecclesiology.

Dissenters greatly benefitted from this change of emphasis. Popular, enthusiastic evangelical Dissent may have been disreputable, but the Dissenting leadership were eminently respectable. Dissenting organisations presented Dissenters as affluent and middle class, and stressed the disruptive tendencies of the Test Acts: they were ‘too destructive of the whole frame of society to be enforced, for they would shake its very foundations. Corporate institutions, companies, hospitals, charitable foundations, and private property, might be disturbed’.²⁸ Dissenters emphasised that, since they shared the Christian morality of the established Church, they posed no threat to the social order. Their very refusal to take the sacramental test was proof of their morality: thus, perversely, the sacramental test ‘can only deter the conscientious while it is no Bar to the unprincipled and ambitious’.²⁹ Another striking departure from the arguments of the 1780s was Dissenters’ tendency in the 1820s to emphasise rather than play down their numerical strength. The Deputies stressed that the Acts created ‘a Division whose numbers are to be reckoned by many hundreds of thousands, or rather by millions’, whilst the United Committee later estimated Dissenting strength at three million, or a quarter of the Protestant population of England and Wales.³⁰ Rather than presenting themselves as harmless and inconsequential, Dissenters were far more likely to stress their importance to the social fabric.

Despite this new emphasis on social utility, Dissenters continued to use religious arguments and language in their demands for repeal. This is sometimes obscured by their growing tendency to describe repeal as a ‘right’ rather than a ‘privilege’, which, together with their opponents’ habit of comparing them to French *philosophes*, can give the impression that Dissenters were demanding abstract, natural rights in the manner of Thomas Paine. Yet the

²⁸ *Statement*, p. 14.

²⁹ Protestant Dissenting Deputies, Minute Book. Vol. 5, 30 June 1820.

³⁰ *Ibid.* Vol. 6, 25 May 1827; *Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*, c. 226.

Dissenters' changing language simply reflected their growing self-confidence: the rights they demanded remained religious and specifically Protestant rights. A petition delivered by the Deputies in 1820 considered 'the exercise of private Judgement in religious affairs as among those absolute natural rights which are instilled to man's first regard', adding that this right is 'now almost universally and completely recognised in every Protestant State'.³¹ Again in 1827 they resolved that: 'the exercise of private judgement in religious matters is a right absolute[ly] inalienable and supremely important... it lies at the very root of Protestantism and is the strong ground on which the Reformation was built'.³² Dissenting rhetoric thus continued to draw upon values derived from the specifically Protestant character of the nation.

However, Dissenters were far less likely to emphasise these Protestant values by contrasting them with Popish values or with a common Popish enemy. In the 1780s, anti-Catholicism had been an important part of the Dissenters' strategy. In the 1820s, by contrast, the word 'Popish' was barely heard. When the Wiltshire curate Stephen Hyde Cassan accused Dissenting ministers of holding their congregations in 'a thralldom full as despotic... as that exercised by the Popish priests', the *Evangelical Magazine*, returned the same accusation: 'that Mr. C. is at heart a Papist, though a very inconsistent one, is obvious'.³³ Dissenters did not usually introduce this word themselves. More typical was the argument made by the Deputies, which invoked the (implicitly Popish) spectre of religious intolerance and infallibility: 'the assumption of authority in one body of men whether to punish or tolerate others in performance of their Religious duties appears to us to imply a pretension to infallibility at once presumptuous and absurd'.³⁴

Likewise, the argument that the Test Acts were barriers against Popery rather than Dissent also became rarer. The Deputies deplored the harsh penalties of the Test Acts, 'creating strangely against Protestants (since the Act in opposition to and perversion of its original intent,

³¹ Protestant Dissenting Deputies, Minute Book. Vol. 5, 30 June 1820.

³² *Ibid.* Vol. 6, 25 May 1827.

³³ *Evangelical Magazine*, 6 (1828), pp. 194-5.

³⁴ Protestant Dissenting Deputies, Minute Book. Vol. 6, 25 May 1827.

now operates against Protestants) the offence, and visiting it with many of the heavy penalties of Recusancy'.³⁵ Yet this was a single sentence buried in the middle of a lengthy petition: in 1787 the opening paragraphs of the *Case* launched stridently into a history of the Test and Corporation Acts, their original direction against Papists, and Parliament's efforts to correct the discrepancy.

In the 1820s, Dissenters did not need to contrast their insider status with the status of the Catholic outsider: the prevalence of the Catholic question ensured that this distinction was already widely accepted and understood. Employing anti-Catholic language would only have confirmed the tendency of a pan-Protestant, anti-Catholic national identity to subordinate Dissenters even as it included them. Dissenters therefore sought to appeal to the inclusive rather than the exclusive facets of British national identity, stressing religious liberty, toleration and the progress of religious truth through reason and unfettered debate. That they were able to appeal to the appropriate aspects of mainstream national identity is not in itself an explanation for their success: the same national identity had fuelled overwhelming opposition to repeal in 1790. However, the tolerant, inclusive and libertarian aspects of Protestant national identity were becoming increasingly important, and the Dissenters' long-running efforts to turn these tropes into reality finally encountered fertile ground. The political establishment recognised that, in order to stave off the unforgettable spectacle of the collapse of French society, the state needed to buy the loyalty of its passive, Protestant subjects and turn them into active, Protestant citizens.

³⁵ *Ibid.* Vol. 6, 25 May 1827.

“We shall ask for the Franchises of Citizens with One Voice”:³⁶ Dissenters and the Catholic Question, 1815-1828

Throughout the post-war period, British politics was dominated by the Catholic question. Throughout the 1810s and 1820s the issue repeatedly divided Parliaments with exceptional disregard for conventional ‘party’ loyalties, such as they were. Emancipation Bills were either narrowly defeated in the Commons, or else narrowly passed the Commons only to be resoundingly rejected by the Lords.³⁷ Because Catholic emancipation eventually passed in 1829, opposition can with hindsight appear futile and reactionary, suggesting that the anti-Catholicism that had been so important in the eighteenth century was withering away in the post-Revolutionary world. Colley suggests that the military defeat of Napoleonic France made the traditional ‘Other’ of continental Catholicism obsolete:

Waterloo finally slew the dragon; and the immediate reaction among many Britons was less complacency than disorientation. How was Britishness to be defined now that it could no longer rely so absolutely on a sense of beleaguered Protestantism and on regular conflict with the Other in the shape of Catholic France?³⁸

However, opposition to emancipation was widespread, powerful and intensely emotive, as evidenced by the floods of hostile petitions and the dire predictions of Popish ascendancy made by even the measure’s more respectable opponents.³⁹ More significantly still, supporters of emancipation tended to attach stringent conditions to the Catholics’ behaviour, and many hoped that legal equality would dilute Catholicism and be the first step to assimilation. One evangelical Dissenter hoped that the emancipation of Irish Catholics would ‘liberate them from the toils of Popery, and introduce them to the bosom of the protestant Church’.⁴⁰ Anti-Catholicism could be consistently held alongside support for toleration.

³⁶ Bowring, *Letter*, pp. 12-13.

³⁷ Machin, *Catholic Question*.

³⁸ Colley, *Britons*, p. 328.

³⁹ G. Machin, ‘The No-Popery Movement in Britain in 1828-9’, *HJ*, 6, 2 (1963), pp. 193-211.

⁴⁰ *Black Coats*, p. 24.

The complete uncertainty throughout the 1820s as to the eventual fate of the Catholic question meant that the Deputies, Ministers and United Committee had little choice but to maintain a careful neutrality for fear of backing the wrong horse. Whilst the Dissenting organisations continued to espouse the right to religious liberty, they avoided applying this argument to the Catholics by deeming it a 'political question' whether or not British Catholics had disqualified themselves from the enjoyment of this right. In 1821, after a lengthy and inconclusive discussion and several unsuccessful motions, the Ministers resolved that they 'rejoice in every measure for the Relief of the Roman Catholics, as far as they may be oppressed for conscience sake but that in consequence of the general division of opinion among us, the further consideration of this subject be postponed'.⁴¹ Maintaining this neutrality became harder than ever, given the widespread preoccupation with the Catholic question and the scope for interaction between the two issues. In 1825 a number of Dissenting congregations petitioned against emancipation, demanding a clarification of Dissent's position from its self-appointed spokesmen. The Deputies promptly declared that:

This Deputation is anxious to disavow any concurrence in, or approval of, the Petitions lately presented to Parliament... it will continue at all seasonable opportunities to urge upon the Legislature (as it has hitherto done) the impolicy and injustice of every sort of penalty or disability civil or political for conscience sake.⁴²

The Ministers issued a similar statement.⁴³ These phrases, of course, were carefully chosen as to be noncommittal.

The Dissenting organisations were just as keen to distance themselves from Catholics as they were to distance themselves from anti-Catholic Dissenters. The United Committee had to rebuff the advances of Catholics keen to establish an alliance of the disenfranchised, and when the *New Times* incorrectly reported that the committee had agreed to such an alliance, they

⁴¹ Three Denominations, Minute Books. Vol. 3, 10 April 1821.

⁴² Protestant Dissenting Deputies, Minute Book. Vol. 6, 29 Apr 1825.

⁴³ Three Denominations, Minute Books. Vol. 3, 3 May 1825.

rushed to explain that ‘a common campaign had been and still was deemed inexpedient, [but] the committee repudiated the inference that they had any hostile feelings towards the Catholic claims’.⁴⁴ Official neutrality on the Catholic question was a deliberate and self-conscious policy, as a letter from Robert Winter, the Deputies’ secretary, to Lord John Russell makes clear: the United Committee, Winter explained, followed Russell’s advice and ‘deemed it expedient throughout the whole of their proceedings to abstain from noticing that great Question upon which all parties are so much divided’.⁴⁵

Overall, the Dissenters’ organisations were remarkably successful in enforcing this silence. As Winter’s letter suggests, one reason for the adoption of this neutrality was fear of alienating potentially supportive Whigs or pro-emancipation Tories, or aggravating the fears of anti-emancipation Tories. This is the explanation offered by Davis, whose account of the campaign is given from the perspective of the MP William Smith.⁴⁶ Yet the remarkable extent to which Dissenters across the country cooperated in official neutrality suggests that, beyond political tactics, there were broader reasons why Dissenters were reluctant to commit themselves on the Catholic question.

