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The Churchman in the context of Victorian Evangelicalism

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'Of the gratification which the appointment will cause among all Evangelical Protestant Churchmen, no remark need here be made.' The paper in which these words occurred was *The Churchman* for May 1880; the appointment was that of J. C. Ryle to be Bishop of Liverpool. For twenty years Ryle gave evangelicals a more vigorous and decisive leadership than previous evangelical bishops had done, although this does not mean that earlier evangelical bishops had not served the church and their supporters well.

The first was Henry Ryder (Gloucester 1815-24, Lichfield and Coventry 1824-36). He was a wonderful pastoral bishop, whose kindness won over clergy who had no sympathy either for his views or his churchmanship, and the standard and spirituality of the clergy in both his dioceses rose perceptibly. He seems to me to have been a sort of nineteenth-century Clifford Martin. Ryder died in 1836, the year before Victoria came to the throne.

John Bird Sumner (Chester 1828-48, Canterbury 1848-62) also proved an excellent diocesan. He maintained the strict discipline over his clergy which he inherited from his predecessor, C. J. Blomfield. He insisted on a high standard from the men he was being asked to ordain and travelled the length and breadth of his vast diocese, planting churches and schools wherever possible. He encouraged both visiting and visiting societies and his work was publicly praised by Peel. Unfortunately, at the age of sixty-eight he was translated to Canterbury and a good diocesan bishop became a mediocre archbishop. It is said that in his old age he became prosy and boring. He was actively involved in the Gorham Judgement and, right at the end of his life, in the debate on *Essays and Reviews*.

His brother, Charles Richard Sumner (Llandaff 1824-28, Winchester 1828-69), was equally active in reviving the life of his diocese by building churches, parsonages and schools, by dividing it into rural deaneries and by increasing the number of confirmation centres. During his forty years at Winchester he conducted no less than ten visitations, and wherever he went he expected a high standard in the care of churches. He seems to have been the first bishop to insist on spending the few days before ordination with the

candidates—this was an early alternative to the later practice of holding an ordination retreat. Samuel Wilberforce, for a time Archdeacon of Surrey, gained some of his ideas for his New Model Episcopate from C. R. Sumner, whom he greatly admired. Unlike his brother, C. R. Sumner was opposed both to parliamentary and church reform, though he supported Roman Catholic Emancipation. He did not resign till he was nearly eighty.

The first appointment of an evangelical bishop in Victoria's reign came with the Palmerston bishops, who were chiefly appointed on the recommendation of Lord Shaftesbury in the period 1856-65. Of the fourteen bishops appointed, five were definitely evangelical: Baring (Gloucester and Durham), Villiers (Carlisle and Durham), Bickersteth (Ripon), Pelham (Norwich) and Waldegrave (Carlisle). Baring and Villiers, though industrious, were unpopular because of personal defects of character. Waldegrave and Pelham won the hearts of their people in their rural dioceses. Most significant of the five was Robert Bickersteth, whose diocese of Ripon included the modern dioceses of Wakefield and Bradford and all the west Yorkshire towns. Bickersteth had learnt the art of speaking to working men in his parish of St Giles-in-the-Fields; northern navvies, miners and mill-workers appreciated his directness and simplicity. He preached in the open air and urged his clergy to do the same, quickly securing their support. This was helped by Hook of Leeds pronouncing enthusiastically in favour of his first charge. His good relations with Anglo-Catholics were helped by his friendship, when Canon of Salisbury, with W. K. Hamilton, the Tractarian bishop. He was vigorous in church building and careful in his preparation of men for orders. In politics he was a Liberal. In the House of Lords he welcomed Forster's Education Bill and spoke in favour of the Deceased Wife's Sister's Bill. He took part in Church Congresses in the early days when many evangelicals avoided them. Like the Sumners he was well known outside his diocese and like Ryle was something of a national figure. Bickersteth died in 1884 at the age of sixty-eight.

