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Albert Swift: A Social Gospeller at Westminster Chapel?

Harold H. Rowdon

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It is one of the minor curiosities of recent church history that evangelical Protestants, who provided some of the leading activists of the nineteenth century, had, by the middle of the twentieth century, gained the reputation of being socially aloof and even opposed to Christian involvement in almost any kind of social or political action. The phenomenon is so curious that Timothy L. Smith has dubbed it, 'the great reversal'.¹

When and why such a change took place are matters for debate. That it did take place is hardly open to question, though whether it was universal among evangelicals is less clear. The writings and activities of men like F. C. Spurr, Baptist minister and evangelist, F. B. Meyer, Free church leader and social activist, and Dr. John Wilson of Woolwich are enough to make us hesitate before coming to that conclusion.²

The problem has been addressed more frequently and more thoroughly in the United States than in the United Kingdom. This may be the result of the greater intensity of the social problems there, the more dramatic nature of the confrontation between the liberal, social gospel on the one hand, and evangelicalism and its half-brother, fundamentalism, on the other, and also, perhaps, the more vigorous revival of evangelicalism in the years following the second world war.

Three North American analyses may serve as examples. E. E. Cairns³ provides five reasons for evangelical neglect of social involvement between the two world wars:

1. The discrediting, among evangelicals, of any concept of a social gospel, because of its association with liberal and critical views of the Bible.
2. Their belief that merely to improve the environment in which man lives will never create a perfect social order, because the basic problem of the hereditary sinfulness of

¹ D. O. Moberg, *The Great Reversal* (New York 1972) 11, 30.

² Spurr claimed in his book, *Social Disorders and Social Progress in the Light of Jesus Christ* (London [1919]) 7, that 'the most strenuous leaders in all the Churches today are tremendously earnest in the work of social reform'. That he was referring to evangelicals is suggested by the statement which follows: 'They are men who believe Christ Jesus to be the sole Redeemer and Director of the life of man, and who preach without ceasing the virtue of His Cross.' Meyer's social involvement at Melbourne Hall, Leicester, and in London, particularly during his two ministries at Christ Church, Westminster, 1892-1909 and 1915-1921, are more or less well-known. See *inter alia* his autobiographical works *The Bells of Is* (London 1893) and *Reveries and Realities* (London [1896]).

Wilson, whose ministry in Woolwich became a legend, admitted to the 7th National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches in 1902 that most Free Churchmen were indifferent and ignorant regarding social problems, but added as his own prescription: 'Religious people should first be sympathetic towards all these problems; secondly, they should get hold of all the facts and know what they were talking about; thirdly, they should move wisely together; they should strike well and strike home, and keep on striking until the evils were overcome.' *Proceedings* 59.

³ E. E. Cairns, *The Christian in Society* (Chicago 1973) 164-166.

man is the real cause of human misery, and this will not be totally and finally dealt with until the second coming of Christ.

3. The insistence that priority should be given to the proclamation of the gospel rather than the renovation of the social order. Social improvement, it was believed, comes as the logical outcome of the preaching of salvation and is not an essential part of the Great Commission given to the church.
4. Evangelicals came to espouse the view that holiness called for minimum contact with the world. Cairns shrewdly adds: 'Perhaps the

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presence of so many corrupt large city political machines and bosses in the past may have encouraged the development of this stereotype.'

5. A strongly futuristic view of the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth is the final factor adduced by Cairns. He points to the influential prophetic conferences of the 1920s, with their strong pre-millennial thrust, and adds:

'Prophecy seemed to provide a complete blueprint for the future with little room for the amelioration of social evils or participation by Christians in political and social matters.'

A second analysis, by Carl Henry,⁴ highlights three factors in particular:

1. The neglect of evangelistic preaching by social gospellers, which left evangelicals to shoulder the burden of worldwide evangelization.
2. The dominance by liberals of such ecclesiastical resources as denominational structures, including training colleges.
3. Most important of all, the reaction of evangelicals against the efforts of liberal Protestants to achieve the kingdom of God on earth through political and economic changes.