Only a very small number of Dissenters spoke out against emancipation. Aside from the small number of petitions delivered against emancipation in 1825, Ivimey published another anti-emancipation pamphlet in 1819. He devoted large sections to detailing the revival of the Catholic threat since the end of the war, paying particular attention to the reinstatement of the Bourbons, the subsequent White Terror, and the restoration of the Jesuits.⁴⁷ Despite his keen interest in European developments – the mysterious reincarnation of the hated Jesuits was a particular obsession of European anti-clericalism – Ivimey made it clear that he not only objected to the Catholic faith, but also feared the threat Papists represented to ‘this Protestant

⁴⁴ *Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*, cc. 220-1.

⁴⁵ Guildhall Library MS.03085: Protestant Dissenting Deputies, Secretary’s Out-Letter Book, 10 Jan 1828.

⁴⁶ Davis, *Dissent in Politics*, pp. 218-21.

⁴⁷ Joseph Ivimey, *The Supremacy of the Pope Contrary to Scripture, and Dangerous to the Safety of Protestant Governments* (1819), pp. 8-12.

Kingdom', its 'Protestant King and... Protestant Government', and 'the House of Hanover... the bulwark of the Protestant cause, and the life and support of British liberty'.⁴⁸ Ivimey clearly considered Dissenters to belong within this Protestant nation. He proudly cited the patriotic anti-Catholicism of Dissenting ministers such as Daniel Neal, Samuel Chandler and Edward Pickard, and deplored the 'criminal apathy' towards Popery shown by modern Dissenters.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, Ivimey's attitude to the sacramental test was ambivalent. In 1819 he told readers that 'he ardently wishes it may be speedily and for ever removed', not in order to strengthen the Protestant interest against Papists, but 'because of the profanity and impiety connected with making the symbols of the dying love of the Redeemer, a stepping-stone to office'.⁵⁰ Whilst in 1819 Ivimey could hope that Parliament would repeal the Test Acts on its own initiative out of concern for the Protestant faith, he went further in 1821, publishing a letter to the Earl of Liverpool under the pseudonym 'Amicus Justitiae', urging that Dissenters' credentials for political admission were relatively stronger than the Catholics'. This pamphlet stressed, 'there is an essential difference in the principles of the Roman Catholics and the Protestant Dissenters with regard to the power of the civil magistrate' and considered it a 'very difficult question, to be settled by the Legislature, - whether such securities *can* be exacted from the Roman Catholics as will render them safe to be admitted to equal terms with Protestants'.⁵¹ Ivimey's pamphlet was aimed at a very specific political context: Liverpool, who had been staunchly opposed to both emancipation and repeal, was rumoured to be considering the former.⁵² That it refrained from expressing an explicit opinion on the question of emancipation indicates the difficulties Dissenters had demanding repeal whilst opposing emancipation;

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 14, 15.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵¹ [Amicus Justitiae] *A Letter to the Right Honourable the Earl of Liverpool, on the Dissimilarity Existing between the Protestant and Roman Catholic Dissenters: Containing a History of the Corporation and Test Acts; and Shewing the Impolicy, as well as Injustice, of Refusing to Repeal the Penal Statutes which affect the Protestant Dissenters, but of Abrogating them in Relation to the Roman Catholics* (1821); George Pritchard, *Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Joseph Ivimey* (1835), pp. 135-6.

⁵² Machin, *Catholic Question*, pp. 25, 30-1.

moreover, the fact that Ivimey published this anonymously suggests a need to distance this pamphlet from his own anti-emancipation opinions. Ivimey's pan-Protestant, anti-Catholic identity, then, offered only a weak platform upon which he could challenge the established Church.

This is one reason why Dissenting opposition to emancipation was so muted. David Hempton notes that the 'notoriously anti-Catholic' Methodists were steered into neutrality by their leadership, who defined the Catholic question as 'political' and therefore off-limits for collective action.⁵³ The same phenomenon is true of Dissenters, many of whom must have shared Ivimey's attitudes towards Popery but who were naturally reluctant to risk jeopardising the repeal campaign by contradicting the tolerant, Protestant identity on which it rested. In 1825, even the anti-Catholic Protestant Society joined the Ministers and Deputies in disavowing the Dissenting petitions against emancipation, though in decidedly unenthusiastic language: it feared that the petitions gave 'the imputation of indifference or hostility to those great principles of Religious Freedom', insisted that 'religious opinions should not alone qualify or disqualify for Public Office', and decided it best to 'leave the measure to the Wisdom and Justice of Parliament'.⁵⁴

Conversely, the small number of Dissenters who broke the official silence and publically advocated Catholic emancipation could use the language of liberty to make a powerful rhetorical argument for Test Act repeal. In 1827 Bowring published a *Letter to the Right Hon. George Canning*, who opposed repeal on the grounds that it would damage the chances of emancipation. Though this polemical purpose required him to deny Dissenting hostility to Catholics, Bowring went much further, promising Canning:

If we succeed in our purpose, there is so much gained from the territory of intolerance; a great principle would be recognized, whose recognition is most essential to the catholic cause... Ere long... we shall ask for the franchises of

⁵³ Hempton, 'Thomas Allan', p. 23.

⁵⁴ Quoted in Davis, *Dissent in Politics*, pp. 228-9.

citizens in one spirit and with one voice: not in the name of Catholicism, - not in the name of Nonconformity; but as Britons.⁵⁵

Bowring's vision of a genuinely non-denominational nation, defined by an inclusive citizenship rather than by religious denomination, allowed him to make a powerful attack on the exclusive, Anglican constitution. This kind of attack was only made possible by the tangible possibility that emancipation would pass: the letter, after all, was addressed to a pro-Catholic Prime Minister. Bowring's active support for the Catholic cause was not popular with the United Committee, which insisted that he 'attach to it a declaration that such letter must be considered as containing only his own individual opinion', and promptly passed a resolution that no committee member should publish in future without the committee's approval.⁵⁶

It was no coincidence that these sentiments came from a Unitarian. The Unitarian Association was consistently more supportive of emancipation than the United Committee was. It protested against the anti-emancipation petitions in 1825 in far more disapproving language than either the Deputies or the Ministers, announcing its 'thorough disavowal and disapprobation of the Petitions lately presented by persons calling themselves Protestant Dissenters, against the repeal of those intolerant laws which disgrace their country's name'.⁵⁷ Orthodox Dissenters could envisage their own admission without the Catholics, whereas Unitarians necessarily sought a more inclusive nation. Yet even amongst Unitarians, the Protestant character of the nation was not abandoned entirely. The Unitarian *Christian Reformer* advocated emancipation in January 1828, after a Catholic petition for repeal was presented to Parliament, commenting that 'the Roman Catholics who signed this petition have gained one emancipation, namely, from bigotry; and we hope and trust that this is in earnest of their gaining another, - that is, emancipation from civil disabilities'.⁵⁸ Despite this, the quotation carried on the title page of the same volume – 'peradventure the dregs of the Church of Rome

⁵⁵ Bowring, *Letter*, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁶ *Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts*, c. 178.

⁵⁷ Davis, *Dissent in Politics*, p. 226.

⁵⁸ *Christian Reformer*, 14, 157 (1828), pp. 33-5.

are not yet sufficiently washed from the hearts of many men' – makes the *Christian Reformer's* ongoing fear of Popery clear. The principle of religious liberty that led Unitarians like Bowring to espouse a universal toleration was still a Protestant value defined against the foil of Popery, even though 'religious liberty' was decoupled from sectarian conflict and instead held up as the universal right of citizens.

"Shame be to that Timid, Shrinking Protestant":⁵⁹ Catholic Emancipation

Although Dissenting neutrality on the Catholic question was partly necessitated by tactical considerations, since any clarification of the Dissenters' stance may have alienated Parliamentary supporters, Dissenting attitudes towards Catholic rights initially remained ambivalent even after the Sacramental Test Act became law in May 1828. At the United Committee's celebratory banquet in June, the Duke of Sussex toasted '*speedy and effectual Relief to all His Majesty's Subjects who still labour under any legal disabilities on account of their Religion*', to rapturous applause.⁶⁰ This toast, which was widely reported in the press, gives the impression that a long-suppressed urge to speak out for Catholic emancipation had finally been unshackled. Yet a specially appointed sub-committee had spent weeks drafting and redrafting the toasts for the event, and this was not one of the twenty-four toasts that had been planned: it seems to have taken the United Committee by surprise.⁶¹

Dissenters, then, did not erupt into support for emancipation once Test Act repeal had been secured; rather, they slowly fell behind the measure as its passage came to seem increasingly inevitable, particularly after the Irish Catholic leader Daniel O'Connell was illegally declared elected to County Clare in July. The United Committee disbanded in December with a

⁵⁹ *Evangelical Magazine*, 7 (May, 1829), p. 196.

⁶⁰ *Reports of the Speeches*, p. 9.

⁶¹ Guildhall Library MS.03084: Minute Book of Committees and Sub-Committees Concerning the Application to Parliament for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. Volume Two. 3 June, 4 June, 10 June, 14 June, 23 June 1828.

resolution which, though described by Manning as the committee's 'political testament',⁶² still did little more than hint at support for emancipation:

Although the Committee abstained during the late application to Parliament, from any Coalition with other applicants, they cannot separate without expressing their earnest desire for the entire abolition of all Laws interfering with the Rights of Conscience.⁶³

The Deputies did not explicitly support emancipation until February 1829, once Parliament itself had resolved in favour of the measure. They submitted a petition declaring that, though grateful for repeal, they 'lament to see the peace of Society still disturbed by the Divisions and Jealousies arising out of the Continuance of other Laws of a similar Character'.⁶⁴ Davis has argued that the Deputies' general sympathy for emancipation reflected the elite committee's financial independence, whereas the Protestant Society, which was dependent on annual subscriptions, was more responsive to popular anti-Catholicism.⁶⁵ Yet the Deputies were financially exhausted by the repeal campaign, and were soliciting a popular subscription even as they submitted this petition.⁶⁶

Remarkably, not only did London Dissenting congregations find the Deputies' petition palatable, even the Protestant Society welcomed a speech from O'Connell himself at its annual meeting in May once Catholic emancipation had passed. O'Connell thanked Dissent 'for the exertions made in our behalf', drew attention to Catholic support for repeal, and concluded: 'I will join with you in abolishing all distinctions between Christian and fellow-Christian – in calling on Christians of every denomination to carry on the religion of their country in the spirit of the God whom they all adore'. The society, which had consistently opposed any strategy for repeal that risked assisting Catholic emancipation, responded with 'loud and long-continued cheering,

⁶² Manning, *Protestant Dissenting Deputies*, p. 252.