The real leaders

However, we must look elsewhere than among the bishops for the real leaders of Victorian evangelicalism. For instance, Edward Bickersteth, Robert's uncle, had a wide influence. He had for some years been secretary of the Church Missionary Society. In 1830 he became vicar of the tiny village of Watton in Hertfordshire but maintained his contacts all over the country by continuing to travel on behalf of CMS, and his small parish allowed him time to write. Although not a graduate, Bickersteth was probably the most significant and widely-read theologian among early Victorian evangelicals. Among his sixteen books is an important one *On the Lord's Supper*; others include *A Treatise on Prayer* and *A Treatise on*

Baptism. He also provided evangelicals with a collection of the writings of the Fathers, where they could see for themselves what the Fathers said and how they are witnesses to the truth of Christ as found in Scripture. Added to all this was Bickersteth's hymn book, *Christian Psalmody*, which became—when revised by his son, Bishop Edward Bickersteth—*The Hymnal Companion to the Book of Common Prayer*. Bickersteth was also a pioneer in the ecumenical movement with the formation of the Evangelical Alliance, its aim being to unite all Christians in England except Roman Catholics. He was the special friend and confidant of Lord Shaftesbury, who owed a great deal to Bickersteth's gentle wisdom.

The other major leaders of Victorian evangelicalism, apart from Lord Shaftesbury, were the Protestant evangelical trio: Francis Close of Cheltenham, Hugh M'Neile of Liverpool and Hugh Stowell of Salford. They opposed Bickersteth's Evangelical Alliance because it would include dissenters who might be members of Edward Miall's Anti-State Church Society. The attitude of the trio on many things was negative, but not as negative as their critics make out. On this negative side was Close's tight control of the intellectual and social life of Cheltenham, which earned him the title of 'Pope of Cheltenham': on the positive side was his vision as an educationalist. As a result of Close's initiative, six infant schools were opened in Cheltenham and the number of children in National Schools was doubled. He also had some part in the founding of Cheltenham College and was the driving force in the formation of an evangelical training college for men and women teachers, which led to the establishment of St Paul's and St Mary's Colleges. Frederick Temple, who was one of the inspectors in 1856, spoke of the excellence of the training college. Close became the evangelical spokesman on education and was also self-appointed critic of the Ecclesiologists.

M'Neile and Stowell were the leaders of the Protestant movement in this country. Violent anti-Catholic agitation was entirely absent, as far as I know, from the Wilberforce-Simeon generation of Anglican evangelicalism. The change came in the early thirties, with the arrival in Salford of Hugh Stowell at Christ Church in 1831 and of Hugh M'Neile at St Bride's, Liverpool three years later. It was at this time that Protestant Associations were formed in Manchester and Liverpool and in other parts of the country. M'Neile and Stowell toured the country dwelling on the evils of popery and also addressed the Operative Protestant Associations of Liverpool and Manchester, which were in many ways similar to the Orange Lodges which they replaced. In education they were unsuccessful in getting the Authorized Version accepted as the only version in schools. The Liverpool Council defeated M'Neile and had it recognized that the Douay Version might also be used in Liverpool-controlled schools. M'Neile and Stowell were also unsuccessful in stopping the govern-

ment grant to the Roman Catholic seminary at Maynooth—Peel increased it in 1845. They were also outraged by the restoration of the Roman Catholic hierarchy to this country in 1850. Typical of many evangelicals was Hugh Stowell, who wrote an undated letter to the Protestant Ladies of Manchester and Salford urging them to form a society aimed at the suppression of cloistered nunneries in Her Majesty's dominions. In the same letter he says:

> The barred and battlemented dungeons of Rome are multiplying more and more on the face of our free country; and here in Protestant England they are unrestricted and unrestrained as they are in no other country in Europe, save palsied Spain and down-trodden Italy.[1]

Though M'Neile and Stowell appear to have moderated their anti-Catholic spleen in their later years, anti-popery remained one of the most powerful influences in evangelical religion at the time of the birth of *The Churchman*.

