The Mind of Victorian Orthodoxy: Anglican Responses to “Essays and Reviews,” 1860–1864

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The composite volume entitled Essays and Reviews, published in 1860, became the center of one of the major religious controversies of Victorian England—a crisis of faith contemporary with that provoked by Darwin’s Origin of Species but more central to the religious mind.1 Essays and Reviews was at once the culmination and the final act of the Broad Church movement. The volume itself was modest in its pretensions and varied in the character and quality of its seven essays. The first, by Frederick Temple, was a warmed-over sermon urging the free study of the Bible. Rowland Williams wrote a provocative essay on Bunsen, denying the predictive character of Old Testament prophecies. Baden Powell flatly denied the possibility of miracles. H. B. Wilson gave the widest possible latitude to subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles and questioned the eternity of damnation. C. W. Goodwin (the only layman among the Essayists) wrote a critique of the attempted “harmonies” between Genesis and geology. Mark Pattison wrote a learned and cold historical study of the evidential theologians of the eighteenth century (perhaps the only essay of lasting value). The volume was capped by Benjamin Jowett’s tremendous though wayward essay “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” in which he urged that the Bible be read “like any other book” and made an impassioned plea for freedom of scholarship.2 Little of all this was original, though it was new to most Englishmen. It was not the cutting edge of biblical scholarship; rather, it was the last gasp of an outmoded Coleridgianism, contributing little except a demand that somebody—somebody else—engage in serious biblical criticism. But this work touched off a controversy which lasted four years and mobilized the resources of both church and state. Outwardly, the conflict ended inconclusively, with the acquittal of Williams and Wilson by the courts and the condemnation of the volume by the clergy in Convocation. At a deeper level, it marked the

1. The Origin of Species was published 24 November 1859; Essays and Reviews in February 1860. The debates overlapped, and the reproach of Darwinism was often hurled against the Essayists, but incidentally and in a manner which indicated that biblical criticism and not evolution was the main concern.

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exhaustion both of the Broad Church and of Anglican orthodoxy and the commencement of an era of religious doubt.

Historians have tended to study this controversy from the standpoint of the Essayists. Beginning with Basil Willey's stimulating but wrongheaded essay in 1956, we have been told how these liberal victims of persecution were ultimately vindicated by the progress of theology.3 It might be more useful now for historians to pay some attention to the case of the other side, those who denounced Essays and Reviews from the standpoint of orthodoxy within the Church of England. They may well have been less attractive; they may even have been wrong; but they were certainly more numerous and more representative of the mind of the church. This essay, then, is an inquiry into the mind of Victorian orthodoxy.

It is, indeed, a mind that we are dealing with. The orthodox opponents of Essays and Reviews may seem obscurantist in their resistance to the higher criticism of the Bible; but an analysis of their writings reveals an ultimate reliance on a rigidly rational line of argument, resting on eighteenth-century evidential apologetics. An Anglican scholasticism (as we may call it) had produced a consistent rationalistic case for the acceptance of the Christian revelation. It was only after this rationalism had laid the intellectual foundations for belief that Anglican orthodoxy invoked the distinctively Victorian demand for certainty of faith. This position was shared by both major parties in the Church of England—Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics—who transcended their differences in denouncing the Broad Church minority. They were, after all, the products of a common university education, old-fashioned but not unsophisticated; and their argumentation revealed the strength and the weakness of this intellectual heritage.

