

JOHN KEBLE'S *THE CHRISTIAN YEAR*: PRIVATE READING AND IMAGINED NATIONAL RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

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THE CHRISTIAN YEAR (1827), BY THE ANGLICAN priest and poet John Keble, is known to scholars of nineteenth-century British literature for being hardly read today but avidly reread throughout the nineteenth century. A series of devotional lyrics organized around the Book of Common Prayer, *The Christian Year* was the century's poetic blockbuster, going through 158 editions before its copyright expired in 1873 and setting what might be a world record for the number of editions produced in its author's lifetime;¹ by the century's end, at least half a million copies had been sold and nearly every literate Victorian household would have had one (Tennyson 226–27). Allegedly read by members of all classes, *The Christian Year* appealed to many readers outside the Anglican Church, and abundant citations in novels, poems, letters, and essays indicate that it was impressed into the memory of nearly every nineteenth-century author.²

Yet why might *The Christian Year* have been so well received? And how might this astounding reception relate to Keble's design of the collection? In answer to the first question, Kirstie Blair has noted that *The Christian Year*, in "the decisiveness of its formal, measured" affirmation of faith, offered great spiritual "security" to generations of Victorians ("The Rhythm of Faith" 147). Indeed, the religiously soothing, reassuring effect of Keble's poems was widely praised in the nineteenth century.³ As for Keble's design of the volume, critics have most often focused on questions of theology and aesthetics, affirming or questioning the poetry's agreement with Tractarian ideals and poetics that Keble later explicated in his lectures and essays.⁴ Here I take another approach to these questions about the intent and influence of *The Christian Year* by analyzing the collection's intervention in nineteenth-century print culture. In this, I build upon recent work by scholars such as William R. McKelvy, who have persuasively argued for Keble's participation through *The Christian Year* in contemporary discussions about "the promise and peril of becoming a nation of independent readers" (142). The immense popularity and wide reception of *The Christian Year*, I argue, are in part explained by the fact that to a degree unrivalled by any other single collection of poetry, it provided a means for imagining private and domestic acts of reading as ways of participating in a print-mediated, national religious community. *The Christian Year*

gained its capacity to exercise this influence from the fluid connections it invited between involvement in a worshiping community and private reading, as well as from the typological significances it encouraged each reader to find in an unknown, mundane life pursued amidst a host of similarly anonymous believers and compatriots. In this way, I will claim, *The Christian Year* enabled overlooked religious versions of the imagined national communities described by Benedict Anderson in his well-known work on the interdependence of nationalism and print capitalism.

I believe we can also understand Keble's construction of the volume in terms of print culture. Both of the qualities contributing to the devoted reception of *The Christian Year* – its provision of a typological understanding of daily life, and its coordination of private reading with communal worship – were shaped by Keble's resistance to what he, together with others who later joined him in the Tractarian controversy, regarded as the potentially corrupting impact of print culture upon the spiritual character of the nation. Yet *The Christian Year* far exceeded any of Keble's discernable aims. Despite Keble's stated attempt in his "Advertisement" to bring British readers' daily thoughts under greater Anglican discipline, the wide interdenominational circulation of *The Christian Year* enabled religiously and politically opposed British journalists, churchmen, and educators to imagine competing versions of a national, non-sectarian religious collectivity formed by the act of reading devotional poetry.

I. "A Feverish Thirst after Knowledge for Its Own Sake": Keble, Print Culture, and Poetry

IN THE PREFACING "ADVERTISEMENT" to *The Christian Year*, Keble stresses three points that suggest the intervention he thought his volume would make in nineteenth-century print culture. First, he emphasizes that daily behavior as a member of a faith community ("practical religion") is determined at least as much by "discipline," by routinely formed "thoughts and feelings," as by a core set of teachings, or "a sound rule of faith." The special value of the Book of Common Prayer, he observes, is its ability to support belief by conditioning habits of feeling and thought. Second, Keble, known to friends for his "aversion to" periodical "reviews" (Froude 1: 190), assumes that the efficacy of the Prayer Book has been undermined by the explosive growth of print culture. At the turn of the century, Wordsworth, Keble's poetic hero, had asserted in the "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802) that the mushrooming print market and increasing circulation of periodicals ("the rapid communication of intelligence") were creating a "craving for extraordinary incident" and a "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation" (Wordsworth 1: 128). In his "Advertisement," Keble implies that similar causes are acting upon the minds of readers in his day to render them insensitive to the ministrations of the Prayer Book. Its "sober" and "soothing" inculcation of a devotional mindset ill suits readers who are driven by "a morbid eagerness" for "excitement" and are itching to satisfy their "unbounded curiosity." Third, in ways he does not explain, Keble says he has designed *The Christian Year* to remedy this breakdown in reception by cultivating the kind of emotional and mental habits the Prayer Book disciplines – Keble will have achieved his goal if his collection helps "any person" conform to the "thoughts and feelings . . . recommended and exemplified in the Prayer Book."

These three points build on and anticipate related arguments in Keble's early periodical essays, sermons of the 1820s and 1830s, Oxford lectures on poetry (1832–1841), and the entries he contributed to and helped formulate for *The Tracts for the Times* in the 1830s

and 1840s. Keble's "Advertisement" suggests, therefore, a strong agreement between the intended effects of *The Christian Year* and the views of print culture, poetry, and religious discipline that Keble and fellow Tractarians expressed in works preceding and following the collection's publication. Tracing these connections indicates that *The Christian Year* was published in reaction to tendencies that Keble felt were encouraged in readers by the rapid multiplication and circulation of printed literature.

In 1823, by which time Keble had completed most of the poems that would become *The Christian Year*, and two years before he resolved to publish them (Coleridge *Memoir* 1: 117), he gave a sermon at Oxford University. He warned his academic audience that they were living "in an age and nation, characterised perhaps beyond all others by a feverish thirst after knowledge for its own sake" (*Sermons* 54). If the wide dissemination of printed works, especially among those "of large intellectual attainments" (such as those in his audience), has fed a craving for knowledge, it does not seem to have encouraged reverence for sacred truths or a desire to lead holy lives. Therefore "it is a point of sound wisdom to be less sanguine, than first impressions would make us, about the success of plans for the general diffusion of knowledge: even of that which is most truly called *Christian* knowledge" (54).

Keble no doubt had in mind efforts such as those by the Whig politician Henry Brougham, who by 1823 was a decade into his campaign to found a national school system and was soon to begin energetically supporting channels for diffusing knowledge among the working poor. Helping to found the British and Foreign School Society in 1814, planting and publicizing Mechanics' Institutes by 1824, and then in 1825 setting up the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge to distribute cheap literature on the arts and sciences among the poor, Brougham represented a vision of the reading nation staunchly resisted by Keble. Keble, like many other Anglican clergymen and politicians, abhorred groups such as the (largely Nonconformist) British and Foreign School Society for their desire to limit the religious component of education to the Bible, cut off from Anglican liturgical worship, catechism, and discipleship (Chadwick 1: 346). For similar reasons, he would have opposed the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge as an effort to "usurp ecclesiastical authority" by spreading faith in the power of reading itself, freed from church guidance (McKevly 131).

Yet Keble's antipathy to these projects reveals more than evidence for his theological conservatism or his quite obvious "opposition to the spirit of democracy" (Rowlands 46). Proposed and existing plans for expanding undogmatic study of the Bible and diffusing cheap literature without ecclesiastical guidance were dangerous, in his view, because of the disposition they encouraged toward knowledge and its communication through print. They were spreading an infection to the working classes that a steady supply of reviews and news had already transmitted among the middle and upper classes – the "feverish thirst after knowledge for its own sake," whether secular or "that which is most truly called *Christian*."