Close, M'Neile and Stowell were all regular speakers for the evangelical societies on the platform of Exeter Hall. Stowell stayed each year with friends at Tooting so that he might attend the May Meetings. These would always include those of the four societies which his church supported, namely the Church Missionary Society, the Church Pastoral Aid Society, the Bible Society and the Jews Society, but he attended and spoke at many more. Almost without exception he was one of the five or six speakers who addressed the CMS annual meeting in Exeter Hall. In 1842 he also preached the CMS sermon as well. In this way he became even more widely known than through his Protestant campaigns. The *Record* kept the views of Close, M'Neile and Stowell in front of their readers so that M'Neile and Stowell became household words in evangelical homes, and busts of each of them were available to place in the drawing-room.

The most familiar figure at the May meetings, over a period of fifty years, was that of Lord Shaftesbury. He was chosen, when comparatively unknown, as the first President of the Church Pastoral Aid Society and also became President of the London Society for Promoting Christianity amongst the Jews and the British and Foreign Bible Society. He was deeply involved in the work of the London City Mission and the Young Men's Christian Association and was also president or chairman of countless other godly and philanthropic societies. Towards the end of his life he wrote: 'Letters and Chairs eat me up . . . I am as thin as a wafer.'[2]

Shaftesbury sought by all means to save some, especially if they were poor. He also believed fervently in the second coming of Christ, which he thought in some way would be hastened by the return of the Jews to Palestine. Edward Bickersteth and he spent many hours together discussing the details of this hope. In politics Shaftesbury was an orthodox Tory; he was opposed to universal suffrage, the ballot and state education. He was also opposed to the manufacturing

interests as represented by Liberals like Cobden and Bright. On the other hand he differed from evangelical Conservatives like Stowell and M'Neile. Shaftesbury believed in agitation for factory reform through short-time committees. Stowell addressed a tract to employers entitled *A Plea for Working Men*, asking them to treat their workers as fellow men: not as they did 'their cotton, wheels or spindles.' Yet when Shaftesbury came to Manchester on short-time business, he shrieks into his diary: 'Where's Stowell?'

Evangelicals, whether they cared about factory reform or not, were with few exceptions Tory. Among the exceptions were Bishop Robert Bickersteth, whom we have already noted was a Liberal, and John Cale Miller, Rector of Birmingham. The more usual view was that of Francis Close, who said:

> In my humble opinion the Bible is conservative, the Prayer Book conservative, the Liturgy conservative, the Church conservative, and it is impossible for a minister to open his mouth without being conservative.[2]

The growth of industrial livings

Evangelicalism by 1850 had become predominant in the Church of England in spite of the quickly-growing popularity of the Tractarians. This was chiefly due to the hold that evangelicalism had on the towns. In the eighteenth century there were evangelical ministries in Hull, Bristol, Leicester and, for a short time, in Huddersfield, but most evangelical clergy were in country livings. This was altered by private patronage. Simeon set out to purchase town livings. By the time of his death Bradford, Newcastle-under-Lyme and St Giles, Northampton, were in the gift of the Simeon Trustees—as were St Peter's, Colchester and St Margaret's, Ipswich, in rural East Anglia. In Manchester and Liverpool evangelicalism was hardly represented till the arrival of Stowell and M'Neile in the 1830s. Trustees built Christ Church, Salford, for Stowell and formed with others the Manchester and Eccles Church Building Society which erected five churches in central Manchester. Nottingham had been virtually untouched by the Evangelical Revival before 1800 but within a few years the influence and effort of one clergyman and one layman completely transformed the situation. By 1850 the five largest congregations in Nottingham had an evangelical ministry, and by 1866 all the ancient churches in Nottingham had evangelical incumbents.[3] In Birmingham much the same happened. In 1829 Thomas Moseley became the first evangelical Rector of Birmingham; eight years later he formed the St Martin's Trust, consisting of five clergy, of whom Francis Close was one. The Trust was able to appoint to about a dozen livings in central Birmingham. Other evangelical parishes emerged in other parts of Birmingham, often as a result of private patronage. Added to this Birmingham was in the diocese of Lichfield and Coventry where, till his death in 1836, Henry Ryder was Bishop. Richard

Spooner, Wilberforce's brother-in-law, was Archdeacon of Coventry and George Hodson, another evangelical, was Archdeacon of Stafford.