⁶³ Minute Book of Committees and Sub-Committees Concerning the Application to Parliament. Vol. 2, 15 Dec 1828.

⁶⁴ Protestant Dissenting Deputies, Minute Book. Vol. 7, 13 Feb 1829.

⁶⁵ Davis, *Dissent in Politics*, pp. 229-35, quotation pp. 234-5.

⁶⁶ Protestant Dissenting Deputies. Minute Book. Vol. 7, 13 Feb 1829.

with waving of handkerchiefs', according to the *Congregational Magazine*.⁶⁷ Though Dissenters had been deeply and sometimes cripplingly divided over the question of emancipation since the pre-war repeal campaign, Dissenters enthusiastically united around O'Connell's vision of a tolerant, Christian nation once emancipation passed into law.

Dissenters' widespread reluctance to commit themselves on the Catholic question was not simply a case of sound political tactics – this restraint had been lifted in 1828 – but also reflected a deeper uncertainty as to the best platform on which to seek integration into the nation. Since the 1780s, their arguments for repeal had stressed the Protestantism that united Church and Dissent and invoked the supposedly Protestant character of the national community, but they remained ambivalent as to how this Protestant nation should treat its Catholic minority. The extent to which Protestant identity defined itself against Popish illiberality and intolerance made toleration of Catholicism a logical consequence of the Dissenters' arguments for repeal, yet most Trinitarian Dissenters were reluctant to admit this and feared being perceived to be pro-Catholic. It was only when emancipation had passed that this contradiction was officially resolved and Dissenters could unite around a vision of a tolerating, Protestant nation without fear of contradicting their Protestant identity. As the Church of England slowly adapted to the inevitability of emancipation it began to approach the interpretation of British national identity that had long been propounded by Dissenters.

Dissenting support for emancipation in 1829 was a new step in the ongoing negotiation of this identity. Test Act repeal did not simply redefine the nation by fiat. The Lords' insistence on an oath renouncing hostility to the established Church indicated the survival of older attitudes: a pamphlet published anonymously by the United Committee's Edgar Taylor hoped that this oath would be revised once emancipation passed.⁶⁸ For the same reason, by supporting O'Connell the traditionally anti-Catholic Protestant Society could stress Dissenters'

⁶⁷ *Congregational Magazine*, 54, 12 (June, 1829), pp. 336-8.

⁶⁸ Edgar Taylor, *A Letter to Sir Thomas D. Acland, Bart. M.P. on the Repeal of the Sacramental Test, and the Imposition of a New Test or Oath* (1828), p. 34.

credentials as tolerant Protestants, and thereby bolster their campaign – launched at the same general meeting – to redress their remaining, more practical grievances.⁶⁹

By supporting Catholic emancipation, British Protestants – whether Churchmen or Dissenters – were not necessarily abandoning the Protestant character of the nation or even the fear of ‘Popery’ that remained a fundamental part of this character. No-Popery could adapt to emancipation in a number of ways: emancipation was advocated precisely because it was un-Popish; British Catholics could be deemed to have renounced their Popery; emancipation could be hailed as the first step to the conversion of Irish Catholics. The *Evangelical Magazine* reported the passage of emancipation by declaring ‘thus, again, do Protestantism and Popery, as in the morning of the Reformation, meet on equal ground; and shame be to that shrinking, timid Protestant, who dreads the result of a combat where truth is opposed to error’.⁷⁰ Spedding Curwen, an evangelical Independent minister, published a pro-emancipation lecture which praised ‘the patriotism of the Roman Catholics of England, whose zeal for liberty stood before the arbitrary monarch, and with a whetted weapon, and in a coat of steel, demanded that “Magna Charta” which was the first bulwark thrown around the liberties of our country’.⁷¹

Curwen simultaneously maintained:

That the Roman Catholic religion is an Antichristian one, we all declare. It is indeed a revolting combination of Pagan and Jewish ceremonials... Her history is stained with the blood of saints. The name of Popery is identified in our conceptions with all that is cruel and mischievous. Its laws have been arbitrary, its government oppressive, and its sanctions merciless.⁷²

William Orme, a Baptist delegate to the Ministers, published a *Letter to the Right Honourable Lord Holland* distancing the majority of Dissenters from the small number of anti-emancipation

⁶⁹ *Congregational Magazine*, 54, 12 (June, 1829), pp. 331-6.

⁷⁰ *Evangelical Magazine*, 7 (May, 1829), p. 196.

⁷¹ Spedding Curwen, *Intolerance Deprecated* (1829), pp. 11-12.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

petitions submitted by Dissenters in 1829. Both Dissenters' support for emancipation and their hatred of Popery were held up as evidence of their patriotism:

In devoted allegiance to the reigning family, in enlightened attachment to the free constitution of the realm, in readiness to suffer for their country's honour, or to participate in its sorrows, they are entitled to rank with any class of persons in Great Britain... Opposed in heart and soul as they have ever been to popery, and alive as they are to its blighting influence on individual happiness and social freedom, and its destructive tendency as a system of superstition and antichristianity, they yet see nothing to apprehend from it. Against its tendency to civil despotism and oppression, they have a security in the principles of the constitution, and the spirit of the country, which leave them nothing to dread. – As a system of error, they desire only to have the opportunity of contending with it on the open field of fair argument and honourable warfare.⁷³

The Deputies approved of Orme's pamphlet, and voted to reimburse him for the cost of printing it.⁷⁴ Curwen and Orme were expressing attitudes widespread amongst Dissenters: the nation was essentially Protestant and defined against Popish values and therefore tolerant of its religious minorities; English and Irish Roman Catholics were to be assimilated into this Protestant nation, either by continuing to distance themselves from Popery or through all-out conversion to Protestantism. They were prevented from expressing these sentiments sooner when support for emancipation was still suggested sympathy with Catholicism.

Conversely, despite the fears of pro-emancipation Tories, the acquisition of repeal did not release any groundswell of Dissenting opposition to emancipation. A minor but steady stream of anti-emancipation pamphlets and petitions continued to appear, but continued to be subject to the same constraints – the danger of appearing intolerant and the difficulty of supporting Dissenting rights whilst opposing Catholic rights – that had always limited Dissenting opposition to emancipation. Ninety-two Dissenting ministers submitted an anti-emancipation

⁷³ William Orme, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Lord Holland, Occasioned by the Petition from the General Body of Dissenting Ministers of London, for the Relief of the Roman Catholic, with Strictures on a Petition of an Opposite Nature, from some Dissenting Ministers* (1829), pp. 4-6.

⁷⁴ Protestant Dissenting Deputies, Minute Book. Vol. 7, 27 Nov 1829.

petition in 1829, which still felt obliged to disavow the repeal campaign even retrospectively.⁷⁵ William Thorp, who signed the petition, published a second speech against emancipation, insisting that ‘Popery, intolerance and despotism are inseparable’.⁷⁶ Extracts from the speech circulated around Somerset as a broadside.⁷⁷ Ivimey published yet another anti-emancipation pamphlet in June 1828, urging Dissenters not to support emancipation, and hoping that ‘the great majority of evangelical dissenters are so strongly opposed to the Roman Catholics, that they will be willing to remain strictly neutral on the question of their claims’.⁷⁸ In January 1829, after unsuccessfully opposing the Ministers’ pro-emancipation resolutions, he sought to lead a Trinitarian secession from the Ministers, whose support for emancipation he continued to blame on the dominant role played by the Unitarians.⁷⁹ Though refusing to return to Doctor Williams’s Library – the Ministers’ meeting-place - until the portrait of Joseph Priestley had been removed, he met with little success: the *Christian Reformer* simply reported that the Ministers’ ‘proceedings excited in one member a degree of anger which seems to have turned his brain’.⁸⁰

Though they enjoyed little support, anti-emancipation Dissenters saw no contradiction in defending a Protestant ascendancy from which they themselves had long been excluded. Thorp rejected the charge of inconsistency, explaining that he saw himself as ‘a conscientious dissenter from the ecclesiastical establishment of my country, which I nevertheless revere, and nothing but scruples of conscience hinder me from entering within her pale’.⁸¹ Similarly, Ivimey invoked ‘the dangers which will result to *the cause of Protestantism* in this country... an irreparable injury will be done to our common faith’.⁸² Ivimey and Thorp do not treat the Test

⁷⁵ Doctor Williams’s Library, MS.38.203: Petition of Protestant Dissenting Ministers in and about London and Westminster against Roman Catholic Claims. 1829.

⁷⁶ William Thorp, *England’s Liberties Defended* (Bristol, 1829), p. 12.

⁷⁷ Curwen, *Intolerance*, pp. vi-vii.

⁷⁸ Joseph Ivimey, *The Roman Catholic Claims a Question not of Religious Liberty, but of Political Expediency* (1828), p. 37.

⁷⁹ Joseph Ivimey, *Dr. Williams’s Library, and the Debate on the Roman Catholic Claims: a Letter Addressed to the Trinitarian Members of the General Body of Dissenting Ministers of the Three Denominations* (1829), p. 8.

⁸⁰ *Christian Reformer*, 15, 172 (1829), pp. 191-5.

⁸¹ Thorp, *England’s Liberties*, p. 10.

⁸² Ivimey, *Roman Catholic Claims*, pp. 36-7.

Acts as a substantial division in Protestant unity. In a memoir, however, George Pritchard recorded that Ivimey responded to repeal with feelings approaching 'ecstasy' and 'unbounded joy'.⁸³ The Test Acts represented a more serious division of Protestant unity than Ivimey could publically admit.

The removal of the Test Acts had a bigger impact on Anglican opponents of emancipation, who were now able to call for Protestant unity against the Catholics with far greater ease and clarity. Richard Warner, a Bath curate and political reformer, denied that the relief granted to Dissenters made emancipation inevitable:

Between THEM and the PAPISTS there is no approximation to a resemblance; and, consequently, the rule which applies to one, will not meet the case of the other. The DISSENTERS are PROTESTANTS... and would, willingly, spill the last drop of their blood, in defence of the PROTESTANT FAITH, and of the great cause of RATIONAL FREEDOM.⁸⁴

Likewise, another pamphleteer objected to emancipation on the grounds that:

The WHOLE nation, I repeat, is a Church: it must be subject, therefore, to the laws of a church. (For the various sects of Protestant Dissenters are a part of the church; their dissent exists but as an irregularity amongst us, arising partly out of the unkindness of the mother in past times, and partly – and, as I believe, the greatest part – out of the rebellion of the children.⁸⁵

Others continued to see the Church of England as the bastion of the Protestant interest and the focus for Protestant unity. William Wait, a minor clergyman of Huguenot descent, implored:

It is high time that *all the other grounds of imaginary difference, between our dissenting brethren and ourselves, should be for every removed...* and let us love,

⁸³ Pritchard, *Memoir*, p. 322.

