

'Telling lies on behalf of the Bible': S. R. Gardiner's Doubts about Catholic Apostolic Teaching

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The reasons for the historian Samuel Rawson Gardiner's departure from the Catholic Apostolic Church in the mid-1860s are speculated upon but not generally known. This essay makes use of letters, hitherto in family hands and unknown to researchers, from Gardiner and his wife Isabella to her brother Martin Irving in order to trace the growth of Gardiner's doubts and his alienation from the Catholic Apostolic Church. In particular, the letters show how Gardiner felt the Church was mishandling the intellectual challenges exercising contemporary churchmen. The aim is to shed light on an aspect of Gardiner's biography which has not previously been explained adequately, and so to illuminate the response of one conservative religious movement – the Catholic Apostolic Church – towards the challenges presented by developments in the disciplines of geology and Biblical studies. It is argued that for Gardiner doubt was a necessary function of the quest for truth.

The reasons for the departure of the historian Samuel Rawson Gardiner (1829–1902) from the Catholic Apostolic Church in the mid-1860s are not generally known, primarily because scholars have not had access to relevant personal correspondence. Many who have written about Gardiner do not comment on his move. Of the minority who do, J. S. A. Adamson asserts that Gardiner abandoned the Catholic Apostolic Church in favour of 'Darwin-inspired evolutionism in sociology, positivism in philosophy and liberalism in politics'.¹ Timothy Lang's *The Victorians and the Stuart Heritage* (1995) places considerable emphasis on Gardiner's Catholic Apostolic upbringing and offers the fullest discussion of his departure from that Church, but

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¹ J. S. A. Adamson, 'Eminent Victorians: S. R. Gardiner and the Liberal as Hero', *HistJ* 33 (1990), 641–57, at 642.

in the absence of evidence Lang has to speculate about the causes of Gardiner's defection. He sees these as including the death of Gardiner's father in 1863, the perceived irrelevance of Catholic Apostolic apocalypticism in the settled climate of the 1850s and 1860s (an awareness strengthened by Gardiner's developing study of the English Civil War period and his observation that apocalypticism was a recurrent feature in English history rather than a divinely inspired response to contemporary workings of Providence), the incompatibility of a literal reading of Scripture with historical method, and (most importantly, according to Lang) the hindrance presented to his career prospects by his Catholic Apostolic membership and ministry.² The most recent work on Gardiner, Mark Nixon's *Samuel Rawson Gardiner and the Idea of History* (2011), whilst fairly conversant with the religious background, offers no explanation of Gardiner's doubts or his move to Anglicanism.³

This essay uses letters from Gardiner and his wife Isabella (1834–78), daughter of Edward Irving (on whom more below), to Isabella's brother Martin (1831–1912), in order to trace the growth of his doubts about Catholic Apostolic thinking and his consequent alienation from the movement, to some extent correcting Lang's interpretation and filling out Nixon's portrait. These letters are in family hands and have not previously been used by researchers.⁴ Lang's frustration that 'Gardiner never mentioned ... what Irvingism meant to him' and the *ODNB*'s assertion that he 'never explained his defection' can now to some extent be overcome.⁵ Although the process by which he came to doubt and then reject the Catholic Apostolic Church's teaching was essentially complete by 1865, he had published relatively little up to that point which would provide insights into his change of outlook. This correspondence therefore increases greatly the evidence available concerning the process.

² Timothy Lang, *The Victorians and the Stuart Heritage: Interpretations of a Discordant Past* (Cambridge, 1995), 146–7.

³ Mark Nixon, *Samuel Rawson Gardiner and the Idea of History* (Woodbridge, 2010).

⁴ An unpublished family history refers to further letters covering the periods 1850–5 and 1875–85: London, Society of Genealogists, Michael Gardiner, 'The Gardiners Volume One' (typescript, 1992), 189. However, these appear to have gone missing; I have also been unable to locate the extensive correspondence, said by the same author to exist, concerning Gardiner's not being allowed to proceed to the degree of MA at Oxford: *ibid.* 190.

⁵ Lang, *Victorians*, 148; *ODNB*, *s.n.* 'Gardiner, Samuel Rawson (1829–1902)'.