David Moberg has underlined and added to these factors. He points to the following as being particularly important:

1. The trend in social gospel thinking away from the evangelical tradition that had been evident in some of its early leaders towards theological liberalism.
2. The size and complexity of the problems of urbanization and industrialization for which the Bible gave no ready-made answers.
3. The identification of many Protestants with the prosperous, involving moving residence from city centres to comfortable suburbs.

⁴ D. E. Hartsock (ed.) *Contemporary Religious Issues* (Belmont, California 1968) 284-299. I have been unable to locate this book, and am therefore dependent on Moberg's summary in *Reversal* 35.

4. The general social pessimism during and after the first World War.
5. The dispensationalist theology of many fundamentalists.
6. Fear of immigrants, Catholics and Jews who were concentrated in large cities.
7. Concentration by evangelicals on other, legitimate issues. In so doing, they disregarded biblical teaching on the stewardship of creation and developed blind spots to current social evils by focusing their attention on the kinds of individualistic evils that were especially prominent in wide-open frontier towns.

Other factors suggested by Moberg include the diversion of energies into anti-evolutionary conflicts and battles with theological liberalism; the feeling that Prohibition would solve all social problems; the idea that the New Testament admonitions to the exercise of Christian love applied only to the material welfare of fellow Christians; and the 'dichotomic fallacy' that the Christian message must be either personal or social, *either* spiritual *or* social, *either* this-worldly *or* other-worldly, and cannot possibly be both. He concludes that 'much of the polemic from both sides of the contest between evangelism and social action represents negative

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reactions against real or alleged errors, abuses and deficiencies of the past'.⁵

In the United Kingdom analysis of the problem has been less thorough—when it has been noticed! Stephen Neill has pointed out that 'as the Social Gospel movement developed evangelicals came to feel that the programme of the movement for social and political change was being substituted for the message of personal salvation. They therefore reacted by affirming that the sole business of the Church was to save souls and that social and political change should be left to the politicians. In any case the only way to change social conditions is to change people.' To which he added: 'By reaction against this attitude, many liberals were driven into detachment from the Church, feeling it to be an instrument of social stagnation and opposition to necessary change.'⁶

David Sheppard, in his valuable study of urban problems *Built as a City*, makes a few pertinent remarks. He not only suggests that evangelicals felt that if *they* didn't stress personal conversion no-one else would, but also maintains that their revulsion against socio-political involvement was, in part, caused by their observation that advocates of such involvement were dominated by Anglo-Catholics, or associated with the *Lux Mundi* school of thought, with its obnoxious (to evangelicals) combination of high churchmanship and liberal theology.⁷

In his introduction to the published papers of a conference on 'Evangelical Social Ethics' (which, incidentally, bears witness to the current revival of interest among evangelicals in the

⁵ Moberg, *Reversal* 34-37.

⁶ S. C. Neill, *Salvation Tomorrow* (London 1976) 71.

⁷ D. Sheppard, *Built as a City* (London 1975²) 136-137.

subject) David Wright has briefly alluded to our topic.⁸ Picking up a point made by R. H. Preston in *The Modern Churchman* 21 (1978) 81, he pinpoints the excessive individualism of evangelicalism earlier this century and the 'almost total entanglement' of its concept of the kingdom of God with evangelical 'futurology'.

Finally, there is the assessment of John R. W. Stott. In his recent book, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Basingstoke 1984, 6-9) Stott endorses five familiar reasons for 'the great reversal': reaction against theological liberalism; reaction against the 'social gospel'; the pessimism following the first world war; the spread of pre-millennialism with its prediction that the world will 'deteriorate steadily' until the coming of Jesus; and the spread of Christianity among middle-class people 'who tended to dilute it by identifying it with their own culture'. In a seminar held at London Bible College on 8 February 1983 Stott raised another factor which is rarely, if ever, mentioned—the new impetus to world evangelism symbolized in the euphoric conference held on that subject at Edinburgh in 1910. There is some evidence to support the view that evangelical energies were increasingly diverted into this channel. It was more congenial for evangelicals to respond to this kind of challenge than to that of the social needs of their fellow-countrymen where the lead was increasingly being taken by high churchmen and social gospellers as well as those who owed their inspiration to F. D. Maurice. In fact, during the course of this paper we

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shall allude to an example of the missionary dimension being urged upon a church as an alternative to the social one.