⁸⁴ Richard Warner, *Catholic Emancipation, Incompatible with the Safety of the Established Religion, Liberty, Laws and Protestant Secession of the British Empire* (1829), pp. 21-2.

⁸⁵ [I.P.K.], *The Opposers of Catholic Emancipation Defended: From the Charge of Injustice, Persecution, and Uncharitableness, and the True Position of a Protestant State in Reference to the Papists Briefly Stated* (1829), p. 26.

as brethren; unite, as members of the same Christian family; worship in the same Communion; join in the same phalanx against the powers of darkness.

Yet for Wait, Protestant unity meant the Dissenters renouncing their '*little fragile barks*' for the 'beautiful vessel' of the Church of England.⁸⁶ Repeal, then, did not instantly grant Dissenters full admission to the nation, but in the context of the ongoing threat from the Irish Catholics, it did greatly strengthen their claims.

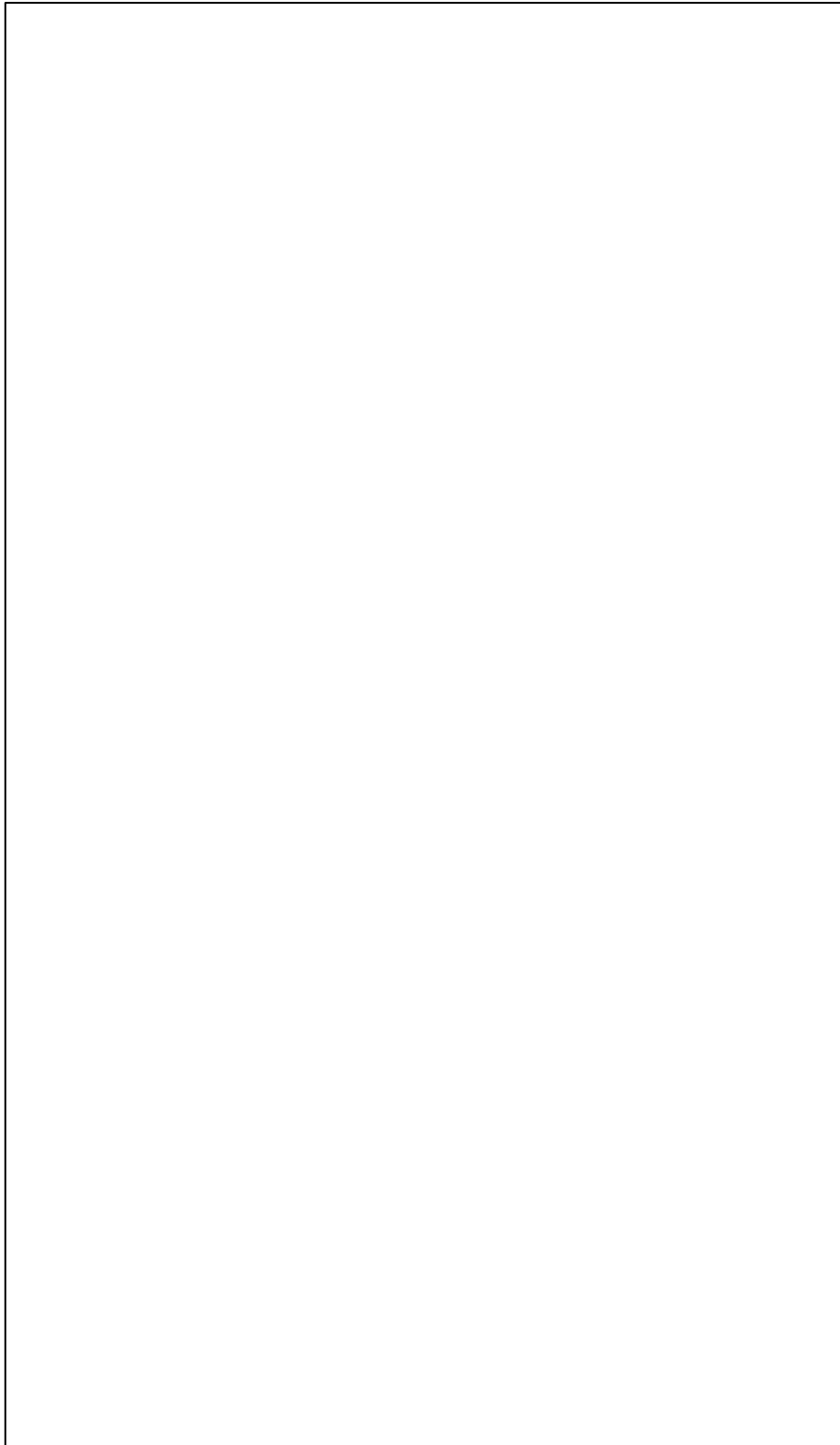
Conclusion

When the established Church conceded Test Act repeal in 1828, its assumptions towards Dissent were remarkably similar to what they had been at the commencement of the pre-war repeal campaign in 1786. Dissenters did not win repeal because these fundamental assumptions had changed, but rather because the political changes of the intervening years made these assumptions work in the Dissenters' favour. Above all, the predominance of the Irish Catholic campaign for political emancipation brought the distinction between Dissenting insider and Catholic outsider to the fore: Dissenters greatly benefitted from the fact that, in the last resort, the established Church's fear of Dissent was of a categorically different order to its fear of Catholicism. Both repeal and emancipation can also be situated within the long-term process of state-building and national integration, which were greatly accelerated by the challenge to the established order posed by the French Revolution and wars.⁸⁷ The unforgettable spectacle of French social anarchy engendered a new concern with social utility, softening fears of Dissenters, who appeared undeniably loyal and respectable in comparison to Irish Catholics. The Catholic problem, too, was a consequence of the Union with Ireland, itself a product of the

⁸⁶ William Wait, *The Present Crisis, or, the Protestant Religion in Danger: Containing Strictures on Popery and Dissent, with a View to Display the Excellence, and Promote the Welfare, of the Established Church of Great Britain and Ireland* (1829), pp. 94-5, 9.

⁸⁷ S. Brown, *The National Churches of England, Ireland and Scotland, 1801-1846* (Oxford, 2001), pp. vii-ix.

need to integrate potentially rebellious Irish Catholics into the British nation given the threat of an Irish uprising, and thus also partially an effect of the French Revolution and the total war that followed it. The essential structures of British national identity adapted to the irresistible political need to integrate all British subjects into the national community, but this community continued to be defined by essentially Protestant values.



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The Commemorative Medal

Source: *Congregational Magazine*, 5 (1829), frontispiece.

Conclusion

The Impact of Repeal

The United Committee were eager to find a fitting way to commemorate the repeal of the Test Acts. They briefly discussed the possibility of erecting a special building to permanently mark the occasion, but their exhausted finances forced them to abandon the plan.¹ They settled instead on a commemorative medal, depicting 'Britannia seated on the right presenting to a graceful figure of Liberty the act of repeal, while Religion in the centre raises her eyes to heaven with the expression of thankfulness for the boon'. The medal was advertised in the *Congregational Magazine*, which reported that 'copies in bronze, with neat morocco cases, are sold, we believe, at 10s. There are also copies struck in silver, which are of course proportionally higher'.² The juxtaposition of the three figures of Britannia, Liberty and Religion are indeed a fitting reflection of what the Dissenters had been fighting for and what they believed they had achieved. For them, the repeal of the sacramental test meant not only the ending of the 'abuse and profanation of the Lord's supper', not only a victory for the principle that 'thoughts are not subjects, nor are theories crimes', but also a meaningful recasting of the nation.³ The tightly interconnected tropes of Britannia, Liberty and Religion had dominated their demands for repeal since the 1780s.

Dissenters were therefore optimistic as they looked to the future. By May 1830 the Protestant Society had formulated a list of outstanding grievances still affecting Dissenters. In March 1833 the Protestant Society, the Deputies and the Ministers established another United Committee and began a campaign for the redress of these grievances, claiming for Dissenters the right to burial in parish graveyards, recognition of Dissenting baptismal registers, freedom to

¹ Minute Book of Committees and Sub-Committees Concerning the Application to Parliament. Vol. 2, 23 June 1828.

² *Ibid.* Vol. 2, 7 July 1828; *Congregational Magazine*, 5, 57 (1829), pp. 494-502.

³ *Congregational Magazine*, 4, 37 (1828), pp. 6-12; Hamilton, *Dissenters of England*, p. 2.

undergo marriage according to their own rites, exemption from the church rates levied to support the established Church, and the opening of degrees at Oxford and Cambridge to non-subscribers.⁴ If the Dissenters' objections to the Test Acts had been purely theoretical, as their opponents had so often claimed, these new demands were addressing serious, material grievances that Dissenters encountered at the most important stages of their lives. As David Bebbington has shown, the eclipse of the old Unitarian leadership by a new generation of evangelical Dissenters transformed Dissenting politics.⁵ More radical Dissenters' demands extended to the disestablishment of the Church of England: the Voluntary Church Society was established in 1834 and the Anti-State Church Association in 1844. When, a week after repeal, the Deputies expressed 'their Collective Sense of the improvement of their situation by what may with strict propriety be denominated "the Emancipation of the Protestant Dissenters of England"... being at length admitted to participate in the Political advantages of the Social State equally with their Brethren of the Establishment', they were articulating Dissenters' hopes for the future as much as their thankfulness for what had already been achieved.⁶

Dissenters' expectations of the practical benefits to follow from their full admission to the 'Social State' were not borne out by the later history of Nonconformist politics. The struggle for the redress of the six grievances formulated in 1833 would last throughout the nineteenth century, and the Church of England remains officially established today.⁷ In hindsight, the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828 appears not as the moment at which Protestant Dissent was officially admitted to the nation, but rather as a single episode in the long-term evolution of national identity as it was continually challenged, negotiated and made to adapt to changing circumstances. J. C. D. Clark's emphasis on the events of 1828–1832 – Test Act repeal, Catholic emancipation and the 'Great' Reform Act – as the end of the hegemonic *ancien régime*

⁴ Watts, *The Dissenters. Volume Two*, pp. 453-5.