In London, evangelical influence was nothing like as great as in the provincial centres. Daniel Wilson (junior) said that when he succeeded his father as Vicar of Islington in 1832 evangelicals were represented in London 'by men few in number and holding for the most part subordinate positions.'[3] This meant that they were either unbeneficed curates or ministers at proprietary chapels like St John's, Bedford Row. Islington sprouted several parishes similar in outlook to itself and, with the Church Missionary College in the parish, became an evangelical oasis in the diocese.

In 1837 Brazenose College, Oxford, appointed William Champneys to be Rector of Whitechapel. He was the first 'town parson', in Peter Green's understanding of the title, and was tremendously effective. He was in some ways traditional, in others radical. Believing in the parochial system, he considered that it could work just as well in dockside Whitechapel as in a country parish. He was a born teacher and preacher and believed that the gospel could be communicated in east London by means of simple sermons and direct teaching. On the other hand, he saw the necessity of dividing the parish into four and distributing his staff between the resulting four parishes. What was radical was the size and duties of his staff. Champneys did not share the reluctance of some contemporary high-churchmen to use lay workers for spiritual work and welcomed scripture-readers from the newly-formed Church Pastoral Aid Society and missionaries from the also newly-formed London City Mission, as well as curates. At one time in the undivided parish there was a staff of thirteen in an impressive team ministry. A House of Lords Committee was investigating the findings of the Religious Census of 1851, including the reasons for the poor attendance of the working class at church in working-class areas, and asked Champneys why the situation was more encouraging in Whitechapel than elsewhere. He accounted for effectiveness in terms of his team ministry, saying that the scripture-readers made the preliminary visits and picked out houses where the clergy might follow. Champneys pointed out that the scripture-reader had little difficulty since he was on the same level as the person whom he visited, 'who was not at all inclined to put on his Sunday clothes before the lay agent.'[4] On Mondays, Champneys held a staff meeting; on Tuesdays he had his curates and the rest of the staff together for a question-and-answer session—this was intended to provide some theological training, in particular for the readers. He also said that they reported at the end of the day if there were 'questions to be asked and problems to be discussed.' Champneys moved from Whitechapel in 1860. The same pattern was followed at St Giles-in-the-Fields, where Robert Bickersteth was

Rector, for the much shorter period of 1850-56. He had seven curates, seven city missionaries and five scripture-readers. Bickersteth often went visiting with his team in the darker areas of the parish.

The Victorian church not only had its own form of team ministry but also of industrial chaplains working on the railways and canals. Between 1838 and 1850, 6,000 miles of track were laid and 200,000 'navigators' employed. The Great Western Railway and the CPAS combined to provide chaplains at Kemble, Stroud and Cheltenham; there were also two chaplains in the Bristol area appointed by local bishops. On the London and Brighton line, CPAS appointed two chaplains to operate between Worth and Haywards Heath. The work was mainly confined to talking to the men informally. Bibles and New Testaments sold well; Sunday services might be conducted in a sympathizer's cottage. There were lunch-hour meetings on weekdays which might be held in the railway sheds, or even in the mouth of a tunnel. Chaplains ran adult night schools and Sunday schools for children living near the line.

The same sort of ministry was carried out by John Davies, the 'Apostle of the Waterman' as he came to be called. When Rector of St Clement's, Worcester, he had employed a curate to work among the people of the canals, for which he received a grant from the CPAS. In 1838 he moved to Holy Trinity, Runcorn, where Bishop Sumner encouraged him in his plans for a floating church. In fact, a local barge-builder provided him with a barge fitted out as a floating chapel. This plied between Worcester and Birmingham with John Davies as chaplain.