Here is a subject which needs to be researched in depth. Most of the analyses cited appear to be little more than intelligent guesses. We need to discover more about what evangelicals were saying and doing in the area of socio-political thought and action during the last century before we can be in a position to determine the reasons for their action—or lack of it.

In the course of fairly extensive reconnoitring of the field, the present writer discovered on one of the shelves of the Evangelical Library a slim volume written by one, Albert Swift, published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1908, and bearing the intriguing title, *First Principles of Christian Citizenship*. His interest was further aroused by the introduction to the book, written by that prince of evangelicals George Campbell Morgan, which revealed that the book had its origins in a series of papers given by Swift to the staff of Westminster Chapel some two years previously, when they had produced a profound effect. It was as a result of the insistence of Campbell Morgan that Swift had published the papers in book form, and it was Campbell Morgan's 'hope and prayer' that 'this book will fling the horizon further back for many' (11).

The remainder of this article will centre on Albert Swift, whom it is not altogether fanciful to view as a man who was influenced by the social gospel movement in its earlier and more orthodox phase. We shall explore his relationship with Campbell Morgan, his role at Westminster Chapel, his book, his indebtedness to the social gospeller Josiah Strong, his departure from Westminster Chapel and his subsequent history, regrettably brief though it was.

⁸ D. F. Wright (ed.), *Essays in Evangelical Social Ethics* (Exeter [1981]) 9.

1. Campbell Morgan and Albert Swift

George Campbell Morgan is a leading figure in twentieth-century evangelicalism. His robust and firmly biblical preaching, his particular method of analytical study and exposition, and his dynamic personality made a profound impression on both sides of the Atlantic, and his two periods of ministry at Westminster Chapel (1904-1917 and 1933-1945) played a significant part in ensuring the survival of evangelicalism in Britain.

Campbell Morgan (as he became known) was born in 1863 to a Baptist minister who, influenced by men like George Müller of Bristol, resigned from the pastorate to start a faith mission in a hired hall.⁹ From his early youth a fervent preacher, though without academic training, George failed to gain acceptance by either the Salvation Army or the Methodists, but was ordained to the Congregational ministry on 22 September 1890, having already been called to the pastorate of a Congregational church at Stone, Staffordshire in August 1889.¹⁰ Subsequently, he held pastorates in Rugeley, Birmingham and London.

In 1896, at the invitation of his friend, Albert Swift, Campbell Morgan

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made the first of no less than 54 Atlantic crossings. Swift was at this time pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church at Ocean Grove, New Jersey. Campbell Morgan preached in Swift's church and also in D. L. Moody's Bible Institute in Chicago. His fame as a preacher must have been considerable, for in inviting him, Moody evidently broke his own rule that he would invite no-one to preach whom he had not personally heard.¹¹ Moody invited him to preach at his Northfield conference, and he was invited back each summer until Moody's death in 1899.¹² Moody was greatly taken with Campbell Morgan and his preaching, referring to him on one occasion as 'one of the most remarkable men who ever came to Northfield'.¹³ In 1901, Campbell Morgan was persuaded by Will Moody, Moody's son who had taken over the running of the influential Northfield conference, to assist him. Campbell Morgan, who had already declined several American pastorates, including that of the prestigious Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City,¹⁴ left his London pastorate to settle in the States. He held Bible conferences around the country during the autumn, winter and spring, and participated in the Northfield conference during the summer. Each year he followed this with a few weeks spent in England.