⁵ D. Bebbington, 'The Dissenting Political Upsurge of 1833-34', in D. Bebbington and T. Larsen (eds.), *Modern Christianity and Cultural Aspirations* (London, 2003), pp. 224-8.

⁶ Protestant Dissenting Deputies, *Minute Book*. Vol. 7, 16 May 1828.

⁷ T. Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality: Nonconformist Politics in Mid-Victorian England* (Woodbridge, 1999).

takes the expectations of the Dissenters and the fears of their opponents at face value, overlooking on the one hand the dynamism of national identity before 1828 and on the other hand its resilience thereafter.⁸

A more useful way of analysing the extent of Dissenters' achievement in 1828 is offered by Stephan Wendehorst. Based on a comparative survey of the experiences of different European religious minorities, Wendehorst distinguishes between the 'formal' and 'informal' emancipation of a minority, the former meaning the removal of legal restrictions on the individual and the latter the far more complicated question of society's attitudes towards the minority as a collectivity. He draws attention to the 'conditionality' of emancipation, 'the parameters within which the state and society at large defined and recognised the collective character of a minority', and the extent to which 'the collective continuity of the minority was envisaged as legitimate and desirable'.⁹ Test Act repeal was granted on the expectation that Dissent would continue to stick to its tradition of pious withdrawal, and not on the understanding that it would enjoy the complete religious equality that it began to demand in the 1830s. The Anglican clergyman Josiah Pratt deplored the behaviour of post repeal Dissent for this reason: 'it is no longer Dissent for conscience sake, with the thankfulness for the quiet enjoyment of the privilege of worshipping and preaching according to their own judgement; but it is a claim to be placed on equal footing with the Church'.¹⁰ Yet if Dissenters and Churchmen differed sharply on their understandings of what was being conceded in 1828, most understood repeal as the strengthening of a Protestant nation rather than as the first step towards the dissolution of Dissent: in many ways the nineteenth-century High Church Tractarian movement was a reaction against what was becoming an increasingly sectarian nation.

⁸ Clark, *English Society*, pp. 547-64.

⁹ S. Wendehorst, 'Emancipation as Path to National Integration', in R. Liedtke and S. Wendehorst (eds.), *The Emancipation of Catholics, Jews and Protestants: Minorities and the Nation State in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Manchester, 1999), pp. 192-4.

¹⁰ Quoted in Watts, *The Dissenters. Volume Two*, p. 454.

The situation for the Catholics was very different. Unlike Test Act repeal, Catholic emancipation was passed in the hope that it would convert and assimilate the British Catholic minority and primarily, of course, Catholic Ireland.¹¹ John Wolffe has stressed that ‘anticatholicism needs to be taken seriously in its own right as an enduring and, on occasions, very significant feature of the religious and political landscape of modern Britain’. He adds, ‘Anticatholic activity since 1829 should not be dismissed as simple prejudice nor as marginal militancy: it reflected the very real tension between Roman Catholicism and a nation that historically defined itself in Protestant terms’.¹² The violent anti-Catholicism that flared up in 1845, when Peel trebled and made permanent the state endowment of the Catholic Maynooth seminary, or the ‘Papal Aggression’ crisis in 1851, following the restoration of the territorial hierarchy of the Catholic Church in England – to take just two examples – were not isolated, spasmodic incidents but rather drew upon and were fuelled by remarkably long-standing traditions of nationalistic anti-Catholicism. If the emancipation of British Catholics came with stringent conditions attached this is still more true of the Irish Catholics, who were never assimilated into the British nation.¹³ Although Colley has been criticised for the importance she assigns to eighteenth-century anti-Catholicism, a more serious weakness in her thesis is the suggestion made in an article published alongside *Britons* than an imperial ‘Other’ stepped in to replace the Catholic ‘Other’ than had been made redundant in 1815.¹⁴ The tropes of post-1815 national identity – such as liberty, universal moral mission, anti-slavery, and empire – continued to be joined by the lynchpin of Protestantism until well into the nineteenth century.¹⁵

¹¹ Brown, *National Churches*, pp. 149-50.

¹² J. Wolffe, ‘Change and Continuity in British Anti-Catholicism, 1829-1982’, in F. Tallet and N. Atkin (eds.), *Catholicism in Britain and France since 1789* (London, 1996), pp. 78, 83.

¹³ E. Larkin, ‘Church, State and Nation in Modern Ireland’, *American Historical Review*, 80, 5 (1975), pp. 1244-76.

¹⁴ L. Colley, ‘Britishness and Otherness: An Argument’, *JBS*, 31, 4 (1992), pp. 323-9; P. Mandler, ‘The Problem with Cultural History’, *Cultural and Social History*, 1, 1 (2004), p. 112; Mandler, ‘What is “National Identity”?’’, pp. 290-2.

¹⁵ H. McLeod, ‘Protestantism and British National Identity, 1815-1915’ in P. van der Veer and H. Lehmann (eds.), *Nation and Religion: Perspectives on Europe and Asia* (Princeton, 1999), pp. 50-5; S. Brown, *Providence and Empire: Religion, Politics and Society in the United Kingdom, 1815-1914* (Harlow, 2008).

Peter, Martin and Jack

Of course, criticism of Colley's thesis has not disputed the importance of anti-Catholicism in eighteenth-century Britain so much as its ability to unite Protestants with one another. Colley has recently reemphasised that 'however much British Protestant co-religionists disagreed among themselves, they usually found common ground when confronted by a real or perceived Catholic threat'.¹⁶ Yet the Dissenters' campaign did not unite with the Church of England against the threat of Catholic emancipation. Only a miniscule number of idiosyncratic individuals took this position: most Dissenters recognised that, whatever their feelings about Catholicism, uniting with the Church of England against Catholic emancipation would only have perpetuated their own exclusion.

Conversely it is simply not true that the Dissenters' campaign for repeal enthusiastically headed an alliance of the disenfranchised, as Bernard Manning argued. Manning began a section on 'Relations with Roman Catholics' with the assertion that 'the Deputies have to their credit a record of attempts to amend the law not merely for themselves but for others who suffered from Anglican privileges. It is noteworthy that quite often this generous attitude provoked no response in those whom the Deputies helped'.¹⁷ Yet during both the pre- and post-war repeal campaigns and throughout the intervening period, neither the Dissenting Deputies nor the vast majority of Trinitarian Dissenters offered anything to the Catholic campaign beyond qualified, ambiguous and evasive declarations in favour of undefined 'religious liberty'; conversely, over 100,000 Irish Catholic petitioned for the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts.¹⁸

¹⁶ Colley, *Britons*, p. 395 n. 19.

¹⁷ Manning, *Protestant Dissenting Deputies*, p. 203.

¹⁸ Brown, *National Churches*, p. 139.

This discrepancy in tactics reflects the fact that the widespread, nationalistic language of anti-Catholic Protestant unity, even if it did not map directly onto two invariably monolithic and antagonistic social entities, did actively skew the political playing field by drawing expanding circles of tolerability around Anglicanism. The strategies of different religious groups reflected their awareness of their position in Anglican eyes. Thus, evangelical Dissenters were consistently more likely to oppose Catholic emancipation than old Dissenters were, Unitarian Dissenters were consistently more supportive of emancipation than Trinitarian Dissenters were, and Catholics were consistently more supportive of repeal than Dissenters were of emancipation. Colley's critics have sometimes appeared too ready to write off the notion of a Protestant national identity on the grounds that it does not accurately describe social reality. Jeremy Black, for example, argues that Colley's emphasis on metropolitan print culture leads her to neglect denominationally, geographically and socially marginal groups; he therefore warns against 'the danger of accepting an influential ideology on its own terms'.¹⁹ By stopping short of addressing how this influential ideology interacted with these marginal groups, Black's criticism seems to drop the analysis at the point where it becomes most interesting.

The interaction between the three figures of Peter, Martin and Jack – Catholicism, Anglicanism and Dissent – during the repeal campaigns reveals the ambiguity of Dissenters' status. The Dissenters were a Protestant minority in a nation that often identified itself with the language of Protestantism. The penal legislation affecting Protestant Dissent was slight in comparison to the anti-Catholic penal laws: unlike British Catholics, Dissenters could vote and sit in Parliament, and the laws excluding them from offices of state were circumvented not only at the level of local non-enforcement but at the Parliamentary level. And yet, in the 1780s at least, these laws were bitterly defended. Unable to present Dissent as antithetical to the British constitution and nation, defenders of the laws resorted to clumsy formulations of Dissenters as rebellious, treacherous and subversive. When the Catholic question rose to dominate British

¹⁹ Black, 'Confessional State', p. 59.

politics after 1800 repeal was subordinated to the more important question of emancipation. Nevertheless, in an eloquent reflection of the uncertainty over the relationship between Dissent and the nation, the Catholics' supporters feared that, once admitted, Dissenters would impede emancipation by strengthening the Protestant constitution, whereas the Catholics' opponents feared that repeal would weaken the Anglican constitution and thereby encourage emancipation. Above all, the Dissenters' ambivalent, uncertain and noncommittal stance on the Catholic question reflected the fact that most Dissenters did not know whether supporting or opposing Catholic emancipation offered the most likely route to their own advancement until the question had been decided for them by Parliament.

The extent of divisions within Dissent is a further reason for their divisions over the Catholic question, and an additional layer of complication to the relationship between Protestant Dissent and the nation. Although all Protestant Dissenters shared a common legal status, in practice there were far stronger ties between the established Church and some sections of Dissent than others. Old Dissent and above all Rational Dissent were the most overtly persecuted: accordingly, the Test Acts meant the most to them as a symbol of exclusion, and they stood to gain the most from aligning themselves with other Protestant Dissenters to demand the Protestant unity hinted at by the Protestant foundations of British national identity. Conversely, evangelical Dissenters, who often had strong links with Low Church Anglicans and were less likely to find the Anglican sacrament theologically unpalatable, were more likely to believe that this Protestant unity existed in spite of the Test Acts. One reason why evangelical Dissenters such as Thomas Allan, William Thorp and Joseph Ivimey were more likely to publish against Catholic emancipation was that they were less invested in the possibility of Test Act repeal.