Gardiner was born at Whitchurch, Hampshire, in 1829, his father being a former East India Company judge, Rawson Boddam Gardiner (1787–1863).⁶ Gardiner *père* was an early adherent of Edward Irving (1792–1834), minister of the National Scotch Church in London's Regent Square, whose preaching about biblical prophecy, advocacy of the doctrine that Christ took fallen human nature in the incarnation, and encouragement of the charismatic gifts of tongues, prophecy and healing scandalized the sermon-tasting metropolis.⁷ After Irving's eviction from Regent Square in 1832 he formed a new congregation, the first of what was to become the Catholic Apostolic Church.⁸ His deposition from the Church of Scotland ministry for heresy followed in 1833, and he died in December 1834. July 1835 saw the separation of twelve apostles to lead the new Church. All Christendom was called to accept their authority and their message as presented in *Testimonies* to the heads of Church and state, and to receive the grace available through them in order to prepare for the imminent return of Christ and avoid impending divine judgement.⁹ By 1836, there were at least two dozen congregations in various parts of England and Scotland, and the following year Rawson Gardiner became the 'angel' (roughly equivalent to a bishop in the Ignatian sense, but subject to the apostles) of the congregations at Everton and Lymington in Hampshire.¹⁰ Samuel (known in the family as Sam) thus grew up at the heart of the new movement. His

⁶ Gardiner, 'Gardiners Volume One', 138–9.

⁷ Among many biographies of Irving, see Mrs M. O. W. Oliphant, *The Life of Edward Irving*, 2 vols (London, 1862); H. C. Whitley, *Blinded Eagle* (London, 1955); Tim Grass, *The Lord's Watchman: A Life of Edward Irving* (Milton Keynes and Eugene, OR, 2011).

⁸ On the Catholic Apostolic Church's history, see Edward Miller, *The History and Doctrines of Irvingism, or of the so-called Catholic and Apostolic Church*, 2 vols (London, 1878); Plato E. Shaw, *The Catholic Apostolic Church, sometimes called Irvingite: A Historical Study* (New York, 1946); R. A. Davenport, *Albury Apostles: The Story of the Body known as the Catholic Apostolic Church (sometimes called 'The Irvingites')* (London, 1970); Columba Graham Flegg, *'Gathered under Apostles': A Study of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (Oxford, 1992). None has much to say about the denomination's response to nineteenth-century intellectual developments. I am currently working on a new history, *The Lord's Work: A History of the Catholic Apostolic Church* (forthcoming).

⁹ The *Testimonies* were first issued between 1836 and 1838, and set out the apostles' assessment of the state and prospects of Christendom, calling upon the baptized to flee the judgement to come. One was addressed to William IV, one to the bishops of the Church of England, and another, the fullest and most often cited subsequently, to the heads of Church and state throughout Christendom. This last was the so-called *Great Testimony*.

¹⁰ H. B. Copinger, 'Annals: The Lord's Work by Apostles in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries' (typescript, c.1951), 70.

younger brother Charles Baring Gardiner (1833–1912) would also become an angel.¹¹ Sam, however, never rose higher than the rank of deacon.¹²

Sam Gardiner received what Lang calls 'an Anglican education' at Winchester, evidence that his father did not see Anglican and Catholic Apostolic allegiance as incompatible.¹³ In 1847 he went up to Christ Church, Oxford, proceeding to his BA in 1851. He had been awarded a studentship in 1850, but was unable to retain it because in 1851 he became a Catholic Apostolic deacon and thus closed the door on his being ordained in the Church of England, a condition of the award's continuance.¹⁴ Gardiner would have become a full member of the Catholic Apostolic Church on receiving the rite of sealing by the laying on of an apostle's hands, which for those brought up in the movement was administered on reaching the age of twenty.¹⁵ He was therefore probably already a member when granted his studentship; it was not membership but ministry in the Catholic Apostolic Church which was to cause him to resign it. What happened was that he was called to the diaconate by prophecy on 24 July 1851, it being indicated that the diaconate was a stepping stone to higher ministry,¹⁶ and on 27 October he was admitted as a deacon in the church at Paddington in London.¹⁷ Four days later the resignation of his studentship was recorded.¹⁸

¹¹ Charles served as a deacon until his ordination as priest in 1865: Isabella Gardiner to Martin Irving, 26 February 1865. In 1882 he became angel of the church at Brighton: Seraphim Newman-Norton, *A Biographical Index of those associated with the Lord's Work* (London, [1972]), 44. He appears to have ministered there until his death.