In 1823, then, Keble was setting himself against the print-stimulated "unbounded curiosity" and "morbid eagerness" he would denounce in his "Advertisement" to *The Christian Year*. Originally committed to posthumous publication, Keble might have been pushed to publish his poems by the discernable effects, in relatively elite circles, of overconfidence in readers' independent judgments and the transmission of knowledge through print. 1825, the year Keble resolved to make *The Christian Year* public, was also the year that controversy erupted in print among Anglican clergymen, intellectuals, and some middle and upper-class readers of quarterly reviews over current German biblical criticism and John Milton's treatise on Christian doctrine, then for the first time published to reveal

the poet's Arian heresy (McKelvy 133–37). Hailing from the homeland of Protestantism, modern German biblical criticism seemed to confirm for Keble and others the danger that Milton, it was now clear, long ago suggested when he set out to read the Bible for himself: longstanding Protestant faith in the individual believer's ability to discern the truths of Scripture was resulting in open heresy and undermining church authority. Now nineteenth-century print culture was amplifying such misplaced trust in private judgment among elite readers, and plans were well in motion to diffuse the error among the lower classes. As Keble would announce in the "Advertisement," something needed to be done to discipline private reading and bring it into greater conformity with the "thoughts and feelings . . . recommended and exemplified in the Prayer Book."

Before publishing *The Christian Year*, therefore, Keble had developed strong suspicions that the rapid transmission of printed works was spreading incredulity toward ancient church authority, worship of knowledge as a value in itself, and confidence in one's own judgment as a reader at the expense of mediating ecclesiastical disciplines. The right-wing, Tory politics that inform this attitude are clear.⁵ Yet for Keble, and for those Tractarians he inspired, anxiety about print culture always centered first and foremost on the threat it posed to the nation's religious self-conception. For this reason, in 1838 Keble addressed the Anglican Societies for Christian Knowledge and the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, warning them of the dangers of selling "all sorts of well-meaning books, which are at all likely to find general acceptance" (*Sermons* 249). Even these established missions and publishing arms of the Church risked deepening the "enchantment" of "a literary and refined age" with the "secular power," or social capital, of knowledge accumulated without the guiding discipline of the Church (237). Increasingly, Keble would claim in 1847, "no one of us is safe from being called on, at any moment, to exercise something like a judgment of his own, on matters" of faith "which in better times would have been indisputably settled for him" (*Sermons* i).

In this light, the well-known Tractarian code of "reserve," which stresses that believers should only gradually be let into the mysteries of Christianity through a process of moral preparation in liturgical worship and pastoral discipleship, seems as much a strategy for resisting perceived excesses of nineteenth-century print culture as an effort to recover patristic tradition.⁶ Tractarian reserve is probably a codified outgrowth of attitudes toward print culture that Keble had already firmly established when deciding to arrange *The Christian Year* for publication. The clearest articulation of reserve is in numbers 80 (1837) and 87 (1840) of *Tracts for the Times*, titled "On Reserve in Communicating Religious Knowledge" by Isaac Williams. Williams became Keble's devoted disciple after meeting him in 1822, and Keble's influence on his tracts is well attested (Blair, "*The Christian Year*" 618). Williams's defense of the principle of Reserve is buttressed throughout by attacks on the "indiscriminate distribution of Bibles and religious publications" (Part 1: 70) and the habit of "discuss[ing] the most sacred subjects in the daily periodical" (Part 2: 47); he concludes with a warning about trusting growth in piety to "the bad instruments of the world (such as the daily periodical)" rather than to "Sacraments and prayers, and a good life" of service to "the poor" (Part 2: 125).⁷

For Williams, the modern British "impatience at any book being held back from any person, as too high and sacred for them" (Part 1: 63) is a transmogrified development of the post-Reformation view that religion consists of saving knowledge communicated through sermons and individual Bible study rather than of habits of mind and feeling trained by church liturgy and formularies for regular self-examination, repentance, and prayer (Part 1: 72–73).

Keble has a similar perspective in Tract 89, "On the Mysticism Attributed to the Early Fathers of the Church" (1841). He opens by criticizing the Reformation for initiating too exclusive an identification of religion with beliefs and their reasoned analysis (1), and he praises the typological interpretations of Scripture by the early fathers as an ingrained hermeneutic, "an instinctive skill" that was "train[ed]" through long practice and submission to "Ecclesiastical" discipline and tradition (40). The typological reading of Scripture, according to which the laws, events, and people of the Old Testament are anticipations (types) of Christ and His dispensation, "was not this or that writer's . . . invention, but it was from the beginning habitually inwrought into the thoughts and language of the Catholic Church" (40). Learning to see as the patristic writers, to find Christ in every part of Scripture, and even to discover in objects of daily life types of spiritual realities, is not a matter of memorizing "set statements" (151), but of acquiring "by degrees their practised eye" (40). And this means following "the same devout observances which we know they kept up" (40), that is, "repentance, devotion, and self-denial" (134).

In this way, Keble and Williams anticipate recent attempts to revise the standard academic treatment of religions as systems of belief. Building on the work of sociologist Talal Asad (*Genealogies of Religion* 1993), the Romanticist Colin Jager has stressed the need to reconsider the paradigm for analyzing religion that the Reformation helped make possible and that became increasingly entrenched after the later eighteenth century (Jager 203, 254–55): identifying religion with belief in a set of propositions, which can be studied in abstraction from believers' lived contexts, at the expense of attending to habits, sensibilities, and postures disciplined within institutional contexts (201–15). Similarly, Keble and Williams emphasize that a religious view of the world and fidelity to a spiritual community are engendered by devotional routines and engrained ways of interpreting texts and circumstances.⁸ Both writers assume that ecclesiastically mediated mindsets enable the "wise or simple," and even those unable to read, to discern the typological meanings of Scripture (Keble "Mysticism" 135–36), and of "the visible creation" (Williams Part 2: 27). These typological habits are being challenged by the nation's progressive immersion in print, since this is encouraging a contrasting disregard for ancient forms of knowing, the assumption that knowledge is a good in itself, and overconfidence in one's private judgment as a reader.

These views inform Keble's earlier meditations on poetry in "Sacred Poetry," an essay that appeared in the *Quarterly Review* shortly after he decided to publish *The Christian Year*. Driven by the commercial demand for works of "mere literature" rather than devotional books, the majority of authors, "who write for money or applause" will be "carried" away from devotional subjects "by the tide of popularity" (*Occasional* 96). Those who do wish to write religious poetry will therefore most often either shrink from the "mockery and neglect" that their "retired thoughts" stand to face from indiscriminate reviewers (96), or sensationally declaim on Christian truths, neglecting reserve toward holy things to satisfy a public accustomed to having "the most sacred subjects" discussed "in the daily periodical" (Williams Part 1: 47).

For this reason, Keble holds up the author of *The Faerie Queene* as the preeminent "sacred poet of his country" (*Occasional* 107), as opposed to Milton, whose Arian conclusions had been exposed as the consequence of his unmediated approach to the Bible – an approach which also distinguishes the bold and free treatment of scriptural subjects in *Paradise Lost* from their indirect treatment in the allegory of *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser, through his veiled allusions to Christian virtues "and the doctrines of sacred writ" (101), intuitively practiced

the principle of Reserve that Keble and Williams were later explicitly to defend in opposition to the trends of nineteenth-century print culture. In fact, Keble claims, in training readers in the “habit of looking at things with a view to something beyond their qualities merely sensible” (99), Spenser is helping them develop that “practised eye” (“Mysticism” 40) upon which the “comparison of the Old Testament with the New” depends (*Occasional* 100).

Poetry that trains habits of interpreting texts and the world as types of spiritual realities is for Keble the best agent for curing the infections spread by overindulgence in print culture – the “feverish thirst after knowledge,” overconfidence in private judgment, and dismissal of ecclesiastical guidance.⁹ In Tract 13 for the 1833 *Tracts for the Times*, “Sunday Lessons: The Principle of Selection,” Keble argues that typological interpretation of Scripture, individual Christian experience, national history, and the surrounding world is a fundamental discipline trained by the Prayer Book’s coordination of readings from the Old and New Testaments (2, 10–11). *The Christian Year* can be understood, therefore, as an attempt to translate into the private reading of poetry the typological disciplines of the Prayer Book and Church fathers (or Keble’s versions of them).