Paradoxically, it was the elite, largely Unitarian leadership of old Dissent which began the project of realising the potential for Protestant unity inherent in British national identity, but it was evangelical Dissent which was most active after repeal in taking this national Protestant

unity to its logical extreme by campaigning for the separation of Church and State. Evangelical Dissenters were thus very quickly embarrassed by the dire predictions of Popish ascendancy that many of their number had made before 1829. Joseph Ivimey died in 1834. The next year George Pritchard, an evangelical Independent and missionary to the South Seas, published a 360-page *Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Rev Joseph Ivimey*. Its strongly hagiographical was already struggling to explain Ivimey's opposition to emancipation: 'among all the friends of liberty, it would be difficult to select one more affectionately attached or more entirely devoted to her interests than the subject of this memoir', Pritchard reported. 'This well known fact renders it the more remarkable, that in relation to the political claims of the Roman Catholics he should have adopted a course, not only adverse to the prevailing conviction, but which seemed, at least, to place him in opposition to his own avowed and recorded principles'.²⁰ Pritchard concluded:

At the repeal of the Corporation and Test laws... his feelings seemed to approach to ecstasy, and his expressions were those of unbounded joy. His satisfaction... was only moderated by perceiving its inevitable influence in effecting relief, also, for the Roman Catholics; and that this did not augment rather than diminish his pleasure, is truly surprising. Let it not be forgotten, however, that in his sentiments and apprehensions, as to the danger of Catholic emancipation, though Mr. Ivimey was in a minority, that minority was far enough from being contemptible, either as to number or intellect. Without at all sympathizing with the conclusion to which he came on the subject, it may be remarked, that his extensive knowledge, derived from various sources, of the system of popery, and his personal observations of its influence upon numbers of its devotees, during his short visit to Ireland, added to the details of its artifices and enormities, which, as Secretary to the Baptist Irish Society, he was receiving every month, may account, in some degree at least, for his seeming pertinacity in retaining, to the last, an opinion so different from that entertained by most of his brethren, and, to a certain extent, contradicted by experience.²¹

Ivimey, in other words, had backed the wrong horse.

²⁰ Pritchard, *Memoir*, pp. 83-4.

²¹ Pritchard, *Memoir*, pp. 322-3.

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¹ Due to the closure of Doctor Williams's Library from May to December 2009 and the ongoing reorganisation of the strong rooms, I have been unable to consult volume four of the minute books of the Protestant Dissenting Ministers.

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Printed Records

Committees for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts: Minutes 1786-90 and 1827-8 (ed. T. Davis, London, 1978)

Parliamentary History of England, From the Earliest Period to the Year 1803. From Which Last-Mentioned Epoch it is Continued Downwards in the Work Entitled "The Parliamentary Debates" (London, 1817), vol. 20

Newspapers

Diary, or Woodfall's Register

Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser

General Evening Post

London Chronicle

Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser

Morning Chronicle

Public Advertiser

St James's Chronicle, or, the British Evening Post

World and Fashionable Advertiser

World

Periodicals

Baptist Magazine

British Critic, Quarterly Theological Review, and Ecclesiastical Record

Christian Reformer, or, New Evangelical Miscellany

Congregational Magazine

Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature

English Review, or, an Abstract of English and Foreign Literature

Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle

General Baptist Repository; and Missionary Observer

John Bull

Monthly Review, or Literary Journal

Test Act Reporter

Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine

Westminster Review

Pamphlets

Place of publication is London unless otherwise stated.

ADDINGTON, STEPHEN, *A Letter to the Deputies, of the Protestant Dissenting Congregations, in and about the Cities of London and Westminster: On their Intended Application to Parliament, for the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1787)

An Address to the People to the People of England, Respecting the Test and Corporation Acts (Birmingham, 1789)

AIKIN, JOHN, *An Address to the Dissidents of England on their Late Defeat* (1790)

ALLAN, THOMAS, *An Appeal to the Protestants of Great Britain and Ireland, on the Subject of the Roman Catholic Question: First Published in the Papers of the Protestant Union, in Reply to a Late Address by Charles Butler, Esq.* (1813)

----- *Letters to a Protestant Dissenter, Relative to the Claims of the Roman Catholics: Both as the Affect a Protestant Government, its Established Church, and Protestant Dissenters* (1813)

AMICUS JUSTITIAE, *A Letter to the Right Honourable the Earl of Liverpool, on the Dissimilarity Existing between the Protestant and Roman Catholic Dissenters: Containing a History of the Corporation and Test Acts; and Shewing the Impolicy, as well as Injustice, of Refusing to Repeal the Penal Statutes which affect the Protestant Dissenters, but of Abrogating them in Relation to the Roman Catholics.* (1821)

An Appeal to the Candor, Magnanimity, and Justice of those in Power, to relieve from Severe and Opprobrious Severities and Penalties, a Great Number of their Fellow Subjects, who will give every Security and Testimony of their Fidelity and Attachment to the Present Establishment, which does not Oblige them to Violate the Rights of Conscience (1787)

ASHDOWNE, WILLIAM, *A Letter to the Author of a Letter to the Bishops, on the Application of the Dissenters for a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (Canterbury, 1790?)

ASPLAND, ROBERT, *The Fall of Eminent Men in Critical Periods a National Calamity. A Sermon Preached at the Gravel-Pit Meeting, Hackney, on Sunday, September 21, 1806; on Occasion of the Recent Death of the Rt. Hon. Charles James Fox* (1806)

BARBAULD, ANNA LETITIA, *An Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (3rd edn, 1790)

BELSHAM, THOMAS, *A Plea for the Catholic Claims; A Sermon, Preached at the Chapel in Essex Street, March 10, 1813. Being the Day Appointed for a General Fast* (1813)

BELSHAM, WILLIAM, *Observations on the Test Laws, in Reply to "A Review of the Case of the Protestant Dissenters"* (1791)

BERINGTON, JOSEPH, *An Address to the Protestant Dissenters who have Lately Petitioned for a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (Birmingham, 1787)

----- *An Address to the Protestant Dissenters. Containing a Letter from Dr. Priestley to the Author* (2nd edn., Birmingham, 1787)

----- *The Rights of Dissenters from the Established Church, in Relation, Principally, to English Catholics* (Birmingham, 1789)

BINGHAM, THOMAS, *An Appeal to Scripture, Justice & Reason, in Reply to the Unfounded Charges Brought against Protestant Dissenters, in a Sermon Preached by Dr. Goddard, in the Parish Church of Andover, on the 7th of November, 1819* (Southampton, 1819)

Bishop Hoadly's Refutation of Bishop Sherlock's arguments against a Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts: where the Justice and Reasonableness of such a Repeal are Clearly Evinc'd (1787)

Bishop Sherlock's Arguments against a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts: Wherein most of the Pleas Advanced in a Paper now Circulating, Styled, The Case of Protestant Dissenters, &c. Are discussed. With a Dedication to the Right Honourable Wm. Pitt (1787)

The Black Coats; or, Priestcraft Detected. Being Remarks on Mr. Thorp's Assize Sermon, at St. Nicholas' Church, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, On Sunday, the 2d of August, 1818, from the Examiner. With Extracts from Various Sermons, and Other Political Works, of Clergymen of the Establishment; Demonstrating a Persecuting Spirit of Unchristian Hostility to Christian Dissenters of all Classes (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1818)

BLOUNT, EDWARD, *Corporation and Test Acts* (1828)

BOGUE, DAVID, *Reasons for Seeking A Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, Submitted to the Consideration of the Candid and Impartial. By a Dissenter* (1790)

BOWRING, JOHN, *A Letter to the Right Hon. George Canning, on the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1827)

BRADBERRY, DAVID, *A Letter to Edward Jeffries, Esq., Chairman of the Committee, Appointed by the Deputies of the Three Denominations of Protestant Dissenters, to Carry into Effect a Resolution... to Apply to Parliament for a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, so far as they Concern Protestant Dissenters* (1789)

BRADLEY, RICHARD BEADON, *A Letter to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, on the Proposed Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts* (1828)

BRISTOW, WILLIAM, *Cursory Reflections on the Policy, Justice, and Expediency, of Repealing the Test and Corporation Acts, Addressed to the Nation* (1790)

BURN, EDWARD, *A Word for My King, My Country, and My God; being the Substance of a Discourse Lately Addressed to the Congregation of St Mary's, Birmingham* (6th edn., Birmingham, 1819)

Caricature Anticipations and Enlargements; Occasioned by a Late Pious Proclamation; also by Two Celebrated Speeches in Parliament Relative to a Repeal of the Test Act; the One by Lord North, the Other by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. With Explanatory Notes, Suitable Illustrations, Anecdotes, &c. (1787)

The Case of the Protestant Dissenters, with Reference to the Test and Corporation Acts (1787)

The Case of the Protestant Dissenters, with Reference to the Test and Corporation Acts (1789)

The Case of the Protestant Dissenters, in Relation to the Laws by which the Sacramental Test is Imposed (London?, 1789)

The Case of the Protestant Dissenters, in Relation to the Laws by which the Sacramental Test is Imposed (London?, 1790)

CASSAN, STEPHEN HYDE, *Considerations on the Danger of any Legislative Alteration Respecting the Corporation and Test Acts; and of any Concession to Dissenters or Papists. To which are Appended some Remarks on the Reformation, and on the Restoration of the Church and Monarchy, after the Overthrow of Both by Dissenters: Explanatory of the Constitution of the Church, and the Unjustifiableness of Separation from it* (1828)

CATLOW, SAMUEL, *An Address to the Dissenters, on the State of their Political and Civil Liberty, as Subjects of Great Britain* (Bradford, 1788)

[A CHURCHMAN], *Some Strictures on a Late Publication, Entitled "Reasons for Seeking a Repeal of the Test Acts". By a Dissenter* (1791)

A Collection of the Resolutions Passed at the Meetings of the Clergy of the Church of England, of the Counties, Corporations, Cities, and Towns, and of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; Assembled to Take into Consideration the Late Application of the Dissenters to Parliament, for the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts (1790)

COOPER, ROBERT JERMYN, *A Letter to... Lord John Russell on his Speech for the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts; in which the Principle of the Test Laws is Defended and the Proposed Alteration of the Existing Statutes is Considered* (1828, 2nd edn., 1828)

COOPER, THOMAS, *To the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London?, 1790)

[A COUNTRY FREEHOLDER], *The Danger of Repealing the Test-Act: in a Letter to a Member of Parliament, from a Country Freeholder* (1790)