Overseas missionary work

Overseas missions for the Victorian evangelical meant CMS, and CMS from 1841-70 meant Henry Venn. Venn was one of the great practical visionaries of the evangelical movement. He believed first and foremost that the job of the missionary is to be an evangelist and not a church leader. Missions, he was always saying, are to be self-supporting, self-governing and self-extending. The role of the missionary is to build up a group of converts, hand them over to a native pastor, and move on himself to the unevangelized regions beyond. It was from the community which the missionary had left that Venn expected the native bishop to emerge. These ideals were difficult to put into practice: Crowther, for instance, does not fit into this pattern. His home was Western Nigeria; Venn made him Bishop of the Niger diocese—which was Eastern Nigeria where a Yoruba, like Bishop Crowther, was a foreigner. Nevertheless, Venn provided the vision of indigenous churches in Asia and Africa. He also tried to further commerce and trade in Africa by having the commercial value of African cotton, coffee and palm oil tested in this country. He

and Thomas Clegg, a Manchester cotton merchant, were responsible for a considerable cotton industry and Venn was always in touch with the relevant government department. He was mercifully free from the missionary jingoism which bedevilled CMS in the last quarter of the nineteenth century because it treated blacks as inferior to whites.

Overseas missions also meant the London Jews Society, the Bible Society and, from 1844, the South American Missionary Society.

Theological issues

The divisions between liberal and conservative evangelicals in the twentieth century were foreshadowed in the previous century. While it is true that no issue in the nineteenth century split CMS or prevented all evangelicals from supporting CPAS, there were deep theological and social differences. W. J. Conybeare, in his article on 'Church Parties' in *Edinburgh Review* 1853, spoke of 'mainstream evangelicals' and 'Recordites'. The former might be called *'Christian Observer* evangelicals' of the tradition of Simeon and Wilberforce: according to Conybeare by mid-century they numbered about 3,300 clergy. The 'Recordites' were the hard-liners, the men who looked back to Whitefield and the Countess of Huntingdon, and more immediately to Edward Irving and Alexander Haldane. Conybeare assesses the number of this group in 1853 as about 2,500. The *Christian Observer,* founded in 1802 by the Clapham Sect, was a journal of theology and current affairs whose editors included Zacharay Macaulay, Stephen Wilkes, J. W. Cunningham of Harrow and Henry Venn of CMS. The *Record* was founded as a bi-weekly newspaper in 1828; Haldane, although never editor, was the most significant name connected with it as he wrote the leaders on theological and political issues.

The real difference that came to divide Victorian evangelicals was their attitude to eschatology and missions, especially with regard to the day of judgement, the millenium and the second coming of Christ. The *Christian Observer* and the CMS believed in an optimistic eschatology: the gospel was to be preached to the ends of the world till the millenium, and only after the millenium would Christ return in judgement and Satan be defeated. This was the outlook of what was called the 'post-millenial' school, and it was challenged by Edward Irving who, though not an Anglican, was a popular speaker at the May Meetings in the 1820s. He declared that the horrors of the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars and the outbreaks of social unrest were not signs of a good time coming, but of the last days. It was essential to make ready for the imminent return of Christ, to defeat Satan and then to usher in the millenium. The contrast between the two views is well set out in the *Christian Observer:*