II. Training a “Practiced Eye”: Typological Disciplines in The Christian Year

IN *THE CHRISTIAN YEAR*, KEBLE EXTENDS typology from the study of Old Testament anticipations of Christ to the interpretation of all reality according to a principle of “analogy.” Keble held that material things, from sunlight to the fall of autumn leaves, provided a system of signs that could dimly show forth the qualities of God, illustrate each Christian’s experience, and correspond with the spiritual truths revealed in Scripture and guarded by the Church. This form of analogical interpretation, Keble would argue in “On the Mysticism Attributed to the Early Fathers of the Church” (Tract 89), was practiced in the Bible itself (162–86), consistently applied by the early fathers (151–62), and intended by God (144, 171). The poem for “Septuagesima Sunday” in *The Christian Year* rehearses natural types discussed by the early fathers in the form of accessible devotional poetry. In Tract 89, Keble gives examples of natural types or analogies used by St. Basil (330–c.379) and St. Ambrose (c. 340–397) in their meditations on the six days of Creation:

Proceeding to [their interpretation of] the works of the fourth day [Gen. 1.14–19], we have another set of well-known symbols. The Sun, the greater light, is our LORD; the Moon, the lesser light, the Church . . . The Saints are stars in this mystical heaven, as . . . seen in a passage from St. Basil. (“Mysticism” 155–56)

Declaring material reality a “book” that imparts “heavenly truth” to “Pure eyes and Christian hearts” at the opening of “Septuagesima Sunday” (1–4), Keble follows with types drawn from St. Basil and St. Ambrose:

The Moon above, the Church below,
A wondrous race they run,
But all their radiance, all their glow,
Each borrows of its Sun.

The Saviour lends the light and heat
That crowns his holy hill;

The saints, like stars, around his seat,
Perform their courses still. (13–20)

In a footnote Keble links the last two lines to Daniel 12.3: “[Many shall awake to everlasting life, and] they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever” (AV). Ensuing lines follow this pattern of scriptural annotation, as do many others throughout *The Christian Year*, repeatedly directing readers to scriptural passages in order to give the impression of a complete network of types in the Bible waiting to be associated with objects of the material world. “Sin” might forbid “us to descry / The mystic heaven and earth within” the world (41–43), and the reader might find Keble’s typologies far-fetched. Yet should she or he adopt the prayer modeled at the poem’s end, the spiritual vision of the divine presence anticipated in the rhyme – “see”/ “Thee” – might be progressively made possible through the formation of a new “heart”: “Thou, who hast given me eyes to see/ And love this sight so fair,/ Give me a heart to find out Thee,/ And read Thee every where” (45–48). Keble attempts to instill the “practised eye” of the early fathers in British readers through his devotional verse, and this remediation¹⁰ of traditional practices reflects his belief in disciplined habits of reading, carried out in submission to unstated principles of exegesis safeguarded by the early church. In so doing, he aims to inculcate (his reconstruction of) ancient typological disciplines through the very spread of private reading that he feared threatened to undermine the nation’s religious identity.

Despite Keble’s fears about Britain’s growing obsession with reading, much of this reading activity had in fact prepared readers to welcome his attempt to cultivate typological habits of mind. George P. Landow has noted the general familiarity of nearly all nineteenth-century British people with typological modes of thinking as a result of the tremendous amount of (spoken and printed) sermons, tracts, biblical commentaries, devotional literature, and hymns produced throughout the century, largely by evangelicals (15–22). Widespread acquaintance with typological methods of interpreting the Bible and the world partly accounts for the favorable reception of *The Christian Year* among evangelicals,¹¹ and for the remark of the *Morning Post* (7 April 1866) just after Keble’s death that there “is scarcely a volume of sermons, or religious essays, by writers of this generation, which has not enriched its pages with precious thoughts from ‘The Christian Year’” (4).

Keble was also in good company when encouraging the extension of biblical typology to all of reality. Childhood exposure to the reading and preaching described by Landow seems to have motivated writers and artists throughout the first half of the nineteenth century to apply the typological exegesis developed for the Bible to all facets of nature, secular history, and daily life. In *Past and Present* (1843), Thomas Carlyle extends his youthful training in biblical typology to read all of secular history as a grand universal scripture, employing “a prefigurative pattern” that evokes “the Second Coming” to suggest that British industrialization will providentially lead to a “new savior” figure, “the Captain of Industry” (Sussman 15, 17). John Ruskin, rigorously schooled in evangelical interpretation of biblical types, argues in the first two volumes of *Modern Painters* (1843–1846) that artistic fidelity to the facts of nature and history will reveal God’s attributes and the inherent spiritual significance of each physical phenomenon (Sussman 10–12). These principles inform *Stones of Venice* (1851–1853), in which Ruskin interprets Venetian history and architecture as a fall – from integrated religious sensibility to prideful sensuality after the Renaissance

– that prefigures the alienated consciousness and impending divine punishment of the English people (25–30).

Members of the early Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (active from roughly 1846 to 1854) were directly influenced by Ruskin and Carlyle, and shared their conviction that “no matter how apparently trivial, each fact in the phenomenal world is meaningful if only read rightly” (50). For all the obvious differences of descriptive precision and psychological subtlety, the early version of Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s poem “My Sister’s Sleep,” published in the *The Germ* (1850), agrees with *The Christian Year* in affirming that “every where we find our suffering God, / And where He trod / May set our steps” (“Wednesday before Easter” 57–59). In Rossetti’s poem, the speaker and his mother attend to his dying sister on Christmas Eve, and the brother’s observations of the hushed scene suggest intricate correspondences between the scheme of Christian salvation and the smallest domestic details. Even the needles his mother sets on her worktable when she rises to announce the arrival of Christmas Day figure, as they accidentally form a cross, the passage from death to life charted by Christ after his birth, and are soon to be followed by the sister’s entry into the next life: “Her needles, as she laid them down, / Met lightly . . . / ‘Glory unto the Newly Born!’ / So, as said angels, she did say; / Because we were in Christmas-day” (Rossetti 38–39, 41–43).

Yet Keble differs from these later Victorians by insisting on scriptural and ecclesiastical parameters for typological interpretation. The early Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, in agreement with Carlyle and Ruskin, believed that unbiased “scientific” observation of natural and historical fact could uncover transcendent meanings and the providential design of history (Sussman 41). Despite insisting on the undistorted representation of history and nature, Carlyle and Ruskin in their historical and cultural criticism, and the early Pre-Raphaelites in their paintings and poems, indicated typological patterns only by relying on the “unacknowledged principle” of “shaping . . . fact into formal parallels with traditional” Christian “iconography” (15). Pre-Raphaelites such as Holman Hunt also resorted to inscribing Scriptural texts on the frames of their paintings to help viewers interpret the otherwise obscure typological meanings of finely rendered details (74). In *The Christian Year*, however, Keble assumes that every detail of reality acquires typological significance only if read according to a shared text in the first place. In *The Christian Year*, then, he relies on nineteenth-century British readers’ general familiarity with typological interpretation to inculcate a “practised eye” adept at reading personal and national life in terms of scriptural typologies mediated through ecclesiastical tradition and Anglican devotional disciplines.

Keble’s view of the threat print culture posed to national religious community informs the frequent typological connections in *The Christian Year* between the history of ancient Israel and that of present British Christianity, a good example of which appears in “Thursday before Easter.” As so often in *The Christian Year*, the poem takes its departure from the biblical lesson assigned for the day by the Prayer Book, in this case the prophet Daniel’s supplication to God to show mercy to his people, then scattered abroad with their city Jerusalem in ruins, and the prophecy of terrible judgment and eventual restoration Daniel receives in response through the angel Gabriel (Dan. 9). After paraphrasing Daniel’s prayer in the first stanza, Keble continues:

Oh for a love like Daniel’s now,
To wing to Heaven but one strong prayer
For God’s new Israel, sunk as low,

Yet flourishing to sight as fair,
 As Sion [Jerusalem] in her height of pride

 'Tis true, nor winter stays thy [the new Israel's] growth,
 Nor torrid summer's sickly smile;
 The flashing billows of the south
 Break not upon so lone an isle,
 But thou, rich vine, art grafted there,
 The fruit of death or life to bear,
 Yielding a surer witness every day,
 To thine Almighty Author and his steadfast sway.