Albert Swift, whose life was to become intertwined with that of Campbell Morgan, was a few years his junior, being born in 1867.¹⁵ A journalist, working at one time on the staff of *The Times* and then as reporter and sub-editor of *The Huntingdonshire County Guardian*,¹⁶ he first met Campbell Morgan about 1895. The two men soon developed a 'David and Jonathan affinity',¹⁷ and spent much time together, some of it evangelizing in the Midlands. According to one of Campbell Morgan's biographers, Swift was the organizer, Campbell Morgan the

⁹ J. Morgan, *A Man of the Word* (London 1951) 23.

¹⁰ *ibid.* 65, 67.

¹¹ *ibid.* 88.

¹² *ibid.* 110.

¹³ *ibid.* 95.

¹⁴ *ibid.* 110.

¹⁵ *Congregational Year Book* (1915).

¹⁶ J. Harries, *G. Campbell Morgan: The Man and his Ministry* (New York 1930) 111.

¹⁷ Morgan, *Man of Word* 53.

preacher.¹⁸ Following Campbell Morgan's call to the pastorate, Swift joined the Salvation Army, where, as personal secretary to William Booth, he acted as press officer. It was Campbell Morgan who married Swift to Miss Laura Slowe on 30 November 1889.¹⁹ Like his friend, Swift sought ordination to the Methodist ministry, but was turned down on medical grounds, and it was evidently on doctor's orders that he and his wife went to the United States in the summer of 1891.²⁰ There he succeeded in becoming a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church, serving in a number of churches. The last of these was Calvary Methodist Episcopal Church, New York, where, as assistant to Dr. A. B. Kendig, he took responsibility for activities among young people, and thereby gained a new interest that was to remain with him for the rest of his life.²¹

The Atlantic did not succeed in separating the two men, for, as we have already seen, Campbell Morgan crossed to visit his friend in 1896. On the eve of returning home, he wrote: 'I feel quite reluctant to leave Bert [Swift] ... I think he and I are more than ever one in heart.'²² He need not have worried, in view of the annual visits he would make to the States.

Then, early in 1899, Swift returned to England. According to one of

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Campbell Morgan's biographers, the move was in order to be near him, but a contemporary paper, *The Daily Chronicle*, ascribed another motive to him: 'an autocratic episcopacy did not suit his democratic temperament'.²³ Whether or not this is so, Swift certainly became pastor of a Congregational church in Dulwich Grove, London. The congregation grew under his ministry and the church had to be enlarged. During a ministry of less than five years, about 328 new members were received—228 on confession of faith, and a further 100 by transfer.²⁴ Swift was able to indulge to the full his new-found interest in young people, organizing a Young People's Institute which is said to have been the first such organization to have been formed in connection with a Congregational church in this country.²⁵

Curiously enough, it was only a year or so after Swift returned to England that Campbell Morgan departed for the States! The relationship between the two men was as close as ever,²⁶ but evidently the type of ministry proposed for Campbell Morgan in the States was too tempting for him to resist.

¹⁸ Harries, *Morgan* 111.

¹⁹ Morgan, *Man of Word* 67.

²⁰ Harries, *Morgan* 111; *Congregational Year Book* (1915).

²¹ *Congregational Year Book* (1915).

²² Morgan, *Man of Word* 101, where the point is made that the two men enjoyed the same sense of humour—a boisterous one.

²³ Harries, *Morgan* 111; *Daily Chronicle* (19 September 1904). Citations from this, and other papers, are taken from a collection of cuttings, kindly made available to me by the archivist of Westminster Chapel.

²⁴ *Christian Globe* (7 July 1904).

²⁵ So the *Congregational Year Book* (1915). Yet Swift himself refers in the introduction to his little book on *The Institute Department of the Sunday School* (London [1910]) xiii to an institute organized at the Vines Congregational Church, Rochester, in 1874 in an attempt to retain contact with Sunday school scholars who felt themselves too old for Sunday school.

²⁶ When Campbell Morgan had to spend three months convalescing in Sark, Swift went over to join him for a while. Morgan, *Man of Word* 80.