What is most striking about the approximately 140 replies to Essays and Reviews is the consistency of their fundamental line of argument.4 To be sure, there were areas of disagreement. High Churchmen blamed the heresy of the Essayists on a reaction against the excesses of Evangelical Calvinism; low Churchmen blamed it on a reaction against the Romanizing tendencies of the Oxford Movement.5 The High Church party stressed ecclesiastical authority;

4. Nearly one hundred responses are listed under Essays and Reviews in the British Museum General Catalogue of Printed Books, and another thirty under the several Essayists. A further dozen or so were added at the Bodleian Library and Pusey House, Oxford.
Evangelicals emphasized the Atonement as the "central doctrine" of Christianity. There was no agreement on which of the various "harmonies" between Genesis and geology should be accepted, and some writers felt free to interpret Genesis 1 poetically. There was no agreed-upon definition of the nature and limits of the inspiration of the Bible, nor was there a consensus as to whether it should be believed literally. Notwithstanding all this, however, there was a clear pattern to the replies. Indeed, they were so consistent, that it is possible to draw up a composite reply to the Essays, leaving only a few blanks to be filled in for the individual idiosyncrasies or party biases of the authors. What follows is a sketch of this composite reply.

The reply would begin with an ad hominem argument against the Essayists personally, criticizing them in their capacity as clergymen who retained their positions in the established church while attacking its doctrines. Their work never would have achieved such notoriety had they not been clergymen. The "false position" of the Essayists, the morality of their behavior, was perceived as more important than the substantial issues which they raised. "The question before us concerns not the truth of the new doctrines but the honesty of the writers." They should have left the church if they could not accept its standards; and the church ought to purge itself of complicity by condemning them. As Carlyle put it, the sentry who deserts his post should be shot. Related to this was an implication of conspiracy, the assertion that all the Essayists were jointly responsible for the statements of every one of them.

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Evangelica (Dublin, 1861), p. 17, blaming the union of "Tractarianism and Rationalism (that two-headed hydra which of late years has crept forth from Oxford)." The author of The Right Way, and a way which seemeth right, Protestant Reformation Society Tract 15 (London, 1861), p. 17, noted that "The Essayist Dr. Williams is the child of the Tractarian Dr. Newman." Even Bishop John Jackson of Lincoln in his 1861 Charge (London, 1861), p. 42, blamed the High Church, which "tended to substitute authority for evidence. . . ."

Rev. John Cumming, Popular Lectures on "The Essays and Reviews" (London, 1861), p. 120.

G. Rorison, "The Creative Week," in Replies to "Essays and Reviews" (Oxford, 1862), p. 324. Replies, sponsored by Bishop Wilberforce, was the second most prestigious collection of responses; Rorison was a Scottish Episcopal priest. For a treatment of Genesis 1 as "parable," see Edgar Huxtable, "The Sacred Record of Creation Vindicated and Explained," in Faith and Peace (London, 1867), p. 74, a High Church collection of tracts organized by Archdeacon Denison, originally published in 1861.


Attributed in Evelyn Abbott and Lewis Campbell, The Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett, 2 vols. (New York, 1897), 1: 294. The military metaphor was used by orthodox controversialists, for example, "An Officer in the Army who should pursue a similar line of action, would be dismissed the Service,—or worse." John William Burgon, Inspiration and Interpretation (Oxford, 1861), p. lxx. See also Cumming, Popular Lectures, p. 2.

After thus demonstrating that the Essayists were not entitled to be heard, the replies then proceeded to argue against them. It was first pointed out that arguments of the Essayists were not new; they were warmed-over repetitions of German criticism, itself derived from the deism of the eighteenth century which had led to revolution and infidelity. The deists had been refuted in their own day by the great Anglican apologists led by Butler and Paley. The German critics were confused, unintelligible, and mutually contradictory; furthermore, the tide of German thought had shifted, and recent conservative scholars had refuted the critics. The name of Hengstenberg was cited as an example with such frequency that F. D. Maurice was driven to ask, “Is Hengstenberg then infallible more than other German doctors?”11 Since the German critics had been contradicted by other Germans, their arguments might be dismissed.

The replies to Essays and Reviews also emphasized the danger posed by biblical criticism. Questioning the accuracy of the Bible might lead to a weakening of faith, to doubt (which was regarded as a state of misery), to Socinianism, and finally to unbelief.12 Atheists, it was pointed out, were overjoyed that some of the clergy had given such aid to their cause. There was a nervous insistence that the faith of the multitudes must not be shaken, that the raising of doubts would lead to dangerous social as well as spiritual consequences.