¹² The Catholic Apostolic diaconate was regarded as a permanent office in its own right, although some deacons were in time ordained as priests.

¹³ Lang, *Victorians*, 149.

¹⁴ C. H. Firth, 'Dr. S. R. Gardiner', *PBA* 1 (1903–4), 294–301, at 294; *ODNB*; Lang, *Victorians*, 148. Subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles, then still required of those proceeding to degrees at Oxford, was not the issue here: Catholic Apostolics would have had no problem with that.

¹⁵ [John Bate Cardale], *Readings upon the Liturgy and other Divine Offices of the Church*, 2 vols (London, 1879, 1878 respectively), 2: 429, 435. The rite was first administered in 1847.

¹⁶ 'There was an indication of the mind of the Lord in the word spoken to S. R. G. that He would use him to preach the Gospel first to the poor & then to the rich also _ intimating that He would use him first in a lower then in a higher sphere': 'Southampton Record of Events', undated ms book held with the letters.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Oxford, Christ Church, Dean and Chapter records, D&C, i.b.10, fol. 136^v, 31 October 1851: 'D[ominu]s Gardiner having tendered to the Dean by letter his resignation of his Student[']s place, it is declared vacant from this day'. I am grateful to the librarian, Judith

From 26 January 1852 until about 1866, Gardiner served as a deacon-evangelist,¹⁹ and was sent on preaching missions or took up temporary residence in places such as Lymington, Newport (Isle of Wight) and Bath. His primary responsibility appears to have been preaching to outsiders, seeking to present the claims of the new movement and to awaken hearers to inquire about the Lord's work by apostles, as well as distributing copies of apologetic literature such as the *Testimonies* to interested clergy and lay people.²⁰ Given the Church's readiness to have him preach evangelist sermons at Gordon Square, where the denomination's flagship church was opened in 1853, it would seem that the apostles had high hopes for his future ministry.

By the mid-1840s the family were living at 22 Gordon Street in Bloomsbury, close to Gordon Square.²¹ In 1856, Sam married Isabella and the couple also settled at 22 Gordon Street, presumably sharing the house with Sam's father (his mother had died in 1853). Later that year his first published work appeared: a translation of *Christian Family Life* by Heinrich W. J. Thiersch (1817–85) of Marburg in Germany. Thiersch, the son of a noted classicist, had given up a promising academic career as professor of theology at Marburg in 1849 to enter the Catholic Apostolic ministry; he shared Gardiner's interest in seventeenth-century English history, and Nicholas Tyacke thinks that he may 'possibly have influenced Gardiner's own historical studies'.²² The two first met in May 1856 when Thiersch was staying with Gardiner's father for a meeting and correcting the translation

Curthoys, for providing me with a copy and transcription of this source. Nixon uses the verb 'expelled' to describe what happened to Gardiner: *Gardiner*, 83. This is too strong, but he may perhaps have been asked to resign. Removal of his name from the college's books meant that he did not proceed to the degree of MA until 1884: Oxford, All Souls' College, Anson, S. R. Gardiner to William Anson, 19 November 1884.

¹⁹ Southampton Record; Lang, *Victorians*, 145.

²⁰ E.g. Isabella Gardiner to Martin Irving, 3 June 1856, 11 October 1857.

²¹ Gardiner, 'Gardiners Volume One', 143. Lang, on the basis of Post Office directories for Southampton and London, has the family moving in 1853: *Victorians*, 146.

²² Nicholas Tyacke, 'An Unnoticed Work by Samuel Rawson Gardiner', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 47 (1974), 244–5, at 245. On Thiersch, see Paul Wigand, *Heinrich W. J. Thierschs Leben (zum Teil von ihm Selbst erzählt)* (Basel, 1888); R.-F. Edel, *Auf dem Weg zur Völlendung der Kirche Jesu Christi: Die oekumenische Sendung der katholisch-apostolischen Gemeinden an die Gesamtkirche Jesu Christi dargestellt in Leben und Wirken des Prof. Dr. Heinrich W. J. Thiersch*, *Oekumenische Texte und Studien* 18, 2nd edn (Marburg an der Lahn, 1971), although neither appears to mention Gardiner.