Oh grief to think, that grapes of gall
 Should cluster round thine healthiest shoot!

 Even such is this bad world we see,
 Which, self-condemn'd in owning Thee,
 Yet dares not open farewell of Thee take,
 For very pride, and her high-boasted Reason's sake. (9–32)

If “God’s new Israel” is the Christian church in general, the poem concentrates particularly on the Anglican Church, the representative of the “rich vine” (alluding to Jesus’s description of his followers as branches on a vine in John 15) that the British Empire has transplanted across “flashing billows of the south” to every “lone . . . isle.” Yet from even this “healthiest shoot” of Christ’s vine are springing “grapes of gall,” a bitter yield of “high-boasted Reason” and “pride” nourished by the diffusion of knowledge for its own sake. This malady only evades detection because the desire to benefit from their connections to the Established Church keeps shut the mouths of those actually committed to skeptical private judgment. Keble maintains typological connections of this admonitory kind throughout *The Christian Year*. Later, in the poem for “Eighteenth Sunday after Trinity,” he connects the reading for the day, Ezekiel 20 (where God says he will judge disobedient Israel by bringing them a second time into the wilderness) to the present Anglican Church, dwelling in a “desert where iniquity / And knowledge both abound”: its members thirst after knowledge for its own sake while disregarding spiritual discipline (3–4).

The title of “Thursday before Easter” of course directly ties it to the Thursday before Christ’s crucifixion, so that the phrase “grapes of gall” would not fall idly on readers schooled in the Bible (as most nineteenth-century readers were): it alludes to the “vinegar . . . mingled with gall” mockingly offered by Pilate’s soldiers to Christ when he was thirsting on the Cross (Matt. 27.34). Not only Daniel’s prayer and the state of Israel in his time, but also the mockery of Christ by the Roman government, become ominous types fulfilled in modern Britain; and, should the reader turn to the other lesson for the day (John 13), she or he would meet with an earlier figure who had not “Yet” dared to take “open farewell” of Christ: Judas, privately contracted to hand over his master for silver, sitting at Jesus’s last meal with the disciples. Following the coordinated typological disciplines of Keble’s poems and the Prayer Book through *The Christian Year*, a reader arrives at a composite image of nineteenth-century Britain, its fidelity to God tested by its very power, wealth, and remarkable dissemination of knowledge in print.

For each reader who “find[s] assistance from” *The Christian Year* in this form of typological discipline, Keble’s purpose of bringing readers’ “thoughts and feelings into more entire unison” with the Prayer Book is at least partially fulfilled according to the terms of his “Advertisement.” As Keble would remark later in Tract 13 (1833), he believed the Prayer Book’s schedule of scriptural readings was especially suited to keep alive such typological warnings for each member of the nation, however uneducated, enabling worshipers to perceive intuitively the prophetic correspondences between ancient Israel’s waywardness and judgment and “the circumstances of civilized and Christian Europe, especially those of our own country, during the comparatively few years which have passed since the arrangement of the Prayer-Book” (6). Those readers, especially Anglican, who took to heart the typological admonitions of poems such as “Thursday before Easter” might find themselves in the position recommended by Charlotte Yonge, the famous novelist and disciple of Keble, when she later commented on the poem in *Musings over “The Christian Year” and “Lyra Innocentium”* (1872): “Would that we [like Daniel] could pray with the same might of love for our own Israel, now sunk as low as Daniel’s, though outwardly . . . fair and prosperous” (114).

If so, such readers would be primed to engage in another discipline recommended in this poem and throughout *The Christian Year*: applying scriptural events and persons typologically to one’s individual experience. As Landow has shown, perceiving the fulfillment of scriptural types within one’s own life was a practice common to all nineteenth-century church parties, so that many readers who had followed Keble thus far in “Thursday before Easter” might be prepared for the turn to individual application at its close (33, 48–50). If “far and wide / Men kneel to Christ . . . / Yet rage with passion, swell with pride,” the speaker asks, “Have we not still our faith to seek?” (33–36). No, he insists, rather than abandoning the ailing Anglican Church, readers ought to realize the model set for them in Daniel, who could face the “Dark . . . future” foreseen for his Israel (41) only because he was “Nam’d to be heir of glory” (46) – the angel delivering his visions promised that he would “stand in thy lot at the end of the days” of judgment (Dan. 12.13). “So then,” Yonge concludes in agreement with the poem’s recommendation, “to us in these latter times, the only balance for the fearful glimpses we get of the course of this world, is attention to secure our own salvation” (115–16).

By coupling these typological disciplines with emphasis throughout *The Christian Year* upon the reserved, private, self-effacing religious devotion that the Tractarians would later defend in their prose, Keble introduced a quality into the collection that accounts for much of its tremendous popularity. *The Christian Year* enabled readers to convert their anonymity and isolation in a socially fractured, urbanizing nation into a sign of significant membership in spiritual community. As J. R. Watson has recently remarked, “Keble is at his best . . . when he is describing a certain style of Christian living – reverent, influenced by the doctrine of Reserve, withdrawn from the hurly-burly of nineteenth-century eagerness and excitement” (333–34). Victorian commentators agreed when assessing the wide interdenominational appeal of *The Christian Year*, and it was perhaps this quality, in addition to its simple meter and stanzas, which recommended the opening poem, “Morning,” to hymnists when they incorporated it into the public worship of many denominations. The “secret . . . of Rest below” (60), the poem counsels, is known by those who in the “trivial round, the common task” (53) have learned “in all [things] to espy / Their God” and “themselves deny” (43–44). Attaining the practiced eye that “hallow[s] all we find” in “our daily course” as types of God is a matter of quiet self-discipline (29–30), ideally guided by the “timely” use of the Prayer

Book's formulary for morning prayer recommended to private readers by this poem: "Oh! timely happy, timely wise, / Hearts that with rising morn arise [to God]!" (17–18).

Many poems in the collection portray such an anonymous, self-denying, mundane discipline as a typological fulfillment of the most momentous events and lives in sacred history. "Wednesday before Easter," for example, asks readers to see in their isolated and unappreciated inner conflict a mysterious impartation of Christ's own lonely agony in Gethsemane, a moment remembered in the week of the Church calendar that provides the poem's title. Quoting Christ's words in Gethsemane in the epigraph ("Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" Luke 22.42), the poem claims that "To the still wrestlings of the lonely heart / He doth impart / The virtue of His midnight agony" (63–65). In lines from "St. Thomas' Day" later approvingly quoted and italicized for readers of the Congregationalist *Eclectic Review* (Hood 436), Keble's speaker calls out to a world of anonymous readers, asking them to find in their personal struggle with belief in the Resurrection a typological echo of St. Thomas' difficulty in accepting the testimony of the first witnesses, and to await their own heavenly experience of the resurrected Christ's answer to Thomas:

Is there, on earth, a spirit frail,
 Who fears to take their [the first witnesses'] word,
 Scarce daring, through the twilight pale,
 To think he sees the Lord?

 Read [the story of St. Thomas in John's Gospel] and confess the hand divine
 That drew thy likeness here so true in every line.