Then, towards the end of 1903 came an urgent invitation to Campbell Morgan to return, in order to take up the pastorate of Westminster Chapel in London. In May, 1904, Campbell Morgan visited England and immediately went to Dulwich where he discussed the proposition with Swift, to whom he made a proposal. In Campbell Morgan's own words, it was 'when Albert Swift, my lifelong friend, said he was willing to stand with me, the matter was settled'.²⁷ The two men would go as co-pastors. Campbell Morgan always insisted that Swift was a colleague, not an assistant—though it was immediately clear who was the senior partner. Campbell Morgan was the preacher and teacher: Swift the organizer of the multitudinous activities that soon characterized Westminster Chapel.²⁸

2 Westminster Chapel

In 1904, Westminster Chapel was regarded as the white elephant of Congregationalism in London. Whereas churches like Whitefield's Tabernacle under Sylvester Horne, City Temple under R. J. Campbell and Hampstead under R. F. Horton were flourishing, Westminster Chapel had fallen on hard times. From an active membership of some 900 in its heyday under Samuel Martin in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, it had fallen to a membership of around 200.²⁹ Richard Westrope, its minister between 1896 and 1902, had combined personal asceticism with a degree of freedom of thought. According to an account of his ministry published in *The Westminster Record* for 1905 (140-142) 'he studied the "higher criticism" with great interest and was fearless in accepting new views of truth when approved by his reason'. The same account goes on to describe him as 'an advanced Radical holding strong Socialistic views' whose great ambition was to transform Westminster Chapel into a 'People's Church' along the lines of the institutional church

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idea.³⁰ Westrope exhausted himself, and left Westminster Chapel in 1902 in the care of a Mr. W. T. Dyke, an evangelist who had been assisting him during the previous year and who did his best to hold the church together during the prolonged vacancy in the pastorate that followed.

Westminster Chapel was situated in an area that was socially mixed. According to *The Christian Age*, a contemporary religious paper, 'slum and palace are all but back to back'.³¹ Young men who were employed in the business houses of the area lived on the premises, and the servants of the rich constituted another element of potential social need. *The Sunday Companion* asserted that the flats in the area were mainly used by well-to-do people during the brief London season and added the information that the small houses and workmen's dwellings in the area were 'of a by no means delectable order'.³² However, it should be noted that an influx of middle-class people had begun to affect the Buckingham Gate district where the chapel was situated.

²⁷ 'How I came to Westminster Chapel', *Westminster Record* (1905) 15.

²⁸ Swift was renowned for his organizing ability. *The Daily News* for 21 June 1904 asserted that he had 'few peers' as an organizer, on the evidence of his work as secretary to the convention of Christian Endeavour recently held in London.

²⁹ Morgan, *Man of Word* 138.

³⁰ For the institutional church see C. S. Horne, *The Institutional Church* (London [1906]).

³¹ *Christian Age* (26 October 1904).

³² *Sunday Companion* (29 October 1904).

Campbell Morgan and Swift evidently spent a great deal of time together prior to the commencement of their joint ministry. They sought the advice of Frank Collier, whose mission in Manchester was well-known to Campbell Morgan. According to Jill Morgan, it was Swift who made it 'his special business to become fully acquainted with the needs and possibilities of the immediate neighbourhood'.³³ The press was interested to know what the policy of the new pastors would be, and naturally it was Swift, with his journalistic background, who was interviewed. In response to enquiries whether they intended to turn Westminster Chapel into an 'institutional church' (*i.e.* a church which modified normal activities in order to provide a full range of social activities for both sexes, all age groups and various interest groups) Swift made statements which, at first sight, seem somewhat equivocal. The reporter from *The Methodist Recorder* was told that 'it is not intended to make Westminster Chapel an Institutional Church'.³⁴ But to a reporter from *The Examiner* Swift said that they did intend to turn it into one 'eventually, but we must feel our way'.³⁵ In *The Christian Age* there appeared a statement by Swift which puts the matter into perspective: 'Institutional work? Of course, we fully expect it, but my point is that it will be the outgrowth of our more spiritual activities. It will be accessory to those activities, and not merely an advertisement for them.'³⁶ The new pastors were clearly determined at the outset to follow the policy of their predecessor, Westrope, and to emulate the example of men like Sylvester Horne at Whitefield's Tabernacle. But they were equally determined not to do it at the expense of pulpit ministry and biblical exposition, nor were they prepared to amend their belief in the authority of scripture. Years later, when Campbell Morgan accepted the call to return to Westminster Chapel a second time, he wrote in a letter to the members as follows: 'In 1904, when with my colleague, Albert Swift, we came to Westminster, we came to make it a centre for Bible interpretation and application... All its work from the beginning was based upon