Only after such points had been made did the replies to Essays and Reviews turn to the actual substance of the work. Many of the replies dealt with the Essays seriatim, taking up each point raised (or each error made) by each Essayist. There was no point made by the Essayists to which there was not a reply, usually a standard reply; but such arguments are as impossible to summarize as they are tedious to read. Other replies concentrated on some leading thought seen as pervading the Essays as a whole. The two most common lines of argument should be examined.

The first concerned an idea common to most of the Essayists (and ultimately derived from Coleridge), that divine inspiration applied only to those parts of scripture which conveyed a religious message, and that there was—in Rowland Williams’s words—a “verifying faculty” in the mind which could distinguish this message from “narratives inherently incredible, or precepts evidently wrong.”13 His fellow Essayist Wilson phrased it more

tersely. "The Word of God is contained in Scripture, whence it does not follow that it is co-extensive with it." The religious mind must discriminate "the bright centre of spiritual truth" from the human elements in the Bible in which it is embedded, with the aid of scholarly criticism but ultimately relying on its innate "verifying faculty." 14 The opponents of Essays and Reviews were quick to perceive this denial of plenary inspiration as opening the door to unbridled speculation and the abandonment of all objective standards of doctrine. If the entire Bible was not equally inspired, where was one to stop in getting rid of its human elements? What would be left?

This was recognized as a central question and was addressed by nearly all of the anti-Essayists. But it was a difficult question to deal with in a clear and comprehensible manner, partly because of the diffuseness and vagueness of Essayists such as Williams and Wilson, and partly because the defenders of orthodoxy did not agree among themselves about the definition of inspiration—whether it was mechanical or dynamic, whether it was an inspiration of supervision only or an inspiration extending, in Dean Burgon's memorable phrase, to every word, every syllable, every letter, every jot, and every tittle. 15

It is a curious fact that the debate over Essays and Reviews, which ultimately revolved around the nature of the divine inspiration of the Bible, made no significant contribution toward the resolution of that question. Harold Browne, who wrote the most important reply dealing with this subject, thought that "definite theories of inspiration" were positively "dangerous." 16

The question of inspiration and the "verifying faculty" thus failed to gain the centrality in the debate which it ought to have had until 1862, when Fitzjames Stephen, counsel for Williams and Wilson in their heresy trial, specifically upheld the idea that the Bible was not itself the Word of God, but that the Word of God was contained in the Bible. 17 This drew attention away from the dubious concept of inspiration and towards the phrase "Word of God," a phrase to which the clergy were devotedly attached and which was usually used as a synonym for "the Bible." A London Evangelical clergyman,

15. Burgon, Inspiration and Interpretation, pp. 76, 94.
16. Harold Browne, "Innovation," Aids to Faith (New York, 1862), p. 349. Aids to Faith was the most important and quasi-official of the composite replies. Samuel Wilberforce was similarly cautious. "Holy scripture has never laid down any theory of inspiration; the Church has never propounded one; and we think sufficient reasons for this reticence." "Essays and Reviews," Quarterly Review 109 (January 1861): 304. Nonetheless, many lesser figures provided or assumed definitions of inspiration, whether "verbal" or merely "plenary."
17. James Fitzjames Stephen, Defence of the Rev. Rowland Williams, D.D. in the Arches Court of Canterbury (London, 1862). A similar point was made about the same time by Bishop Colenso, which added to the controversy.
Alexander McCaul, picked up this phrase and asserted that the central issue was upholding the Bible as being, not merely containing, the Word of God.  

This was something ordinary clergy could understand; and this phraseology was inserted as one of the two main points of the Declaration signed in 1864 by a majority of the clergy.  