 Soon will He [Christ] shew thee all His wounds, and say
 "Long have I known thy name – know thou my face alway." (57–60, 63–64, 71–72)

Perhaps unwittingly, Keble tempts readers to equate the lines of Scripture with "every line" in his poem, so that "the hand divine" that "drew" the typological link between Thomas and later conflicted believers also sanctions Keble's lines. In a poem widely praised by contemporaries, "St. Matthew's Day," Keble presents the former tax collector as a type of all urbanites, surrounded by the absorbing bustle of commerce, threading their way through a "crowded loneliness" of "ever-moving myriads" (22–23), and barred from the sky by smog. Like Matthew, who dwelt in the city and thrived on what the religious of his day condemned as dirty business, nineteenth-century urban readers and businessmen can still feel a divine call and blessing:

There are in this loud and stunning tide
 Of human care and crime,

 Who carry music in their heart
 Through dusky lane and wrangling mart,
 Plying their daily task with busier feet,
 Because their secret souls a holy strain repeat. (25–32)

In lines that mildly resemble Wordsworth's then unpublished portrayal of London's alienated masses in *The Prelude*, Keble assures readers that the heightened sense of anonymity created by urban, industrializing society can actually be converted into a worthy discipline: the reserve forcibly trained by routinely passing nameless faces can be voluntarily adopted rather than despondently endured. Throughout *The Christian Year*, in fact, Keble gives the impression of what might be called a community of the isolated, one that implicitly involves the anonymous reader and Keble as distant poet, each of them engaged in private prayer and reflection by way of the poetry. At the end of "St. Matthew's Day," the speaker adopts a voice that *The Christian Year's* almost instantaneous popularity soon helped readers recognize as Keble's, despite the retiring country parson's refusal to put his name on the title page: "oh! if even on Babel [the city] shine / Such gleams of Paradise, / . . . Shame on us, who about us Babel bear, / And live in Paradise [the countryside], as if God was not there!" (72–73, 78–79). After describing the unnoticed, repressed spiritual struggle among the anonymous "myriads" living in "crowded loneliness," the Keblean speaker, alone in his countryside retirement, pauses to be admonished by their good example. Fictively overheard by any given reader of *The Christian Year*, the solitary authorial speaker represents anonymous individuals, simultaneously carrying out their overlooked lives across the nation, as members of a Christian community. Such lines drew unanimous praise from Victorian commentators of every denomination. "The children of 'the nameless family of God' kindle in him a deep enthusiasm, such as most poets have reserved for earth's great heroes," observed William Shairp in an essay that originally appeared in the *North British Review* (337), a journal associated with an institution deeply opposed to the Tractarians, the Free Church of Scotland (Altholz 92–93).

Especially as *The Christian Year* began "to be met with in every form, at every place – between one shilling and two guineas" (Hood 428), the sense of being one among the hundreds of thousands of its nameless readers could confirm one's sense of membership in a national community of the daily faithful, each of whom was pursuing a parallel life of unexpressed spiritual hopes and uncertainties. Perhaps with little to no exaggeration, the *Morning Post* (2 April 1866) could claim that the "announcement of the death of" the "venerated author of 'The Christian year,' will cast a gloom over the Easter festivity of many a household in this country" ("John Keble" 5), and the *Times* (6 April 1866) could more moderately affirm that "everywhere throughout this empire are hearts and households to which the news will come like a far distant sound, more felt than heard" ("The Late John Keble" 5).

III. "Our annual steps": Private Reading and National Religious Community

THE CHRISTIAN YEAR, THEN, WAS DESIGNED to bring private readers into conformity with modes of thought and feeling trained in the Prayer Book, specifically by inculcating the "practiced eye" of disciplined typological interpretation, and by modeling reserved, ecclesiastically ordered devotion. By these means, Keble aimed to counteract nineteenth-century print culture's stimulation of a "feverish thirst after knowledge for its own sake" and celebration of private judgment unhindered by the Church's oversight. Yet, as I have argued, Keble's poems quickly exceeded the scope of his strategy for curing the infectious spread of indiscriminate reading. *The Christian Year* became one of the century's most powerful and popular means for imagining private devotional reading as participation in a national and imperial religious

community of nameless individuals, each simultaneously leading unremarked lives of private aspiration and inner strife in their disparate social stations.

The Christian Year thereby provided a religiously inflected version of the form of imagined community described by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983), his study of the interdependent rise of nationalism and print capitalism. After the later eighteenth century, Anderson argues, growth in periodical and novel reading increasingly enabled middle and upper-class readers to imagine themselves joined to countless other anonymous individuals in a nation progressing through secular time – time charted by the secular calendar rather than providentially arranged (24–36). That is, this form of national imagination was stimulated by the very forces of print culture that Keble and Williams set out to subdue and discipline. *The Christian Year* thereby enjoyed a somewhat paradoxical existence: strategically arranged to align private reading with the ecclesiastical calendar and Prayer Book, its capacity to project a national religious community derived at least in part from a potentially competing, secular way of conceiving the temporal unity of the nation.

Landow aptly summarizes the typological view of time and history recommended in works such as *The Christian Year*: “Before Christ, all recorded Old Testament events served as a lens converging upon His appearance; after His death and resurrection, all things simultaneously point backwards towards His earthly life and forwards to His second coming” (40). For this reason, invoking one well-known type communicates a whole view of history and the world as “completely ordered” by “God’s plan” (40). Keble held that a typological mindset, when trained by ecclesiastical discipline, embraces not only events of biblical history, but also all facets of the natural world, daily life, and national events. In his ideal scenario, Britons of every class would come to see their individual spiritual trials and hopes as shared in a larger community of faith that stretched backward and forward through providential history – a history in which each fact and event was reassuringly interwoven in a web of divinely ordained interdependency, however difficult or impossible it might be to apprehend all the connections.

By contrast, Anderson claims, newspaper and novel reading helped stimulate a type of national imagination in which one was joined to others by a “transverse, cross-time” form of “simultaneity,” marked “not by prefigurement and fulfillment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar” (24). In the 1820s, newspaper circulation rose to a level previously unattained, and Sunday newspapers far outpaced dailies, reaching an aggregate of about 110,000 copies a week and penetrating into mass middle-class, artisanal, and, to a lesser degree, working-class audiences (Altick 329). Taking up an increasing portion of Sunday afternoon reading, periodical publications were becoming an alternate, non-ecclesiastical means of imagining oneself as part of a national community progressing through time. As Hegel observed, “newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers” (Anderson 35).

Sir David Wilkie provides an example of this form of press-mediated national imagination in his painting *Chelsea Pensioners Reading the Gazette of the Battle of Waterloo*, which thousands of men and women lined up to see when it was first displayed at the Royal Academy in 1822. Set on Thursday, 2 June 1815, when the British and Allied victory was first officially announced, the painting portrays a street scene in London near Chelsea Hospital, a home for invalid and retired soldiers. A miscellaneous crowd – dancing women, shabbily dressed workers, people straining out of windows, and soldiers from Scotland,

Wales, Ireland, and England – listens attentively as a Chelsea pensioner reads the account of the victory in the *Gazette* (Colley 364–65). This is an image – idealistic, to be sure – of the British national collective, united for a moment across classes and ethnicities on 2 June 1815 by their simultaneous print-mediated awakening to a great national event. The figures in the painting, of course, stand for unseen millions to whom the news is being conveyed by periodicals like the *Gazette* through private or group readings. Since, until the 1850s, provincial newspapers often relied on central London news, it became possible to imagine a nation of nameless, private readers (and hearers of newspapers read aloud) all receiving word of national events at relatively the same moment in secular, calendrical time. This capacity was early increased by innovative techniques to communicate news almost instantly – for example, outlining front pages in black to mark royal deaths, a sign that even the illiterate could immediately decipher, and printing the most sensational headlines on placards affixed to mail coaches (Colley 220).

As Anderson notes, the nineteenth-century rise in novel reading also contributed to this ability to envision oneself in a massive collection of anonymous individuals participating simultaneously in a national society. To take just one example from the middle of the century, Dickens solicits this form of imagination when he emotionally centers *Bleak House* (1853) on Jo, an impoverished orphan in London connected only by coincidence to a web of characters who for long stretches of the novel do not know each other. Dickens transforms Jo's miserable death into a protest against the economic injustice, elite indifference, and urban squalor that threaten to tear apart the interdependency of British society. "Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us, every day" (734; ch. 47). The page of Dickens's novel suddenly becomes a virtual national parliament or meeting house. The assembly is formed by a vast host of readers from every social order (or at least from the middle classes and up), who for the most part are unknown and invisible to each other, and who, in the act of reading, are called both to judge the ruling elites and exercise "Heavenly compassion," asking themselves if they stand guilty of their suggested indifference.