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the belief in the full and final authority of the Bible in all matters of Faith and Practice.'³⁷

It was Campbell Morgan's role to ensure that this was done. In addition to morning and evening Sunday preaching, Friday evening Bible lectures were commenced. It was the intention—from the beginning—that these should develop along the lines of the Northfield conferences.³⁸ The Friday evening lectures, which were inaugurated on 4 November 1904, necessitated the construction of a special rostrum to accommodate the large blackboard which Campbell Morgan used in connection with his talks.³⁹ During their first year, these lectures attracted an average attendance of some 1500.⁴⁰ Less than a year after starting them, Campbell Morgan was invited by the Rev. Gregory Mantle to give similar lectures at the Deptford Mission on alternate Tuesdays during the winter. In his diary, Campbell Morgan claimed that the attendance there varied between 1700 and 2000.⁴¹ By 1907, Campbell

³³ Morgan, *Man of Word* 145.

³⁴ *Methodist Recorder* (13 October 1904).

³⁵ *Examiner* (20 October 1904).

³⁶ *Christian Age* (26 October 1904).

³⁷ I. H. Murray, *D. M. Lloyd-Jones: The First Forty Years* (London 1982) 359, citing MS minutes of the church meeting.

³⁸ *Examiner* (20 October 1904); cf. *British Weekly* (20 October 1904).

³⁹ Morgan, *Man of Word* 149.

⁴⁰ *Westminster Record* (1905) 224.

⁴¹ Morgan, *Man of Word* 165.

Morgan was lecturing not only at Westminster and Deptford but fortnightly at Westbourne Grove and Mildmay, and monthly at venues in Bristol, Cardiff and Manchester. The pace was too much, however, and in September 1909 Campbell Morgan reported that the lectures in two of the London centres and at Bristol, Cardiff and Manchester had been discontinued, on account of the strain.⁴² As for the vision of a conference like the American Northfield, plans for this were aired as early as 1905 in *The Westminster Record*.⁴³ A large house was duly acquired in Mundesley, Norfolk, and the Mundesley Conference was held for ten days each summer from 1906 to 1914 in a tent holding 1000. Each morning, Campbell Morgan and a visiting speaker gave Bible lectures. The afternoons were free. An inspirational service was held in the evenings.⁴⁴ Sunday congregations and church membership at Westminster Chapel grew rapidly. From 213 on 30 September 1904 the membership rose to 407 a year later and 912 on 27 July 1909.⁴⁵ Though the increase included a high proportion of transfer-growth, this was always less than the professions of faith.

In 1905 a Lay Preachers' Guild was founded by Campbell Morgan (assisted by Swift), and for the benefit of budding lay preachers Campbell Morgan commenced a series of special Bible classes on Sunday afternoons. These, however, had to be discontinued, owing to the strain on Campbell Morgan's health.⁴⁶

Another short-lived enterprise was an attempt to set up a training department somewhat similar to the Bible Training Institutes that flourished in some large cities. Evening classes were organized in the winter of 1907 for the benefit of Christian workers anxious to increase their knowledge and for those who wished to prepare for Christian service. Classes in New Testament Greek, Christian Evidences, Principles of Christian Missions and 'Psychology and Child Nature' attracted very small enrolments, and very few of those who did enrol were willing to do any study at home. But 138 enrolled for Campbell Morgan's Bible lectures

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on Isaiah. The experiment was discontinued.⁴⁷