Paul Tillich has remarked that “if the Bible is called the Word of God, theological confusion is almost unavoidable.”  

For the Anglican clergy of 1864, however, it provided a useful simplification of the theological issue, avoiding the difficulties of a definite concept of inspiration and providing a common ground on which to join in condemning the “verifying faculty.”  

The other leading argument of Essays and Reviews which its orthodox opponents were unanimous in condemning was its attack on the accepted “evidences” of Christianity. The eighteenth-century Anglican apologists, especially Bishop Butler and Archdeacon Paley, had constructed an evidentiary theology which rested the case for Christianity on the arguments from miracles, the fulfillment of prophecies, and the correspondence of types and antitypes in the Old and New Testaments.  

The ablest orthodox controversialist of the 1860s, H. L. Mansel, thus summarized the evidences for or against the claims of the Christian faith:

- the genuineness and authenticity of the documents; the judgment and good faith of the writers; the testimony to the actual occurrence of prophecies and miracles, and their relation to the religious teaching with which they are connected; the

18. Alexander McCaul, Testimonies to the Divine Authority and Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, as taught by the Church of England, in reply to the statements of Mr. James Fitzjames Stephen (London, 1862). McCaul had anticipated the issue earlier in Rationalism and Deistic Infidelity (London, 1861), pp. 20–21, originally published in the Record, 7 January 1861.

19. “We, the undersigned Presbyters and Deacons in Holy Orders of the Church of England and Ireland, hold it to be our bounden duty to the Church and to the souls of men, to declare our firm belief that the Church of England and Ireland, in common with the whole Catholic Church, maintains without reserve or qualification the plenary Inspiration and Authority of the whole Canonical Scriptures as the Word of God, and further teaches, in the words of our Blessed Lord, that the ‘punishment’ of the ‘cursed,’ as the ‘life’ of the ‘righteous’ lasts for ever.”


William Paley (1743–1805), was archdeacon of Carlisle (1782), the author of Evidences of Christianity (1794) and Natural Theology (1802), and “the man whose memory Cambridge reveres” (An M.A. of Cambridge, A Reply to the “Essays and Reviews” [Cambridge, 1861], p. 28). Archbishop Whately of Dublin regarded Essays and Reviews as designed as an answer to his recent edition of Paley. Richard Whately, Danger from Within (London, 1861), p. 18.
character of the Teacher Himself. . .; those rites and ceremonies of the elder Law, so significant as typical of Christ, and so strange and meaningless without Him; those predictions of the promised Messiah. . .; this history of the rise and progress of Christianity, and its comparison with that of other religions; the ability or inability of human means to bring about the results which it actually accomplished; . . . the character of those by whom it was promulgated and received; the sufferings which attested the sincerity of their convictions . . .

These were the "external evidences" which had been denigrated by the Broad Church since Coleridge and which were explicitly attacked in *Essays and Reviews*: Powell had denied miracles; Williams had denied that prophecy was predictive; Jowett undermined the use of types and antitypes; Pattison had put the evidential theologians in their historical place.

There was a similar solidarity in defense of the evidential theology on the part of the anti-Essayists. Frequently it seemed that the greatest sin of the Essayists was not their questioning of the Bible or of doctrine but their attack on this specific form of defense of Christianity. The anti-Essayists spoke of the "evidences" as the "foundations" of the faith, and used language which implied that, if these "foundations" were shaken, the faith would be unable to stand. The "evidences" provided the clearest point of difference between the Essayists and their opponents. The evidential theology, asserted as necessary and sufficient, had become almost as much a part of orthodoxy as the articles of faith, employed so routinely as to constitute an Anglican scholasticism.

In some ways this fact is surprising. The evidential theology, very much the product of the eighteenth century, is strictly rational, indeed rationalistic—as rationalistic as the deism it was designed to combat. One might expect that it would be antithetical to the religious movements of the nineteenth century, whether Evangelical or Anglo-Catholic, which reasserted the nonrational forces motivating faith. Yet both parties accepted it. Indeed, the Evangelicals were particularly committed to the evidential apologetic, perhaps because they felt that their theology was otherwise dangerously subjective.