of his book.²³ They became friends, Thiersch meeting or staying with Gardiner on several occasions when visiting England, and the Gardiners staying with Thiersch and his family when on holiday in Germany in 1867.²⁴

Intellectually speaking, Gardiner was head and shoulders above anyone else in the Catholic Apostolic Church in England. As early as 1856 Isabella confided her concerns to her brother, then en route to Australia to take up an appointment as professor of classics at the newly founded University of Melbourne.²⁵ In Martin's absence, she felt that Sam had nobody to talk to about his reading, although the Church authorities were of the opinion that delivering the *Testimony* to clergy and talking to them about the work would help him.²⁶ Thiersch would have been his equal, but the two could not often meet. Gardiner's doubts, then, began with his intellectual isolation as a Catholic Apostolic member and minister. He lacked an intellectually supportive community which could reinforce his belief system.

Gardiner's developing sense of intellectual frustration with the Catholic Apostolic Church was fuelled by a conviction that when its ministers did speak about contemporary currents of thought, they did not know what they were talking about; this would have threatened the credibility of his own ministry as a deacon-evangelist. In 1856, he wrote:

Mr. Taplin has come across Comte's positive philosophy in some shape or another, & has been teaching against it ... I wish he would leave it alone, for he does not seem to understand what he is attacking. Amongst other things he accuses the universities of being the seats of this philosophy. I only know I never came across a Comtist, when I was at Oxford.²⁷

Moreover, Catholic Apostolic scholarship tended to look backwards, the liturgical researches of the chief apostle, John Bate Cardale (1802–77), being a prime example. At this point there were few if any

²³ Isabella Gardiner to Martin Irving, 18 May 1856.

²⁴ Isabella Gardiner to Martin Irving, 26 September 1867.

²⁵ Martin Irving proceeded to the degree of MA in 1856, although J. A. Froude later suggested that filial piety had kept him from taking a fellowship at Oxford: cited in John S. Martin, *Martin Hony Irving: Professor, Headmaster, Public Servant* (Melbourne, 2006), 49.

²⁶ Isabella Gardiner to Martin Irving, [June 1856] and 16 December 1858.

²⁷ S. R. Gardiner to Martin Irving, 23 November [1856]. Edward Taplin (1800–62) was the 'Pillar of Prophets', the chief representative of that ministry in the Catholic Apostolic Church.

members able to wrestle with the issues presented by contemporary developments in various sciences, and more often than not ministers were content to continue advocating a pre-critical approach to Scripture, calling on eighteenth-century writers in support. The apostle John Tudor (1784–1861), for instance, rejected the understanding of geological stratification as an entirely natural process occurring over a long period of time and argued for a literal six-day creation and for the importance of Noah's flood as an act of God.²⁸ Nevertheless, at this stage Gardiner seems to have been confident about the compatibility of his religious allegiance with a commitment to careful historiography; when a prospective employer expressed the fear that he would be 'sectarian' in his approach to modern history, he rejected the charge as 'gammon', telling his brother-in-law: 'if anybody can be unsectarian, we can; or at least, next door to the infidels'.²⁹

There is a two-year gap in the correspondence from early 1859 to early 1861; thereafter Gardiner continued writing to Irving about Church affairs, but there are no further references to his preaching, and it appears that he was becoming less active in ministry. This may mean that the Church was losing confidence in his ministry, or that he was asking too many awkward questions, or simply that he was increasingly busy with the demands of his vocation as a historian (which was becoming his main source of income) and his growing family. But he was not yet expressing doubts openly, even to Martin. In 1861 he dismissed two controversial books: 'I haven't read Essays & Reviews, & I haven't read the Gorilla book. Am not I ignorant? I haven't time to read very much except Reviews & Magazines'.³⁰ In February 1863 he quoted a couple of limericks about J. W. Colenso,

²⁸ [John Owen Tudor], *On the Reconciliation of Geological Phenomena with Divine Revelation* (London, 1856); cf. idem, *Sacred Geology; or, The Scriptural Account of the World's Creation maintained* (London, 1847), xiv–xvii.

²⁹ S. R. Gardiner to Martin Irving, 3 January 1858. The Catholic Apostolic Church claimed that it alone could rise above all sectarian distinctions, because it was led by apostles, who were intended to head up the whole Christian Church on earth. It therefore accepted no name which would mark it out as a subset of the company of the baptized.