While Anderson implies that this secular, non-typological view of temporal unity was coordinated with the incremental erosion of religious belief, there was in fact no general decline of Christianity in nineteenth-century Britain. Religious participation experienced high growth between 1800 and 1840, and then continued to grow at a more moderate pace until 1910 (Currie, Gilbert, and Horsley 23–29); and historian Linda Colley has amply demonstrated the persistent and popular link in this period between British nationalism and Protestantism. Anderson, then, is most helpful if understood as describing the contribution of periodical and novel reading to a process by which it became possible, without any necessary decline in religious beliefs (or even the abandonment of typological thinking¹²), for nineteenth-century readers to imagine themselves linked by temporal coincidence and a finite national destiny, rather than primarily by the seasons of the church and God's typological arrangement of history.

However, *The Christian Year* resisted its readers' total immersion in this form of imagined national community, not only by promoting typological interpretation of history and daily life, but also by orienting private reading around participation in the seasonal worship of the Church. Poems in *The Christian Year* regularly reinforce the confusion between their private reception and involvement in a worshiping community by aligning the two in the

time of reading. "Sunday next before Advent," taking its title from the final day in the Church's calendar, addresses readers as members of a congregation that has completed the ecclesiastical year, calling them to account for their spiritual progress: "Now through her round of holy thought / The Church our annual steps has brought, / But we no holy fire have caught" (13–15). The phrase "her round of holy thought" seamlessly blends the annual cycle of public worship with the interior cycle of reflection it might stimulate – and with the time of reading, if one is reading *The Christian Year* according to schedule. When commenting on the poem later in the century, Yonge assumes that repeated perusal has made such connections habitual for Anglican readers: "alas! how often have we felt how little our advance" over the Church year "since the last time" this poem "formed and expressed our sense of failure" (272). Readers in and out of the Anglican Church would have experienced the merger of private reading with public worship as *The Christian Year* was incorporated directly into services, whether by transforming select poems into hymns or by reading and commenting on them from the pulpit in place of a Sunday sermon (Coleridge *Memoir* 1: 157).

At the same time, the fluid connections that *The Christian Year* invited readers to make between private reading and membership in a worshiping community allowed Keble's poems to be powerfully informed by the capacity Anderson describes for imagining a national community of individuals progressing simultaneously through secular time. This is apparent in "Monday in Easter Week," reportedly a favorite among nineteenth-century readers (Yonge 128). The poem opens by calling on the analogical mode of interpretation disciplined throughout the volume, sustaining an elaborate comparison between prayer and a "new-born rill" (1) that swells, as it gathers force and meets with other streams, into the "bulwark of some mighty realm," bearing "navies to and fro / With monarchs at their helm" (10–12), until the comingled waters "in the wide sea end / Their spotless lives at last" (19–20):

Even so, the course of prayer who knows?
It springs in silence where it will,
Springs out of sight, and flows
At first a lonely rill:

But streams shall meet it by and by
From thousand sympathetic hearts,
Together swelling high
Their chant of many parts. (21–28)

As in "Septuagesima Sunday," Keble appears to be mediating patristic exegesis to British readers through the habit of private reading. Later, in his 1841 tract on "Mysticism," he quotes St. Ambrose, who drew upon various scriptural verses to conclude that God intended us to find an analogy between streams, each taking their separate start and ending in a common sea, and the conversion and congregational prayer of Christians:

[I]t is a true similitude, which is commonly made of the sea to a Church, first receiving or swallowing by all its porches certain waves of people entering in long array, then in the prayer of the whole congregation sounding as with reflux waves, when in harmony to the responsories of the Psalms

an echo is made, a breaking of waves, by the chanting of men and women, of virgins and children.
(153–54)

Keble completes the patristic analogy near the end of the poem, when he describes “Gentile spirits” “daily” pressing “through Christ’s open gate” (47–48). Yet he reworks the analogy in two ways that keep his poem open to the form of national imagination analyzed by Anderson. First, Keble turns the analogy toward Britain; second, Keble describes “a chant of many parts” that none of its mortal participants can hear. Keble’s lines – “bulwark of some mighty realm, / [That] Bear[s] navies to and fro / With monarchs at their helm” – recall the address of the Thames to Windsor forest in Pope’s nationalist pastoral by that name (“half thy Forests rush into my Floods, / Bear *Britain’s* Thunder and her Cross display, / To the bright Regions of the rising Day” [385–88]), as well as James Thomson’s “Rule, Britannia” (1740), early converted into a patriotic song still roared out at concert halls and soccer matches:

When Britain first at heaven’s command,
Arose from out the azure main,
This was the charter of the land,
And guardian angels sung this strain:

‘Rule Britannia, rule the waves,
Britons never will be slaves.’ (1–6)

According to Yonge’s 1872 commentary (129) and earlier remarks in periodicals (“John Keble,” *Month* [1866]: 444), there was a literary rumor that Keble was thinking of the sources of the Thames and Severn rivers when composing his lines. Of course, Keble comes nowhere near Thomson’s nationalist strutting. His stanza form gently recalls the long measure used by Thomson and many hymnists, even as it shortens the lines metrically (from 4-4-4-4 to 4-4-3-3) in an aural and typographical concentration obedient both to the governing analogy – the gathering of many streams of prayer into one “chant” – and to the quiet, restrained private devotion recommended in the poem: the “course of prayer” cannot be charted by those who pray, for it “springs in silence where it will, / Springs out of sight, and flows / At first a lonely rill.” If Keble’s poem unobtrusively suggests that the “thousand sympathetic hearts” are British by alluding to Britain’s mighty commercial and military waterways, these prayers are only part of a mightier influx of praise and supplication from throughout the Christian church. The allusion at the close of the poem to “perils brav’d” by “veterans” (55–56) might have unavoidably recalled for Keble’s first readers recent glories in the Napoleonic wars, and later readers might have thought of many other overseas campaigns waged by the British as *The Christian Year* continued its reign; but such nationalist triumphs are hinted at only to be devalued and to set off the far greater triumph, achieved through prayer, over conquered “Gentile spirits” now pressing into “Christ’s open gate” (gates held open, perhaps, by the imperial spread of the Anglican church).

In view of the private-public nature of reading *The Christian Year*, these lines could easily take on additional resonances as they became a “first love” among “those who have known the ‘Christian Year’ from childhood” (Yonge 128). Prayers, springing silently out of sight from a “thousand sympathetic hearts,” each nameless to the others, yet coordinated

simultaneously, as it were, into one “chant of many parts” – this is yet another image of the fusion between domestic reading and public praise solicited throughout *The Christian Year*. In “Trinity Sunday,” for instance, the time and space of private reading strangely slide into the time and space of corporate, seasonal worship within a virtual church building: “Along the Church’s central space / The sacred weeks with unfelt pace / Have borne us on from grace to grace. / . . . And now before the choir we pause. / [Where we overhear a hymn of] Three solemn parts [that] together twine / In harmony’s mysterious line” (10–12, 21, 28–29).

When in “Monday in Easter Week” Keble invokes another discipline instilled throughout *The Christian Year*, the discovery of scriptural types fulfilled in present Christian lives, he interestingly draws on the New Testament story of two individuals, praying alone and unknown to each other, yet coordinated in their meditation by the providence of God. Acts 10, which provides the epigraph for Keble’s poem, tells of Cornelius, a Roman centurion attracted to Judaism, who receives a message “about the ninth hour of the day” (10.9) from an angel while praying in his villa at Caesarea. The angel tells him to send men to Joppa, about 40 miles away, to obtain St. Peter, who will instruct Cornelius spiritually. “On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour” (10.9), receiving a vision from God in which he was commanded to eat previously unclean things, which the narrative later reveals is a sign of the Gentiles’ inclusion in Christian salvation, as Cornelius and his household gladly receive Peter’s message and are baptized (10.25–48). Keble seems simply to repeat the story, but certain details have been altered:

Unheard by all but angel ears
The good Cornelius knelt alone,
Nor dream’d his prayers and tears
Would help a world undone.