It seemed . . . to be required, in order that the evangelical revival of religious life might be gathered into the Church, and spread from her as a centre so as to have its permanency secured, that subjective faith should be showed to rest upon a morally certain basis of evidence, however incomprehensible to unrenewed reason the objects of faith themselves.

Because they regarded the intellectual foundations of belief in revelation as

23. The centrality of the "evidences" explains why Pattison's historical essay, which was not intrinsically controversial, was denounced with the others.
24. "Either the predictive character of Old Testament prophecy must be maintained or Christianity (as a Divine system) must be abandoned." *Another Gospel* Examined (London, 1861), p. 22.
secure, both Evangelicals and High Churchmen could venture into those more subjective regions in which they habitually disported themselves.

It is clear that a standard apologetic based on the eighteenth-century evidential theologians had been taught to aspiring clergy (and others) at the universities, where Butler and Paley were standard texts, and that it had been mastered and internalized by the students. In the Essays and Reviews controversy, this apologetic proved itself invulnerable against a Broad Church critique which convinced only a minority of the clergy. Let me now attempt to state systematically this orthodox apologetic, this Anglican scholasticism, the mind of the Church of England in the 1860s.

The orthodox apologetic assumed the traditional natural theology, common to medieval scholastics and deists, which had received its most ample formulation in Paley's Natural Theology. The existence of God was not the subject of debate; rather, the argument revolved around the question of a special revelation which went beyond natural theology. On this point Butler had labored to demonstrate not so much that the Christian revelation was true but that it was credible—or rather, that it was not antecedently incredible; that is, that the criticisms of such a revelation were subject to the same objections as had been raised against the arguments in favor of it. The sophisticated line of reasoning of Butler's Analogy of Religion, with its reliance on probability rather than proof and on affirmation by double negative (that is, revelation is no more improbable than the alternative), was matched in the nineteenth century only by Newman's Grammar of Assent; and its double negatives were potentially doubled-edged. Nonetheless, Butler had shown that Christianity was not incredible. The next step was to show that it was in fact true, a factual rather than a philosophical argument, relying on evidence. The proper evidences of a religion such as Christianity, Butler reasoned, were miracles and prophecies, which authenticated the message by showing the divine approval of the messenger. Although this was not a new approach, it was reserved for Paley's Evidences of Christianity to work out in its fullest perfection a demonstration that the miracles and prophecies cited in scripture were in fact historically true. Paley's reasoning rested on certain assumptions about the value of human testimony, under the conditions in which the Gospel witnesses operated, to provide evidence which, once their truthfulness was established, could be accepted as factually true. The Gospels being thus demonstrated to be genuine records of authentic facts, and the facts of miracles and fulfilled prophecies demonstrating the divine credentials of those who accomplished them, the message which they delivered must obviously be a divine message to be believed without further argument. The result of all this was a tight, complete, self-sufficient

scholastic argument for implicit belief in the Bible. It is best summed up by a writer who may be selected for his conventionality.

Butler, by his analogical reasoning, proved there is nothing incredible in Christianity; Paley, by his historical demonstration, established the reality of its history; and these combined should command, by the fulness of their proof, the assent of every reasonable mind to the truth of revelation.\(^{27}\)

“The assent of every reasonable mind”: this was a strictly rational argument, with a logic unchallengeable within its premises, a defense of revelation by an appeal to reason. The opponents of Essays and Reviews were neither obscurantists nor fideists; they were conscious of a reliance on reason which, in this case, served the interests of religion. This explains why they so frequently criticized the Essayists for being not merely “unscriptural” but also “unphilosophical.”\(^{28}\) But they carried this rational argument only up to a point, demonstrating that the message of the Bible was credible and valid. Once this was proven, they argued, reason had done its work; it had brought people to the portals of scripture, whose message was then simply to be accepted, without any further exercise of human reason.\(^{29}\) “Believing that the revelation which makes them known is from God, we receive them by faith, reason satisfying us of this, that there is nothing in them incredible.”\(^{30}\)