> A question has of late been much agitated, in connexion with the millenial reign of Christ . . . namely whether the latter-day glory shall be ushered in with judgements or with mercy. The advocates for the opinion, among whom are Mr Irving and Mr M'Neile, speak in the strongest terms of the deteriorated and deteriorating state of the world; they view Christendom as verging to its downfall; they consider our Bible and missionary societies, not as instruments for ushering in the latter-day glory, not as harbingers of mercy to the wide world, but only as messengers to gather out a few elect vessels, and to fill up the measure of the wicked, till God in his wrath shall consume the world of the ungodly, and bring in a wholly new dispensation, even the Millenium of Christ's personal reign with his saints.
>
> We differ widely in opinion from this dejecting sentiment; we view our Bible and missionary societies as ministers of mercy, and not of wrath; we hail with joy the extension of education; we consider the world, by the blessing of God, and the influence of his Holy Spirit, not as becoming worse but better; and we look, not for a new dispensation, a fifth monarchy, but for the consummation of the present dispensation, the dispensation of the Gospel in the glory of the Messiah, and the extension of his kingdom upon earth, in the merciful arrangements of his providence, under the powerful manifestations of his Holy Spirit.[4]

Pre-millenialism was linked with an interpretation of world history based on the books of Daniel and Revelation, which included a strong belief in the return of the Jews to Palestine. Edward Bickersteth, secretary of CMS, changed his views on the millenium and became a student of prophecy with particular interest in the future of the Jews and the second coming. On all other issues he remained a *Christian Observer* man and, till his death in 1850, the leader of that school.

Another Scot, Robert Haldane, influenced evangelicals in the direction of Calvinistic orthodoxy. Robert Haldane was an undenominational Christian; his nephew Alexander was an Anglican, but with views similar to his uncle's. Alexander Haldane was also a barrister who had had a literary education. Among his friends were a number of army officers, other barristers and evangelical clergy in London, especially William Howells of Long Acre Chapel who from 1820 had allied himself with Robert Haldane and was the leader of the London Calvinists. Alexander Haldane never distinguished himself as a barrister but gave his talents to the *Record*, of which he was part proprietor and leader writer, and this he did from the first few months of the paper's existence in 1828 till his death in 1882. His obituary in the *Record* says:

> Mr Haldane set before himself the one object of endeavouring to maintain and advance the cause of Protestant Evangelical religion in our midst. . . . With characteristic persistency he fought up to the end the same errors which in his youth raised him to action. His clearness and consistency of belief were not without result in 'sound' doctrine which has distinguished Evangelical Churchmen during the last half century.[5]

Fighting error, Tractarian error, rationalist error, *Christian Observer* error, liberal error in politics or dissent, Haldane's shrill voice is not attractive. It pervades the *Record* and was the voice to which Shaftesbury listened when Bickersteth died in 1850.

Room for a new journal

In November 1872 the *Christian Observer* ceased publication, its editor for the last four years having been Henry Venn. Venn represented the best of the *Christian Observer* school of evangelicalism. As we have seen, he was an outstanding missionary statesman; at home he was open to new movements and new ideas. He was one of the few evangelicals to welcome the Revival of 1859 and would certainly have welcomed Keswick, had he lived to see it, with its effect on evangelism and the growth of missionary recruits. He also came to recognize the effective Christian mission of at least some of the ritualists. He told Lord Chichester, with tears of thanksgiving in his eyes, 'A.B., with all the nonsensical practices observed at his church, preaches the Gospel, and souls are converted. . . . Evidently the Holy Spirit is working with them, and I rejoice and thank God.'

This sympathy with the ritualists may have been individual to Venn. It is certainly not shared by the Recordites, nor by the editors of the *Rock*, a new penny paper which first appeared in 1868, seeking to oppose Romanism, ritualism and rationalism as well as the movement for popular education. With the *Record*—supplemented by the *Rock*—expounding a negative and defensive evangelicalism, and with the demise of the *Christian Observer*, there was certainly room for a new journal in 1880.

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NOTES

1 J. B. Marsden, *Memoirs of the Rev. Hugh Stowell* (1868) p 174.
2 Geoffrey Berwick, *MS Life of Francis Close* (1938), in the Cheltenham Public Library.
3 J. C. Weller, *Say to the Wind : The Revival of Religion in Nottingham.* The original thesis on which this book is based is in the Library of Nottingham University.
4 *Christian Observer*, June 1828.
5 *Record*, 28 July 1882.