The while upon his terrac’d roof
The lov’d Apostle to his Lord
In silent thought aloof
For heavenly vision soar’d.

Far o’er the glowing western main
His wistful brow was upward rais’d,
Where, like an angel’s train,
The burnish’d water blazed.

The saint beside the ocean pray’d,
The soldier in his chosen bower,
Where all his eye survey’d
Seem’d sacred in that hour.

To each unknown his brother’s prayer,
Yet brethren true in dearest love
Were they—and now they share
Fraternal joys above. (29–48)

In Acts, Cornelius and Peter pray at different hours of the day (the “ninth” and “sixth” respectively), and on different days: Peter is found praying by Cornelius’ men “on the morrow” after he sends them to Joppa. Keble, however, blurs these distinctions, allowing readers to imagine Cornelius praying “while” Peter, far away on his terrace overlooking the Mediterranean, is also meditating, “each unknown to his brother’s prayer” and each “Unheard by all but angel ears” and God. Keble not only transforms Cornelius into a type of all the Gentiles, including his present readers, who will flow into heaven through Christ’s gate, but also makes him, together with Peter, into a type of scattered individuals, simultaneously praying alone and unknown to each other, yet mysteriously coordinated into a network of prayer by God.

At least some Victorian readers reread Acts under the influence of Keble’s poem. In her commentary, Yonge agrees that an outstanding example of God’s integration of disparate, simultaneous prayers is found in “Cornelius . . . praying in his villa at Caesarea, . . . *at the same time*” as “the ardent simple hearted Apostle, at Joppa on the house-top,” was “praying to know his Lord’s will,” each “perfectly ignorant of the prayer of the other” (129; emphasis mine). Readers attuned to the massive circulation of *The Christian Year*, and also familiar with its use as “a book for each individual, found in every room, companion in travel, comfort in sickness” (Coleridge *The Guardian* [April 11, 1866]: 372), might recognize in Keble’s presentation of Corenlius and Peter an anticipation of their own reading activity as faithful individuals scattered throughout a nation and empire – a prefiguration ultimately made possible, according to the poem, by God’s superintendence of history, the basis of Christian typology. The fusion of private reading with communal worship throughout *The Christian Year* thereby left the collection’s use open to the imagined simultaneity in secular time to which periodicals and novels accustomed nineteenth-century readers. Yet in the imagined national religious community enabled by *The Christian Year*, the network of print, by means of which individual Britons could conceive of themselves in a nation of anonymous compatriots simultaneously leading separate lives, is sublimated into a network of prayer, its channels providentially interlinked from above.

On 11 April 1866, a week after Keble’s death, the High-Church newspaper the *Guardian* published a letter from an anonymous reader commemorating the author of *The Christian Year*. The correspondent reveals the influence of Keble’s volume in the way he imagines a national religious community. He opens by alluding to Acts 13.36 – “David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers” (AV) – to transform the Psalmist into a type of Keble, even as he transforms Israel into a type of Britain: “Your next number will record the laying to rest of the great psalmist of our Israel, who having ‘served his own generation by the will of God, has fallen on sleep’” (“John Keble” 371). Included in a series of letters sent from different corners of the nation to commemorate Keble and *The Christian Year*, this act of typological interpretation takes for granted the sense of membership in a nation of individuals simultaneously progressing through secular time that was stimulated by the regular circulation of newspapers such as the *Guardian* (“Your next number will record the laying to rest. . .”). In ways Keble could never have predicted, *The Christian Year* had provided a means for adapting a typological vision of Christian history and community to the secular, non-ecclesiastical time by which readers were becoming accustomed to clock the nation’s imagined life.

IV. Conclusion: (Re)Imagining National Religious Community Through *The Christian Year*

WHILE KEBLE INTENDED *THE CHRISTIAN YEAR* to bring British readers under Anglican discipline, his collection quickly became a means not only for Anglicans, but also for those outside the Established Church to conceive of an imagined national religious community. This is perhaps clearest in the many attempts made by nineteenth-century journalists, educators, and clergymen to account for the influence and popularity of *The Christian Year* after Keble's death on 29 March 1866. Writing for the *Contemporary Review*, William Lake, an Anglican clergyman liberal in politics and connected with leading Broad Churchmen, provides a typical example of how commentators built on the interdenominational circulation of *The Christian Year* to imagine a national, non-sectarian religious unity formed by reading devotional poetry:

[W]e may reckon amongst the best signs of [the] Age. . . , the fact that poetry, so pure and unworldly, should be, far above any other that can be named, the constant companion of every class of thoughtful Englishmen and Englishwomen, – a true 'Eirenicon' [an attempt to make peace], in which, spite of all differences of thought and feeling, –
 "Reconcilèd Christians meet,
 And face to face and heart to heart,
 High thoughts of holy love impart,
 In silence meek or converse sweet." (337)

Quoting from "St. Mark's Day" in *The Christian Year*, Lake performs the act of imagination made so habitual by Keble's collection: he describes private reading ("constant companion of every class of thoughtful Englishmen and Englishwomen") as participation in a national religious community ("Christians meet, / . . . face to face and heart to heart"). For Lake, by piercing denominational divisions through private reading, *The Christian Year* outlines a fundamental, non-sectarian Christian unity for the nation, providing, as it were, a virtual meeting place that no single church party could hope to offer. One might expect such a reading from a clergyman with Broad Church affinities, but similar assertions were widely made after Keble's death by writers in Dissenting periodicals. In his denomination's quarterly review, James Harrison Rigg, a Wesleyan Methodist minister and educator, observed: "Very remarkable and very beautiful is the unanimity of affectionate admiration and regret with which the intelligence of Mr. Keble's decease has been responded to by Christian men of every denominational colour. The *Nonconformist* has vied with the *Guardian* [High-Church newspaper] in its tribute to his merits as a sacred poet and his goodness as a man" (403).

In "Sweetness and Light" (1869), Arnold would poke fun at the narrowness of the *Nonconformist* simply by quoting its motto, "The Dissidence of Dissent, and the Protestantism of the Protestant Religion!" (101). Yet even this newspaper strained to present the enjoyment of *The Christian Year* "among all cultured men and women" (261) as a sign of a generally Protestant nation, with room for different religious camps – a vision that the author had himself apparently only imperfectly understood: "In almost everything that relates to Church life and outward Christian worship on earth he was opposed to us . . . [But] Keble is to the Christian Church what Tennyson is to all of our own age . . . – the poet of lofty spirituality. We wish he had not so often sung in such sectarian dress, but we have always forgotten the dress when we have heard the song" (262).

As the *Nonconformist* journalist shows, envisioning the interdenominational national community indicated by *The Christian Year* did not mean surrendering conviction of the superiority of one's own ground. In fact, demonstrating sensitivity to *The Christian Year* could be a way of pointing out the spiritual narrowness of other religious groups in the nation. Immediately after rebuking Keble's confinement to the establishment, the *Nonconformist* casts aspersions on Scotch Presbyterians for refusing "to read a line of Keble's," a sign of the Puritanical "idolatry of most Scotchmen" ("Ecclesiastical Notes" 262). Similarly, a journalist for the Jesuit-run *Month* builds on the familiar connection between Keble's poems and a generally Protestant national community, arguing that "its thousands of readers" ("John Keble" 441) have underappreciated the "great movement towards antiquity and Catholicism, which was originated by the *Christian Year*" ("John Keble" 445). The *Month* critic resolutely links *The Christian Year* to its author's later involvement in *Tracts for the Times* and the Anglo-Catholic movement it sparked – which, this critic and the *Nonconformist* author would agree, threatened the "Protestantism of England" (446). *The Christian Year*, he continues, has in fact proven so attractive to Protestants precisely because Keble's "poetic fancy and devotional feeling invested Anglicanism with beauties and graces which did not really belong to it" (451). By following "hints contained in the Prayer-Book" Keble was unconsciously drawing on the ancient majesty belonging to Roman Catholicism, so that "the royal attributes of the Spouse of Christ" seemed to belong "to the Communion" he adored (451). *The Christian Year* itself becomes an emblem of Britain's spiritual condition: despite the intentions of its author and the conscious beliefs of the majority of its readers, it has revealed Protestant Britain's unconscious desire for the beauty of the Catholic Church.