Nothing is more striking than the way in which an argument hitherto strictly rational turns into an argument from faith. The orthodox apologetic defended the approaches to the Bible but did not enter within it.\(^{31}\) The human mind, it was asserted, was capable of judging the credentials of a revelation but not of passing judgment on its contents.\(^{32}\) The contents were simply to be accepted as data, to be believed, not judged. Hence scripture was sufficient to establish doctrine, with no external reference, whether to facts or to conscience. This fundamental concept was expressed most frankly by Man-

\(^{27}\) John Nash Griffin, Seven Answers to the Seven Essays and Reviews (London, 1862), p. 229.


\(^{29}\) “If, upon the acknowledged principles which guide human life in other matters, this evidence leaves no other alternative open besides the Divine origin of the revelation, then the human mind must submit to an authority the credentials of which have been thus recognized.” Rev. Edward Garbett, The Bible and its Critics . . . the Boyle Lectures for MDCCCLXI (London, 1861), p. 369.

\(^{30}\) Griffin, Seven Answers, p. 233.

\(^{31}\) “Reason leads us to the door of the Sanctuary. But let it not cross the threshold.” Christopher Wordsworth, The Interpretation of the Bible (London, 1861), p. 40.

\(^{32}\) Reason “is competent to deal with the question whether a religion is from God, but when once that question is settled in the affirmative, it is not competent to sit in judgment upon the doctrine which it teaches.” John Cumming and R. P. Blakeney, Scripture Miracles Vindicated, Protestant Reformation Society Tract 6 (London, 1861), p. 26. “The intellect is qualified indeed to examine the grounds upon which a revelation purports to proceed from God but, the fact once being recognized, the intellect has only to accept the ‘dicta’ of that revelation with as blind a submission as childhood’s own.” Rev. Archer Gurney, The Faith against Free-Thinkers (London, 1864), p. 23.
sel. "If there is sufficient evidence . . . to show that the Scripture, in which this
document is contained, is a Revelation from God, the doctrine itself must be
unconditionally received, not as reasonable, nor as unreasonable, but as
scriptural."33

Two assumptions underlying this argument should be noted. First, the
orthodox apologetic treated the Bible as essentially a collection of data, a
factually verified record of facts, disregarding (at least for controversial
purposes) its spiritual quality or its effects upon the heart and conscience.34
Victorians usually exalted the heart over the head; yet it was only the heretics
of the Broad Church who dared to apply that approach to apologetic
theology. Second, it was assumed that the only legitimate response to these
facts was simple acceptance of them—in other words, faith. Indeed, the
nature of faith itself was an underlying issue in this debate, though it was
rarely made explicit. Perhaps the High Church leader Pusey was the only
one to express this clearly. In an 1855 sermon on faith, he had said:

Faith, whether in God or man, is an implicit, full, unswerving reliance on the
Being Who is the object of faith. If it is not absolute or perfect, it is not Faith. . . .
He who rejects any one revealed truth, does not hold whatever other truth he does
not part with out of submission to the authority of God Who has revealed it, but
because it approves itself in some way to his own natural mind and judgment.
What he holds, he holds of himself, accounting it to be truth, not as Faith.