³⁰ S. R. Gardiner to Martin Irving, 15 September 1861. The 'Gorilla book' is not identifiable from the letter, but it may have been Paul du Chaillu, *Explorations and Adventures in Equatorial Africa* (London, 1861), which became a best-seller thanks to the interest excited by the author's collection of gorilla bones and skins which he had exhibited in London that February: see Jochen Petzold, "'How like us is that ugly brute, the ape!'" Darwin's "Ape Theory" and its Traces in Victorian Children's Magazines', in Barbara Schaff, Eckart Voigts and Monika Pietrzak-Franger, eds, *Reflecting on Darwin* (Farnham, 2014) 57–71, at 59–60. I owe this reference to Frances Andrews.

the Anglican bishop of Natal whose work on the Pentateuch had caused such a furore, in order to fill up a short letter, doing so in a way which implies that he did not feel there was any serious challenge to be met in the bishop's writings.³¹

Two months later, however, when his father was dying, Sam concluded a letter by informing Martin: 'I can't go on writing about other things which I want to say, in the midst of this trouble.'³² What the 'other things' were appears from his letter informing Irving of Rawson Gardiner's death; it is conceivable that his father's passing allowed him to express thoughts which hitherto he had kept to himself. The letter contains a fuller expression of his concerns regarding the way in which the Catholic Apostolic Church was meeting the intellectual challenges of the day. Dr Augustus Bayford, who had defended G. C. Gorham before the Court of Arches in his legal battle with Bishop Phillpotts of Exeter,³³ had undertaken at short notice to deliver a course of lectures against *Essays and Reviews*. Sam was unimpressed: 'he told us that we ought to be prepared to deny boldly any conclusions whatever to which Geology[,] Ethnology &c. might lead us, not because we knew anything about the matter but because though they were logically faultless they didn't agree with Genesis. In other words our business is to tell lies on behalf of the Bible.'³⁴ A month later he returned to the last allegation: 'I haven't read Colenso because he is an ass & I haven't time to read asses' books. I have read Lyell. All I can say is that it is no use trying to please God by telling lies which is the line that nine tenths of the good people at Gordon Square take.' Even those ministers who were not guilty of this stopped short of serious engagement with the issues, Cardale the chief apostle included.³⁵

About this time Martin evidently commented on Colenso's ideas in a letter, for Isabella felt it necessary to account for her husband's lack of response by explaining to him: 'To tell you the truth I think

³¹ S. R. Gardiner to Martin Irving, 19 February 1863.

³² S. R. Gardiner to Martin Irving, 27 April 1863.

³³ A. F. Bayford, *The Argument of Dr Bayford on behalf of the Rev. G. C. Gorham in the Court of Arches*, 2nd edn (London, 1849).

³⁴ S. R. Gardiner to Martin Irving, 25 May 1863.

³⁵ S. R. Gardiner to Martin Irving, 25 June 1863. He was probably referring to a lecture by Charles Lyell to the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1859 arguing for belief in an 'old earth', or to Lyell's 1863 book *The Geological Evidence of the Antiquity of Man*: see James C. Livingston, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age: Challenges and Presuppositions* (New York and London, 2007), 155–6.

he feels too much about the whole matter, to know exactly how to write to you about it. We have had many trying teachings & sermons about it all here.³⁶ At this stage, however, Sam appears to have been questioning rather than rejecting Catholic Apostolic belief, and seeking to understand the issues presented by contemporary challenges to orthodox Christian thought. His doubts appear to have been provoked as much by the perceived inadequacy of Catholic Apostolic responses to contemporary scientific writers as by the writers themselves. Although he was reading various journals, his letters do not mention many scientific authors in a manner which indicates serious first-hand engagement with their books. A month later, in response to Martin's inquiry as to whether he would be asked to go to Melbourne as a minister, he confessed: "There are several things I want to understand myself, before I can be asked to teach other people."³⁷

However, by March 1865 Gardiner had taken a further step away from his religious roots, ceasing to worship in the Catholic Apostolic Church. His conviction that his brother-in-law would value the quest for truth more highly than allegiance to a particular theological system enabled him to share his doubts freely with him. Among the issues he mentioned were the inadequacy of the movement's response to new scientific challenges. Its approach might have been appropriate when the issues under discussion concerned intra-Christian disputes, but the challenges now concerned the credibility of Christianity itself rather than that of one Christian group over against another.