When commemorating Keble's *The Christian Year*, then, ideologically disparate journalists, educators, and clergymen felt empowered by the collection's influence to imagine conflicting versions of a national religious community that the law had by then increasingly made a reality,¹³ and about which Keble was prophetically anxious in his 1833 "National Apostasy" sermon: a generally Christian Britain in which the Anglican Church was "henceforth to stand, in the eye of the State, as one sect among many" (*Sermons* 127). This act of imagining a non-sectarian (but generally Protestant) religious community for the nation by means of *The Christian Year* was compatible with attempts to privilege one's own ecclesiastical camp within the national spiritual collective – or, in the case of Catholic writers, to argue that devoted reading of *The Christian Year* showed the unconscious longing of Britain for the Church it had forsaken.

The Christian Year might have ultimately proved so popular and resonant with the life of the nation because it provided a flexible means of imagining a link between a national community secularly timed by clocks and periodicals, and a cross-denominational community of anonymous, faithful readers united by basic piety and a generally Christian typological code for interpreting national and daily life. Considering Keble's anxiety over "popular channels of information" such as periodicals and newspapers (*Sermons* 116), it is a little ironic that late into the century these publications remained important agents in sustaining readers' fluid associations between *The Christian Year*, the Church calendar it defended, and the secular temporal journey of the nation. Many newspapers and journals published weekly and monthly calendars that synthesized central events in national history, the Church seasons, and the deaths of outstanding national figures. In constructing the nation's calendar, simultaneously secular and sacred, *Reynolds's Newspaper*, left-leaning, cheap, and with a fairly wide circulation that penetrated the working classes, cooperated with

All the Year Round, launched by Dickens and catering to a wide but respectable middle-class audience. Sandwiched between events such as “The Fifth Sunday in Lent” and “Slave Trade Abolished,” both journals regularly included “John Keble died, 1866” (“Calendar for the Week” 4; “Calendar for 1895” 58). No one needed to add that he was the author of *The Christian Year*.

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NOTES

1. At least this seemed to be the case in 1927, when the *Times Literary Supplement* suggested that “with its ninety-five editions in thirty-nine years,” *The Christian Year* “is probably a world’s ‘record’” for the most editions of a work sold in an author’s lifetime (“Note on Sales” 492).
2. In addition to Tennyson’s discussion in *Victorian Devotional Poetry* (226–32), see Blair’s survey of responses to *The Christian Year* in her “Introduction” to *Keble in Context* (7–9), “John Keble and the Rhythm of Faith” (129–30), and “Keble and *The Christian Year*” (607–08, 616–21).
3. A journalist for the *Daily News* (2 April 1866) joined many in identifying the immense influence of *The Christian Year* with the religious assurance it encouraged at a time when Christian orthodoxy seemed to face challenges to its authority: “His religious verse was eminently that of a satisfied mind, one resting in the assurance of truths which, for it, are beyond question, and in the spiritual relationships and duties accepted as of divine appointment . . . and this habit of mind may have, more than is commonly suspected, to do with the merits which have recommended ‘The Christian Year.’ . . . [I]t is remarkable ‘The Christian Year’ has gained steadily in favour during the rise and progress within the church of schools of thought that have tended to unsettle old forms of faith” (“The Late Rev. John Keble” 2).
4. Did, this scholarly discussion asks, *The Christian Year* anticipate and popularize Tractarian ideas such as analogy and reserve (Tennyson 69–71, 93), or have these concepts been too hastily read into the poetry in hindsight (Edgecombe 17)? I side with the first opinion, but I believe that the consistency between Keble’s position in *The Christian Year* and later Tractarian writings was due to persistent anxiety over print culture as well as – perhaps as much as – theological tenets.
5. It is hardly surprising that amidst clamor for parliamentary reform in 1831, with pro-reform newspapers steadily reporting speeches and petitions “from all over the island” (Colley 343), Keble should preach another sermon at Oxford, warning of the “daily diffusion of . . . irreverence and insubordination” through “the popular channels of information” (*Sermons* 116).
6. McKelvy comes to a similar conclusion in his chapter on *The Christian Year* (142).
7. I annotate the two installments of Williams’s “On Reserve” as Part 1 and Part 2.
8. Keble consistently stressed the role of mental and emotional habit in the Christian life, as opposed to mere dogmatic instruction. Emphasizing this point in his “Advertisement” to *The Christian Year* and Tract 89, Keble also did so in his lifelong service as a pastor in rural Hursley. As Johnson has observed, Keble’s parochial sermons “assume but do not insist on a basic grasp of the Christian creed. Rather they are designed to foster in their hearers habits of thought, which, if they take sufficiently deep root, will form a thoroughly Christian mind, even as ingrained moral habits constitute a virtuous character” (417). The two major resources on which Keble drew when trying to inculcate such devout mental habits in his parishioners were the same that I argue he emphasizes in *The Christian Year*: “the cycle of the liturgical year and the typological method of scriptural exegesis” (417).
9. Keble would later affirm that poetry, “traced as high up as we can go [to the Scriptures themselves], may almost seem to be God’s gift from the beginning” as a means of “training God’s people” in “supernatural knowledge” (“Mysticism” 185).

10. I borrow this term from Bolter and Grusin, who use it to describe the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms (273). While typological exegesis early relied on texts, Keble is here attempting to refashion this tradition through the particular media form of printed poetry, and the practice of privately reading it.
11. In the October 1866 issue of the *Evangelical Magazine*, the Rev. J. S. Bright approvingly quotes from Keble's "The Twenty-third Sunday after Trinity" to illustrate his own typological explication of "Autumn" (633). Bright advocates a view of nature that in many ways agrees with Keble's in "Septuagesima Sunday." "[T]he world . . . , notwithstanding its sin and sorrow, is the temple of the Divine presence, and full of the richest beauty for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear" (629). Bright, like Keble, assumes that interpreting nature and texts for spiritual types is natural: "[In autumn t]he days begin to shorten, as if to veil somewhat the fading beauty of the year, and men begin unconsciously to moralize . . . Serious passages of Scripture recur to the memory, and then the sad confession of the ancient church comes home to the heart: 'We all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.' . . . [Yet by the] mental law of contrast . . . humble and obedient souls may realize the blessedness of Him of whom it is said, 'His leaf shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper'" (632).
12. Landow and Korshin have demonstrated the degree to which novelists throughout the century depended on forms of typology to create, define, and foreshadow the qualities and actions of their characters (Korshin 226-45; Landow 97-99).
13. Over the thirty years preceding Keble's death, the Established Church had lost most of its civil power and exclusive political patronage from the British state. The two major periods of public debate and legislative reform leading to this situation were the late 1820s and the 1850s (1828 repeal of the Test Acts; 1829 Catholic Relief Act; 1854 admission of Dissenters to Oxford and Cambridge; 1857 removal of divorce from ecclesiastical control; 1858 admission of Jews to Parliament; the relative freedom from prosecution for blasphemy by 1860). Despite the increasing disassociation of Anglicanism from civil life, there remained a strong popular and official connection between the life of the nation (and empire) and Christianity in general: national days of prayer and fasting, for example, were still being declared by the state in the latter part of the century. Chadwick lucidly discusses these issues in *The Victorian Church* (1: 476-91; 2: 427-39).

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