Pusey regarded faith as an act of the will rather than of the intellect, a total
acceptance of revealed truth to which the intellect could only "submit
blindly."35 In these terms, indeed, the criticism of Essays and Reviews was
literally "soul-destroying," destructive of that self-abasement of reason which
was necessary to faith.36

The orthodox apologetic, having first validated scripture by reason and
then having declared that it must be accepted by faith, further insisted that,
since faith must be without reservation, the acceptance of the data of
revelation must be total and uncritical. If the Bible is God’s message, it is
entirely so, and it must be accepted in its entirety. Even those who did not
maintain the literal inspiration of the Bible insisted on its plenary inspiration.
The question was usually put moralistically in terms of the truthfulness both

33. Mansel, The Limits of Religious Thought, Lecture 6, p. 168. Mansel’s epistemology, based
on Sir William Hamilton, was accepted by few other orthodox spokesmen, but the passages
selected for quotation are representative of their thought, if somewhat pithier.
34. William Tait, Inspiration and Justification (London, 1861), p. 12, regarded the Bible as
"communications from the eternal throne." Christianity is "an historical religion—a
religion made up of matters of fact, and propounded on the evidence of matters of fact."
William Fitzgerald (Bishop of Cork), "On the Study of the Evidences of Christianity," Aids
to Faith, pp. 77–78.
is representative of orthodoxy in referring faith to the will rather than the intellect.
36. Pusey to Lord Shaftesbury, 28 February 1864, ibid., p. 51, with reference to the judgment in
favor of the Essayists.
of God as the author of the Bible and of Christ and his apostles, who appealed to the miracles, prophecies, and events recorded in scripture. The corollary of this simplistic approach to the reliability of scripture as a moral rather than a factual question was the assertion that, if one statement in the Bible was shown to be false, the entire revelation was unreliable and must be rejected. It was common for orthodox writers to proclaim that they would give up their faith if one error could be found in the Bible. Bishop Lee of Manchester declared that “the very foundation of our faith, the very basis of our hopes, the very nearest and dearest of our consolations are taken from us when one line in that Sacred Volume on which we base everything is declared to be unfaithful or untrustworthy. This is the famous either-or argument: either you believe everything in the Bible as the Word of God, or you must abandon, not merely some parts of the Bible, but all of Christianity.

The either-or argument had been employed by Newman on behalf of Roman Catholicism: either you must go all the way (to Rome) or you will lose all faith. Its application to biblical criticism is attributed by Owen Chadwick to Pusey’s disciple Liddon in his 1866 Bampton lectures on The Divinity of Our Lord; but in fact it was a commonplace among orthodox writers throughout the debate over Essays and Reviews. It represented a willingness to stake all of Christian faith on the text of the Bible and ultimately on a particular scholastic argument which justified that reliance. In one sense this may have been a sign of insecurity, in that it obviated analysis of specific biblical difficulties by an overriding appeal to faith; in another sense it was a supreme act of self-confidence, in that it was prepared to rest the case for Christianity on its most vulnerable point. In any case it was an act of hubris, a tremendous raising of the stakes. The either-or argument, argued so forcefully as to impress itself even on doubters, was responsible more than anything else for the peculiar dimensions and intensity of the Victorian crisis of faith. Either you accepted all of revelation and orthodox theology, or the whole edifice would fall if any of its elements were denied—so argued the


“defenders” of the faith. The argument was double-edged: if you could not accept any one point of revelation or doctrine, you must renounce, not only that point, but all of Christianity. In all previous controversies, the doubter had been given the alternative of heresy—wrong faith, but faith nonetheless. Now it was held that there was no alternative between orthodoxy and total “infidelity.” The result was inevitable: England ceased to produce heretics and began to produce infidels.

For this, the mind of Victorian orthodoxy had prepared the way, not by its unreason, but by its reason, by that rationalistic Anglican scholasticism which had provided so apparently secure a foundation on which an edifice of faith could be constructed. The fatal combination of an eighteenth-century evidential theology and a nineteenth-century concept of faith had produced both a false certainty and a dangerous demand for certainty. There was a lack of flexibility in Victorian orthodoxy. It was due, not to the narrowness of their faith, but to the narrowness of the structure of reason on which they believed their faith to be founded.