CHAPTER SIX

THE FABRICATION OF A JESUITED MOCK WEAL

Catholic Reassertions of Englishness

One of the principal dangers in this subject is to see the struggle as between ‘two tightly consolidated blocs, Roman and Protestant.’ Binaries were attractive to polemicists but as historians, one is rightly sceptical about their truth-value. There was much contestation both within as well as between Catholic and Protestant factions. As regards the perceptions of national status with which we are concerned, not all Protestants would have felt Catholics to be un-English, especially when social similarities or geographical proximity were such as to override religious divisions. Quite understandably, many Protestants would have had more in common with Catholic neighbours of a similar social standing than they would have had with coreligionists further down or up the social scale. Besides, in a population of 4 million, the 40,000 or so remaining Catholics did not seem so much of a threat. Catholics, for their part, having started to accept minority status from the end of the 1580s onwards were finding a *modus vivendi* under the Protestant regime and, some spectacular exceptions aside (the most infamous being the Gunpowder Plot), proved to be moderately successful at adapting in the Jacobean period. 

No doubt they continued to see themselves as English despite the prevalent rhetoric of estrangement, but to date, they had not done a convincing job of asserting it in print. At the cusp of the new century, we find evidence of a desire among a sector of the Catholic community to do just that: to recapture lost ground and to reclaim their status as true sons of the nation. Their success was limited. Certainly, they did not manage to reverse the lazy stereotype regarding the innate foreignness of popery, but they did manage to help channel it ever more into an anti-Jesuit direction, thus, to a certain extent, taking the heat off the majority at the expense of a minority. The greatest irony was that, in making a case for loyal English Catholics, they exposed and exacerbated intra-Catholic disunity. This was unfortunate as far as presenting

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1 Questier 1996, p. 9.
2 Questier 1996, p. 4.
a united front was concerned but altogether inevitable because the only way loyalist Catholics had of escaping the accusation of un-Englishness was to place the blame on the Jesuits and their followers (the Jesuited), all the while insisting on the purity of their own credentials. The Jesuited were readily sacrificed on the altar of the nation.

It was ironic that the proximate occasion should have been the Archpriest controversy from 1598 onwards, for, considering that the appointment of a senior cleric to oversee the English mission was meant to assuage tensions rather than stir them up, it ought not, strictly speaking, have been a controversy at all. Although George Blackwell, the arch-priest appointed by Rome, was not himself a Jesuit, his brief to work in close consultation with the superior of the Society in England made it appear to some secular priests and interested onlookers that he was something of a puppet, and they more puppet-like still. Such a state of affairs rankled with many, although not perhaps as many as the pamphlet overflow would lead us to believe. Added to the news of Persons’ re-appointment as rector of the English college in Rome in the same year, the whole was seen as an unwarranted Jesuit take-over of the English mission.

Accusations of excessive Jesuit influence have to be balanced against the bare facts: the actual numbers of Jesuits working on the ground in England was very small. In 1593, there were merely 6; by 1598, the number had increased to 14. By 1610, there were 51. At any one time, some would have been in prison. Still, despite small numbers, they were deemed to have disproportionate influence throughout the period, and the general fear was compounded by the knowledge of the Jesuits’ expulsion from France 1594 to 1603 and the speedy translation and publication of French anti-Jesuit texts in England. Although the Archpriest controversy has a narrowly technical side involving clerics annoyed at the preferment of others, the affair has wider significance in that it afforded an opportunity to some spokesmen for the Catholic community to drive a wedge between the true Catholic English and those tainted with Jesuitism. It is the most striking instance in the whole period of Catholics entering the polemical

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3 We do not know how great the split was amongst the seculars on this matter. Most would appear to have accepted the appointment (Pritchard 1979, p. 120), but some of the more vocal ones did not. 33 priests signed the appeal on 17 November 1600.
5 See for example the Étienne Pasquier The Iesuite displayed (1594) and The Iesuites Cathedisme (1602), and also Antoine Arnauld The coppie of the Anti-Spaniard (1590), The arrainment of the whole society of Iesuits in France (1594) and Le franc discours A discourse, presented of late to the French King (1602).