CROFT, GEORGE, *The Test Laws Defended. A Sermon, Preached at St Philip's Church in Birmingham, On Sunday, January 3rd, 1790. With a Preface Containing Remarks on Dr. Price's Revolution Sermon* (Birmingham, 1790)

Cursory Reflections, on the Present Intended Repeal of the Test Act. Addressed to the Members of a Certain Meeting, Friends to the Established Church. By a Member of the Same Church (1790)

Cursory Remarks on the Reverend Dr. Priestley's Letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer: Containing Hints, Humbly Offered in Favour of the Establishment, and Opposed to the Principles Contained in that Publication; in a Letter addressed to the Doctor, by a Layman (1787)

CURWEN, SPEDDING, *Intolerance Deprecated. A Lecture, Delivered at Zion Chapel, Frome, on Thursday Evening, March 12, 1829* (1829)

The Debate in the House of Commons, on Tuesday, the 2d March, 1790, on the Motion of Mr. Fox, for a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts; in which the Arguments of the Different Speakers are given with Correctness and Impartiality (1790)

Debate on the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Act [sic], in the House of Commons, March 28th, 1787 (1787)

The Debate on the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, in the House of Commons, May the 8th, 1789 (1789)

DISNEY, JOHN, *An Address to the Bishops, upon the Subject of a Late Letter from One of their Lordships to Certain Clergy in his Diocese. With the Letter Prefixed* (1790)

----- *An Arranged Catalogue of the Several Publications Which Have Appeared, Relating to the Enlargement of the Toleration of Protestant-Dissenting Ministers; and the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts: With Reference to the Agitation of Those Questions in Parliament, from the Year M.DCC.LXXII, to M.DCC.XC, Inclusive* (1790)

The Dispute Adjusted About the Proper Time of Applying for a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts: By Shewing, that No Time is Proper (Oxford, 1790)

[A DISSENTER], *To the Printer of the Manchester Chronicle* (Manchester?, 1790?)

ENGLEFIELD, HARRY, *A Letter to the Author of the Review of the Case of the Protestant Dissenters; with a Short Address to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of St David's* (1790)

An Essay on the Origin, Character and Views of the Protestant Dissenters (Oxford, 1790)

EVANS, JOHN, *Complete Religious Liberty Vindicated. A Letter to a Friend in the Country, Respecting the Petition for Abolition of all Penal Statutes in Matters of Religion, Unanimously Voted by the Dissenting Ministers of London and Westminster, at Red-Cross-Street Library, February 2, 1813; with Remarks on the Extraordinary Correspondence Between the Rev. Joseph Ivimey, and J. Butterworth, Esq. M.P. for Coventry* (2nd edn., 1813)

EVANS, WILLIAM DAVID, *Letters on the Legal Disabilities of Roman Catholics and Dissenters; and on the Dangers Apprehended from their Removal* (1813)

Extracts from Books, and Other Small Pieces; in Favour of Religious Liberty, and the Rights of Dissenters. Number One (Birmingham, 1790)

Extracts from Books, and Other Small Pieces; in Favour of Religious Liberty, and the Rights of Dissenters. Number Two (Birmingham, 1790)

Facts, Submitted to the Consideration of the Friends to Civil and Religious Liberty, But More Particularly Addressed to the Protestant Dissenters of England and Wales; Containing Bishop Horsley's Extraordinary Letter to the Clergy of his Diocese; and the Substance of Mr Fox's Speech on the Repeal of the Test Laws (1789)

FAVELL, SAMUEL, *A Speech upon the Corporation and Test Acts, Delivered in the Court of Common Council, on Wednesday, the 9th of May, by Mr. Favell: with an Appendix, Containing Extracts from Mr. Serjeant Heywood's Pamphlet* (1827)

FIRTH, WILLIAM, *A Letter to the Right Rev. Henry Bathurst, D. D. Lord Bishop of Norwich: On the Tendency of Some of his Public Opinions, and the Benefits Likely to Accrue to the Establishment*

in Church and State, by the Repeal of all the Disabling Statutes Against Roman Catholics and Protestant Dissenters, and the Lancastrian system of education (1813)

FLETCHER, JOSEPH, *The Funeral Sermon, on the Death of the Rev. W. Thorp, Delivered at Castle Green Chapel, Bristol, on Lord's Day Morning, May 26, 1833. Including a Memoir of Mr. Thorp, and The Letters Addressed by him to his Church, During the Last Month of his Life (1833)*

FLETCHER, SAMUEL, *To Thomas Plumbe, Esq; Chairman of the Bolton Committee, February 18th 1790 (Manchester?, 1790)*

FOWNES, JOSEPH, *An Enquiry into the Principles of Toleration, the Degree by which they are Admitted by our Laws, and the Reasonableness of the Late Application made by the Dissenters to Parliament for an Enlargement of their Religious Liberties (3rd edn., Shrewsbury, 1790)*

GEDDES, ALEXANDER, *Letter to a Member of Parliament, on the Case of the Protestant Dissenters; and the Expediency of a General Repeal of all Penal Statutes that regard Religious Opinions (1787)*

At a General Meeting of the Deputies of the Three Denominations of Dissenters, held at Dr. Williams's Library, Red Cross Street, London, on Friday the 5th of January, 1787, to Consider of an Application to Parliament, for the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts. Edward Jeffries, Esq; in the chair (London?, 1787)

At a General Meeting of the Deputies at Dr Williams's Library, Red Cross Street, on Friday 4th May 1787 (London?, 1787)

GODDARD, WILLIAM STANLEY, *On the Use and Abuse of Religious and Civil Liberty. A Sermon, Preached in the Parish Church of Andover, Hants, on Sunday, November 7, 1819 (Andover, 1819)*

[HAMDEN], *Two Letters on the Test Act, Signed Hamden. Printed in the Gazetteer of Jan 20th and March 1st, 1790. The First Occasioned by the University of Cambridge Thanking the Minister for his Opposition to the Repeal of the Test Act Last Year (1790)*

HAMILTON, RICHARD WINTER, *The Dissenters of England and Catholic Emancipation (1828)*

HAWTREY, CHARLES, *A Letter to Earl Stanhope, on the Subject of the Test, as Objected to in a Pamphlet Recommended by His Lordship (Oxford, 1789)*

HEYWOOD, SAMUEL, *High Church Politics: Being a Seasonable Appeal to the Friends of the British Constitution, Against the Practices and Principles of High Churchman, as Exemplified in the Late Opposition to the Repeal of the Test Laws, and in the Riots at Birmingham (1792)*

----- *The Right of Protestant Dissenters to a Compleat Toleration Asserted; or an Essay, Containing a Historical View of their Situation under the Laws Imposing the Sacramental Test on Persons Admitted to Office; and Shewing the Imposition of that Test to be Unjust with Respect to the Protestant Dissenters of England and the Natives of North Britain, as well as Inexpedient; with Answer to the Objection Urged from the Act of Union with Scotland; and Proofs that the Present is the Proper Time for Applying to Parliament for the Necessary Redress (1787)*

----- *The Right of Protestant Dissenters to a Compleat Toleration Asserted; Containing an Historical Account of the Test Laws, And Shewing the Injustice, Inexpediency, and Folly of the Sacramental Test, as Now Imposed, with Respect to Protestant Dissenters; with an Answer to the Objection from the Act of Union with Scotland (1789)*

A History of the Test Act: In Which the Mistakes in some Late Writings Against it are Rectified, and the Importance of it to the Church Explained (1790)

Hints Respectfully Addressed to the Members of the House of Commons, on the Subject of the Test Laws, and Recommended to the Candid Attention of Every Member of the Church of England (1790?)

[HOLLIS], *To the Editor of the Gazetteer* (1790)

HORSLEY, SAMUEL, *The Charges of Samuel Horsley, LL.D F.R.S. F.A.S. Late Lord Bishop of St. Asaph, Delivered at his Several Visitations of the Dioceses of St. David's, Rochester, and St. Asaph, &c.* (1830)

----- *A Review of the Case of the Protestant Dissenters; with Reference to the Corporation and Test Acts, in Which the Reasons Alleged by the Non-conformists for the Repeal of those Laws, are Examined under the Three General Heads, to which they are Reducible, of Grounds of Claim, Religious Motives, and Political Considerations, and Shewn to Fail in Each Branch* (1790)

[HUDSON], *Observations on the Origin and Effects of the Test Act. With Some Hints for the Consideration of the Clergy. By a Dissenter* (1790)

HUNTER, WILLIAM, *A Letter to Dr. Priestley, F.R.S. &c. in Answer to his Letter to the Right Hon. William Pitt, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and First Lord of the Treasury, on the Subject of the Repeal of the Test-Act, and the Abolition of Subscription, &c.* (1787)

[I.P.K.], *The Opposers of Catholic Emancipation Defended: From the Charge of Injustice, Persecution, and Uncharitableness, and the True Position of a Protestant State in Reference to the Papists Briefly Stated. In Two Letters to a Friend, not Originally Intended for Publication* (1829)

IVIMEY, JOSEPH, *Dr. Williams's Library, and the Debate on the Roman Catholic Claims: a Letter Addressed to the Trinitarian Members of the General Body of Dissenting Ministers of the Three Denominations, on the Above Subject* (1829)

----- *Neutrality the Proper Ground for Protestant Dissenters Respecting the Roman Catholic Claims; Being a Vindication of the Author's Conduct, at Two Meetings of the General Body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers, of the Three Denominations, in London and its Vicinity, Held at the Library, Redcross Street, the 2nd of February & the 2nd of March, 1813. Containing a Reply to the Remarks of the Rev. John Evans M.A. on what he has Designated "An Extraordinary Correspondence", in Six Letters to a Friend* (1813)

----- *The Roman Catholic Claims a Question not of Religious Liberty, but of Political Expediency: An Address to the Protestant Dissenters of Great Britain, Assigning Reasons Why, (In Reference to that Subject), They Should Maintain the Most Strict Neutrality* (1828)

----- *The Supremacy of the Pope Contrary to Scripture, and Dangerous to the Safety of Protestant Governments. An Address to Protestant Dissenters, on the Present State of the Roman Catholics* (1819)

JONES, WILLIAM, *One Penny-Worth of Truth, from Thomas Bull to his Brother John* ([1st edn.], London?, 1792?)

----- *One Penny-Worth of Truth, from Thomas Bull to his Brother John* ([2nd end.], London?, 1792?)