... after much and anxious thought I have come to the conclusion that it is impossible for me any longer to continue taking part in the worship to which I have been accustomed from my childhood. As long as the religious questions under discussion around [*sic*] were merely sectarian disputes I felt, and I suppose we all felt that we were standing on a ground which gave us larger views, and fuller faith. But I feel that it is very different now. New questions are arising of a very different character, and what ever may be the true answers to them it is impossible for any one who watches what is going on around to imagine that they will be found at Gordon Square. There is nothing there but recurrence to old formulas. Whether we accept Dr Bayford's doctrine that it is the

³⁶ Isabella Gardiner to Martin Irving, 26 September 1863.

³⁷ S. R. Gardiner to Martin Irving, 25 October 1863.

duty of a Christian to assert, in spite of any evidence however conclusive, the falsehood of scientific proof when it clashes with our accepted system; or whether we hold with Mr Groser³⁸ that science is no doubt true, but that we had better shut our eyes to any difficulty it presents, I don't see that there is much chance of being of any use whatever to ourselves or those around us.

And besides this, the more I look into the history of the world, the more the presence of God becomes revealed not in a pattern organization, or in a complete theological system, but as showing itself in the blessing which crowns the work of men who from various sides and with partial success grasp by turns some portion of the Divine order which is not wholly revealed to any.

Again and again I have longed to be able to talk over my thoughts with you; because I know that you would think first of what was true, and not as too many others do of what was true according to a certain system. I don't think I can say any more. But you will know how much trouble and sorrow this has caused in many ways.³⁹

Isabella's comment on reading this over was that her husband's care for her, and his 'simplicity & uprightness' remained unchanged; God knew his heart, and she trusted God with her future, although 'it looks different now from what it did' when they married.⁴⁰ Given such hints as the prophecy at his admission to the diaconate marking him out for a higher sphere of service, it is probable that the Church authorities had envisaged his eventual call to the priesthood.⁴¹ She may well have anticipated, then, that her husband would become a full-time minister. Now she had to come to terms with the realization that this was never going to happen; yet she referred in the same letter to Sam's conducting family prayers, and on Sunday evenings

³⁸ Groser, formerly a Baptist minister, was an early convert to the movement. The Gardiners were friends with him, and Sam had earlier expressed appreciation of his preaching: Gardiner to Martin Irving, 1 November 1856. Groser continued to dine with them until at least 1870.

³⁹ S. R. Gardiner to Martin Irving, 27 March 1865.

⁴⁰ Isabella Gardiner to Martin Irving, 26 March 1865.

⁴¹ It had been suggested in 1857 that he offer himself as a candidate for ordination to the priesthood, but he refused, feeling that whilst he was a bad deacon he would make a worse priest: S. R. Gardiner to Martin Irving, 9 September [1857].

the couple were reading together, from the latest volume of Edward Irving's sermons, those on 'Social Religion'.⁴²

Sam's final statement regarding his changing views came in a letter of August 1865, written from Pontresina in Switzerland. Thanking Martin for his 'very, very kind letter', which was probably a reply to his earlier confession, he explained that it was difficult to know how to put his doubts into words; for one thing, so much was 'the product of feeling rather than of reasoning'. Gardiner was evidently not a rationalist pure and simple. The two principles guiding his thinking were, firstly, that

Every where the good is partial & subject to continual change of form according to the wants of the age. Everywhere definite organization and definite logical forms put forward as a universal panacea are the sure precursors of decay & death. How then can I tell men that to submit to certain definite ordinances, & to accept certain beliefs upon the word of certain men is the way to a universal restoration?

Secondly, he had come to disbelieve the phenomenon of charismatic prophecy, which occupied a central place in Catholic Apostolic worship. Once again, he stressed that it was not a rational issue, but 'a matter of feeling and spiritual perception' (appropriately, given that prophecy was itself regarded as a matter of 'spiritual perception'). Furthermore, Martin had said that 'questions about geology & science should not trouble us', but whilst Sam admitted that religious teachers should not be expected to 'know everything correctly', he complained that Bayford had been 'allowed without contradiction to put forth opinions which could only lead to a universal scepticism', insisting, for instance, that belief in a six-day creation was non-negotiable.⁴³ The problem, as Gardiner saw it, was not so much what Bayford had asserted, but the fact that he had been allowed to do so without any alternative opinion being offered. And such teaching was not refuted but 'eagerly received by many'.