Another piece of evidence of Campbell Morgan's concern for training—and of his propensity for taking on responsibilities which were excessive—is his presidency of Cheshunt College from 1911 to 1914. As president (the title really corresponds to that of principal) he superintended the removal of the college to Cambridge and played a major part in raising the necessary finance. He resided in the new college buildings at Cambridge from Monday to Friday and discharged his duties at Westminster Chapel from Friday to Sunday, each week. His presidency was not particularly successful—apart from the building project—and he himself referred to it as 'the wildest thing to have done', though, characteristically, he added, 'I do not regret it'.⁴⁸

⁴² *Westminster Record* (1909) 194.

⁴³ A. Swift, 'A British Northfield', *Westminster Record* (1905) 214-216.

⁴⁴ Morgan, *Man of Word* 171-180.

⁴⁵ *Westminster Record* (1909) 201-203.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* 215.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* 207-210 One of the Westminster sisters, Josephine, held a B.A. of London University, was a gifted Bible teacher and knew New Testament Greek. Morgan, *Man of Word* 147 For the sisters, see below.

⁴⁸ Campbell Morgan's address to the church meeting held on 1 January 1917, in which he announced his resignation from the pastorate: Morgan, *Man of Word* 219.

3 Campbell Morgan's Social Concern

But this was not all. Campbell Morgan the preacher, the Bible teacher and the trainer did not hold himself aloof from social and political matters.

Like many nonconformists of the period, Campbell Morgan was closely identified with the Liberal Party. When a pastor at Rugeley he had served as vice-president of the local Liberal Association, and was in great demand as a speaker at Liberal rallies during the election campaign of 1892.⁴⁹ This kind of political involvement continued after his coming to Westminster.⁵⁰ But, in common with many others, he became increasingly disenchanted with the Liberal connection and, in the editorial notes of *The Westminster Record* for April 1909 he vigorously refuted the idea that the church should act as the tool of any particular party or government. He still insisted, however, that the church 'has no right to remain silent when wrong is done to individuals or to other nations in the interests of selfishness and greed'.⁵¹

According to one of his biographers, Campbell Morgan was greatly influenced by the social writer, Charles Kingsley, and, indeed, one of his sons was named Kingsley in honour of him.⁵² When a minister in Birmingham, he helped to organize a public meeting to censure the Armenian massacres, and during the particularly hard winter of 1895-96 his church ran a wood-chopping yard and carried out a thorough system of district visitation.⁵³ This kind of concern continued into the Westminster ministry thanks not only to the initiative of Swift—who, as we shall see, had a highly developed social conscience—but also to the support of Campbell Morgan. For example, in 1905 when a demonstration by the wives and daughters of the unemployed culminated in the presentation of a petition to the prime minister, A. J. Balfour, 500 of the demonstrators were entertained to lunch at Westminster Chapel, and 2,000 or more gathered there to hear the result of the interview between their leaders and Balfour. On this occasion, Campbell Morgan commented to Swift: 'This marks a new factor in English politics.'⁵⁴

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Campbell Morgan's attitude to socio-political involvement at the beginning of his first period of ministry at Westminster Chapel is to be found in a sermon which he preached there on 4 December 1904 on 'The Church and the Nation'.⁵⁵ The text was Ephesians 3:20-21. He declared his basic principles on this subject to be that 'the Church is the medium existing in the midst of national life for the revelation and realization of the glory of God'; that 'the responsibility of the Church is that of establishing the State'; and that the church is to 'reveal the character of God', 'herald the claim of God' and 'communicate the compassion of God'. Moving on to the outworking of these principles, Campbell Morgan began with a strong disavowal of party politics, asserting that 'the greatest national necessity of the moment is that the Church should shake itself free from all entanglements of this description'. He continued by urging the necessity for the church to reveal the character of God in her own 'internal life', but did not shrink from going on to assert that the church must 'dictate the terms of

⁴⁹ *ibid.* 75.

⁵⁰ According to S. Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British Politics* (London 1975) 71, he went electioneering with Dr. Clifford during the 1906 election campaign.