Jack and Martin: a Poetical Dialogue, on the Proposed Repeal of the Test Act. To which is Added (by the Same Author) a Pastoral Song, on his Majesty's Late Happy Recovery (Hereford, 1790)

LEIFCHILD, JOHN, *A Christian Antidote to Unreasonable Fears at the Present Crisis, in Reply to the Second Printed Speech of the Rev. W. Thorp, against Catholic Emancipation* (1829)

MARTIN, JOHN, *A Speech on the Repeal of Such Parts of the Test and Corporation Acts as Affect Conscientious Dissenters: Intended to have been Delivered before the General Body of Dissenting Ministers at the Library in Red Cross Street, December 22, 1789* (1790)

At a Meeting of the Committee of the Midland District, held at the Flying Horse Inn, in Nottingham, on Thursday June 17, 1790 (Nottingham?, 1790)

At a Meeting of the Deputies and Delegates from the Protestant Dissenters of England and Wales, Appointed to Obtain the Repeal of the Test-Laws; at the King's-Head Tavern, in the Poultry, London, on the 29th of May, 1793 (1793)

At a Meeting of Protestant Dissenters, of different Denominations, in the Town and Neighbourhood of Bolton, on the 17th of December 1789, the Following Resolutions were Unanimously Agreed to (Bolton?, 1789)

At a Meeting of the Protestant Dissenters of the Several Denominations of the Western and Southern Parts of the County of Somerset (Taunton, 1790)

At a Meeting of Protestant Dissenters of the Southern Part of the County of Bucks, held by Special Notice at the Red Lion, in the Town of Chesham, on Tuesday the 9th of February, 1790. Mr. John Anthony, in the Chair (Chesham?, 1790)

[A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND, COMMONLY CALLED A METHODIST], *A Word to Discontented Dissenters, especially the Worcester Association* (Worcester?, 1790)

MORRES, ROBERT, *Reflections on the Claims of Protestant and Popish Dissenters, Especially of the Latter, to an Equality in Civil Privileges with the Members of the Established Church* (Salisbury, 1824)

The Necessity of the Corporation and Test Acts Maintained, in a Brief Review of the "Statement of the Case of the Protestant Dissenters" (1828)

[NO REVEREND DISSENTER], *A Letter to the Reverend John Martin. Occasioned by his Intended Speech on the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts* (1790)

Observations Occasioned by the Late Decision in Parliament, in Favour of the Test Laws: Being a Sermon Preached in a Country Chapel, on the 7th of March, 1790 (Manchester, 1790)

ORME, WILLIAM, *A Letter to the Right Honourable Lord Holland, Occasioned by the Petition from the General Body of Dissenting Ministers of London, for the Relief of the Roman Catholic, with Strictures on a Petition of an Opposite Nature, from some Dissenting Ministers; and other Remarks Occasioned by Recent Circumstances. By a Member of the General Body* (1829)

PALMER, SAMUEL, *A Vindication of the Modern Dissenters against the Aspersions of the Rev. William Hawkins, M.A. in his Bampton-Lectures, and the Right Reverend Author of A Review of the Case of the Protestant Dissenters, with Reference to the Corporation and Test-Acts* (1790)

PARRY, WILLIAM, *Thoughts on such Penal Religious Statutes as Affect the Protestant Dissenters; Most Respectfully Submitted to the Consideration of the Honourable Promoters of the Bill in Favour of Protesting Roman Catholics* (1791)

PEARCE, SAMUEL, *The Oppressive, Unjust, and Prophane Nature, and Tendency of the Corporation and Test Acts, Exposed, in a Sermon, Preached before the Congregation of Protestant Dissenters, Meeting in Cannon-Street, Birmingham, February 21, 1790* (Birmingham, 1790)

PETRE, ROBERT EDWARD, *A Letter from the Right Honourable Lord Petre, to the Right Reverend Doctor Horsley, Bishop of St David's* (1790)

[PHILAETHES], *Remarks on Dr. Priestley's Letter to the Right Honourable Mr. Pitt; in a Second Address to the Candidates for Orders, in both Universities* (1787)

PRIESTLEY, JOSEPH, *A Letter to the Right Honourable William Pitt, First Lord of the Treasury, and Chancellor of the Exchequer; on the Subjects of Toleration and Church Establishments; Occasioned by his Speech against the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, on Wednesday the 28th of March, 1787* (1787)

----- *Familiar Letters, Addressed to the Inhabitants of Birmingham, in Refutation of Several Charges, Advanced Against the Dissenters, by the Rev. Mr. Madan, Rector of St Philip's, in his Sermon, Entitled, "The Principle Claims of the Dissenters Considered", Preached at St Philip's Church, on Sunday, February 14, 1790. Part I* (2nd edn., Birmingham, 1790)

----- *Familiar Letters, Addressed to the Inhabitants of Birmingham, in Refutation of Several Charges, Advanced Against the Dissenters, by the Rev. Mr. Madan, Rector of St Philip's, in his Sermon, Entitled, "The Principle Claims of the Dissenters Considered", Preached at St Philip's Church, on Sunday, February 14, 1790. Part III* (2nd edn., Birmingham, 1790)

----- *Familiar Letters, Addressed to the Inhabitants of Birmingham, in Refutation of Several Charges, Advanced Against the Dissenters, by the Rev. Mr. Madan, Rector of St Philip's, in his Sermon, Entitled, "The Principle Claims of the Dissenters Considered", Preached at St Philip's Church, on Sunday, February 14, 1790. Part IV* (2nd edn., Birmingham, 1790)

----- , *The Importance and Extent of Free Inquiry in Matters of Religion: A Sermon, Preached Before the Congregations of the Old and New Meeting of Protestant Dissenters in Birmingham. November 5, 1785* (Birmingham, 1785)

The Printer of Aris's Birmingham Gazette not being able Last Week to Insert Various Letters and Remarks upon the Test and Corporation Acts, Several of his Readers among the Protestant Dissenters have Directed the Following to be Printed on a Separate Half Sheet, which is given Gratis with each of this Day's Gazette (Birmingham, 1790)

PRITCHARD, GEORGE, *Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Rev. Joseph Ivimey, Late Pastor of the Church in Eagle Street, London; and Twenty Years Gratuitous Secretary to the Baptist Irish Society* (1835)

A Remonstrance with the Rev. Mr. Clayton, on his Sermon on the Duty of Christians to Civil Magistrates; Occasioned by the Riots at Birmingham: and on his Prefixed Address to the Public, Intended to Remove the Reproach Lately Fallen on Protestant Dissenters (1791)

Report on the Speeches and Proceedings at a Dinner to Commemorate the Abolition of the Sacramental Test, on Wednesday the Eighteenth Day of June, 1828, at Freemasons' Hall: H.R.H. the Duke of Sussex in the Chair, William Smith, Esq. M.P. Deputy Chairman. Taken in Shorthand by Mr. Gurney (1828)

RIPPINGHAM, JOHN, *A Letter to the King, on the State of the Established Church of England* (1808)

ROBINSON, ROBERT, *A Discourse on Sacramental Tests. Delivered at Cambridge Thursday, October 30th, 1788, at a General Meeting of the Deputies of the Congregations of Protestant Dissenters in the County of Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1788)

SHARP, RICHARD, *A Letter to the Public Meeting of the Friends to the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, at the London Tavern, on February the 13th, 1790, from a Lay Dissenter* (1790)

SHEBBEARE, JOHN, *An essay on the origin, progress and establishment of national society; in which the principles of government, ... contained in Dr. Price's Observations, &c. are fairly examined and fully refuted: together with a justification of the legislature, in reducing America to obedience by force. To which is added an appendix on ... Mr. Burke's ... speech of the 22d of March, 1775* (1776)

Sir, I Beg Leave to Submit to your Consideration the Following Extracts from a Pamphlet, entitled, "The Right of Protestant Dissenters to a Compleat Toleration Asserted, &c.", by a Layman (Leeds, 1790)

SMITH, JOSEPH, *Some Remarks on the Resolutions, Which were Formed at a Meeting of the Archdeaconry of Chester, Held at the City of Chester, on Monday the 15th Day of February, 1790; with some Observations on the Late Arguments of M. Pitt, and the Conduct of Mr. Burke, Relative to a Repeal of the Test Act* (Liverpool, 1790)

SMITH, SYDNEY, *A Sermon Preached at the Temple upon the Conduct to be Observed by the Established Church Towards Catholics and other Dissenters* (1807)

[SOCIA], *A Letter to a Protestant Dissent, in Answer to the Question, "Shall the Dissenters Join with the Roman Catholics in their Petitions to Parliament?"* (4th edn., 1812)

The Speech of Monsr Rabaud de Saint Etienne, a Protestant Minister, in the National Assembly of France, on Thursday, the 27th of August, 1789 (London?, 1789)

Statement of the Case of the Protestant Dissenters under the Corporation and Test Acts, Published by the United Committee, Appointed to Conduct their Application for Relief (1827)

Statement of the Case of the Protestant Dissenters under the Corporation and Test Acts, Published by the United Committee, Appointed to Conduct their Application for Relief (3rd edn., 1827)

TAYLOR, EDGAR, *A Letter to Sir Thomas D. Acland, Bart. M.P. on the Repeal of the Sacramental Test, and the Imposition of a New Test or Oath* (1828)

THORP, WILLIAM, *Catholic Emancipation: the Substance of a Speech, Intended to have been Delivered at a Meeting Convened at the Guildhall, in the City of Bristol* (1813)

----- *England's Liberties Defended. The Substance of a Second Speech, after an Interval of Sixteen Years, Intended to have been Delivered at a Meeting convened in Queen-Square, in the City of Bristol, for the Purpose of Taking into Consideration the Expediency of Presenting a Petition to Parliament against the Claims of the Roman Catholics* (Bristol, 1829)

TOULMIN, JOSHUA, *A Letter to the Bishops, on the Application of the Protestant Dissenters, to Parliament, for a Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts. Including Strictures on some Passages in the Bishop of Gloucester's Sermon, on January 30, 1788* (1789)

WAIT, WILLIAM, *The Present Crisis, or, the Protestant Religion in Danger: Containing Strictures on Popery and Dissent, with a View to Display the Excellence, and Promote the Welfare, of the Established Church of Great Britain and Ireland, Respectfully Submitted to the King, Lords, and Commons* (1829)

WAKEFIELD, GILBERT, *An Address to the Inhabitants of Nottingham, Occasioned by a Letter Lately Sent to the Mayor, and Some Other Members of the Corporation of that Town. With an Appendix, on the Subject of the Test Laws* (1789)

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