The beauty of the Catholic Apostolic liturgy was widely deployed as an apologetic argument in favour of the movement's divine origin; Gardiner had done so himself and Irving had advanced the same

⁴² Edward Irving, *Collected Writings*, ed. Gavin Carlyle, 5 vols (London, 1865), 3: 217–340.

⁴³ However, Groser warned against excessive dogmatism in this matter, and appears to have regarded the six days as long periods: *Sermons preached in the Catholic Apostolic Church, Gordon Square* (London, 1871), 78–9, 84.

argument in a letter to him. Now, however, whilst Gardiner could accept, in Plato's terms, that whatever was beautiful must in some sense be true, he could not accept that it must be the truth without any admixture of error. Like all apprehensions of truth in this world, it was partial and liable to be superseded. As Gardiner read his father-in-law's published works, he readily acknowledged the good in them which had come from God, but denied that such blessing had, or must, come through supernatural intervention. Rather, it was Irving's personal qualities as a Christian which God had used. Such an argument struck at the heart of what Edward Irving had stood for regarding charismatic manifestations, and hence at the basis for the Catholic Apostolic Church's separate existence.

It would appear that Gardiner had shared his doubts with others, for he went on:

It has been said to me, & you will perhaps say the same. 'If you admit all this, why not remain where you were?' My answer to this is, Because it is dishonest. Unless I believe more than this I cannot by my presence even at the services tell men that more than this is true. Every time I went to Church latterly I felt as if I were in a manner telling a lie to God & man.

It was his commitment to truth which led Sam to act and think as he did. That commitment, and his conviction that human perception of truth in this life must inevitably be partial, made it impossible for him to accept any longer the Catholic Apostolic approach to questions of truth. Martin may have suggested that the Church's teachings could be interpreted in terms of metaphor, story or ideal, but Sam would have seen that this could never be acceptable to the Catholic Apostolic apostles. He was not, however, adopting a positivist view in which facts were everything, for, as Nixon points out, he occasionally made use of a story about a historical figure which, whilst not demonstrably true in the sense that it actually happened, nevertheless offered a true insight into the subject's character.⁴⁴ Moreover, his later historical writing would bear out his belief in the need for imagination on the part of a historian seeking to step inside the past.⁴⁵

Gardiner did not regard himself as having abandoned Christian faith: 'In God[']s protecting guidance, in the assurance that he will

⁴⁴ Nixon, *Gardiner*, 121–3.

⁴⁵ Cf. *ibid.* 29.

lead us all in his ways sooner or later my faith is as strong as ever it was.⁴⁶ To the extent that he retained a teleological understanding of personal history, then, he was still shaped by the perspective advocated by his father-in-law more than three decades earlier, which the Catholic Apostolic Church had adopted as its own. But as far as the Christian Church's relationship to society was concerned, he had turned that perspective on its head: whereas Edward Irving and the Catholic Apostolics thought in terms of the Church's decay from apostolic perfection into final apostasy, the faithful being rescued by divine intervention, Gardiner seems to have inclined to the idea of progress towards a fuller apprehension of truth, and increasingly to see his Church's dogmatic pronouncements as hindrances to that progress. His change of outlook reflected a wider trend: the apocalypticism which had been a prominent feature of the social milieu of the 1830s was no longer so attractive by the middle of the century, having to a large extent given way to notions of progress and achievement. Gardiner's belief in progress was not new; in 1858 he had expressed approval of Hegel's *Philosophy of History* because it argued that progress was measured by 'freedom to submit to the law of truth', whereas submission to tyranny or the arbitrary exercise of power represented decline.⁴⁷ One wonders whether he saw the Catholic Apostolic ministry as guilty of these failings.

Gardiner's complete disengagement from the Catholic Apostolic Church took a while longer, because it did not rush to strike members off its registers. As late as 1870 he continued to have quite extensive social contact with its ministers and people. But by 1871, when he applied for the professorship of modern history at King's College, London, a character reference was provided by the Anglican vicar of All Saints, Gordon Square, stating that Gardiner had been a regular communicant for several years.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, it was only in 1872 that Gardiner was formally declared by the Catholic Apostolics to be lapsed.⁴⁹ This was supposed to take place only after protracted attempts at reclamation had been made, but we have no

⁴⁶ S. R. Gardiner to Martin Irving, 12 August 1865.

⁴⁷ S. R. Gardiner to Martin Irving, 8 August 1858.

⁴⁸ London, King's College London, Secretary's in-correspondence, KA/IC/G50, Arthur Godson to the Council of King's College, 20 November 1871. Lang thinks that he continued as a communicant Anglican until his death: *Victorians*, 141; cf. *ODNB*.

⁴⁹ Lang, *Victorians*, 146, citing information provided by the Catholic Apostolic Trustees. The Church's extensive archives are inaccessible to researchers.

evidence of any such action in his case.⁵⁰ Perhaps other ministers – even Christopher Heath (1802–76), the angel, who would have been a family friend – were afraid of his intellectual standing, a final instance of the intellectual isolation of which he, and Isabella on his behalf, was all too conscious.

In conclusion, then, Gardiner's doubts and ultimate departure from the Catholic Apostolic Church owed much to the habits of mind which governed his work as a historian, but the issues for him were not the same as those put forward by Lang. Lang could not be certain whether Gardiner left the Catholic Apostolic Church for religious reasons or career ones; the letters examined here demonstrate clearly that the former was the case. This was the man whose honesty compelled him to take a course of action which would estrange him from the circle within which he had been brought up, and whose wife testified to his continuing 'simplicity & uprightness'.⁵¹ What mattered most to him was pursuing the truth, wherever that might lead, and in the course of that pursuit he was convinced that all apprehension of truth in this life was partial at best: no ideology or system of religious dogma could fully encapsulate it. As such he could not accept something as true simply on the authority of another, as the Catholic Apostolic Church expected the utterances of its higher ministers to be accepted; nor could he be as assertive and categorical as they were. Commitment to seeking the truth required him to doubt the word of its ministers. Gardiner was convinced that his Church was being economical with the truth. He would have shared Thiersch's opinion: 'It is lying which works the death of souls.'⁵²

It is therefore appropriate to reverse the *ODNB's* assertion that Gardiner's 'religious experience had an impact on his approach to history': it was his approach to history, and to truth in general, seeking to get at the facts of the matter and to use them in constructing a historiographical narrative, which shaped his religious experience. This way of thinking may, incidentally, also have dictated his approach to the question of Irish Home Rule in the 1880s: Nixon has suggested that '[i]t is a serious possibility that Gardiner's political views regarding Ireland resulted from his historical study of seventeenth-century

⁵⁰ *General Rubrics; or, Rules for the Celebration of the Divine Offices, etc.* (London, 1852), Appendix I; cf. *Book of Regulations* (London, 1878), §635.

⁵¹ Isabella Gardiner to Martin Irving, 26 March 1865.

⁵² Heinrich W. J. Thiersch, *Christian Family Life*, transl. S. R. Gardiner, 2nd edn (London, 1880), 160.

Ireland.⁵³ Further research might usefully explore whether a similar outlook was manifest in the thinking of other historians who came to doubt orthodox Christianity (such as Froude and Seeley), as well as comparing this with the outlook of those historians who retained (or returned to) mainstream belief (such as Acton, Döllinger and Lightfoot).⁵⁴ Such an investigation would need to reach back into the eighteenth century, for as Butterfield notes regarding the new German historical school which emerged from the 1760s, many of its chief luminaries had intended to become clergy but 'had been converted to history by their theological studies'.⁵⁵ Much more work has been done on the manifestations of doubt among the scientific community than on its appearance in historians. Gardiner is a promising subject for inquiry: he could no more tell lies on behalf of the Bible than he could on behalf of any of the historical figures whom he admired. Doubt, for him, was a function of his commitment to the quest for truth.

⁵³ Nixon, *Gardiner*, 13.

⁵⁴ Timothy Larsen to the author, e-mail, 31 December 2014.

⁵⁵ Herbert Butterfield, *Man on his Past: The Study of the History of Historical Scholarship* (Cambridge, 1955, repr. 1969), 36.