⁵¹ *Westminster Record* (1909) 74.

⁵² Morgan, *Man of Word* 83.

⁵³ *ibid.* 85-86.

⁵⁴ *Westminster Record* (1905) 291.

⁵⁵ *ibid.* 29-34.

righteousness to the age'. Jesus did so, and so, for example, did Savonarola. In pursuance of this task, Campbell Morgan went on, the church must be both destructive and constructive. It must declare itself to be against 'spiritual wickedness' (as an illustration of which he refers to 'priestism'); mental degradation (not only ignorance and 'impure thinking' but also 'all physical disability'—overcrowded housing conditions are instanced), the 'endowment of destruction' (i.e. the drink trade) and 'the commerce of selfishness'. In connection with this last, Campbell Morgan asserted that 'any commercial enterprise that is on behalf of the few and not the many is contrary to the Spirit of Jesus Christ'.

Following this blistering attack on current social evils, Campbell Morgan went on to deal with the constructive side. The church stands for 'the correction of character'. Here he insisted, with characteristic evangelical naïvety that: 'If today we could get those dwellers in our slums really regenerate the slums would soon be gone', and even permitted himself to say: 'There is no man born that knows how to vote properly until he is born again.'

In concluding his sermon, Campbell Morgan asserted that nothing was needed more than the 'creation of a great Christian conscience'. By this, he meant something larger than the 'nonconformist conscience', if only because it must include freedom not only from sin within the church but 'from the last tie that binds her to parties'.

Despite the vigour of this sermon, backed up, as it is, by other evidence of social concern at the beginning of his first Westminster Chapel ministry, it is not Campbell Morgan but Albert Swift who is our suspected social gospeller. Later, we shall produce evidence which suggests rather strongly that Campbell Morgan retreated somewhat from the position that he held in 1904. But first we must explore the social attitudes of Albert Swift.

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4 Albert Swift's Social Concern

Evidence for Swift's social concern comes from three sources: his activities at Westminster Chapel, his book *First Principles of Christian Citizenship*, and his contributions to *The Westminster Record*. We shall look at each in turn.

Swift, as we have already seen, was valued by Campbell Morgan for his organizing ability—perhaps above everything else. While it would be quite wrong to suggest that Campbell Morgan was not interested in the fringe activities of Westminster Chapel—many of them were initiated by him—yet it seems that they were Swift's special responsibility. Many of the charitable organizations inherited from Westrope's ministry were continued or revived. There were clubs for boys and girls (including a 'Cripples' Parlour' which functioned every Wednesday for the benefit of Westminster cripples on the register of the Ragged School Union⁵⁶). A 'Men's Own' meeting, which had dwindled almost to nothing, was revived. Swift addressed the men every Sunday afternoon. For a short time⁵⁷ an 'orchestral band' provided music in the best style of the institutional church. A Mothers' Meeting was, of course, a necessity! The Benevolent Society for the relief of the poor continued, with an unemployment bureau as a useful adjunct. In March 1907 the Old Pye Street Men's Mission was inaugurated as an embankment mission.⁵⁸ The Gospel Temperance Society, commenced by the church

⁵⁶ *Westminster Record* (1905) 25.

⁵⁷ *ibid.* (1906) 48.

⁵⁸ *ibid.* (1909) 218-219.

evangelist, A. W. Hewitt, as long ago as 1884, continued to flourish,⁵⁹ and a Literary and Social Guild provided educational and cultural stimulus for a membership that, by 1909, had reached 235 (with an average attendance of 191).⁶⁰

Probably the most significant development with social significance was the institution of a sisterhood. There was nothing novel about this, for there were many such bodies in London, including the order of deaconesses for whom William Pennefather and his wife had established a training school in Mildmay. But it provided thrust and muscle to the social care generated at Westminster Chapel, and, as we shall see, it constituted the backbone of the staff to whom Swift delivered the addresses that were published in his book!

As early as 29 September 1904 *The Christian Commonwealth* reported Campbell Morgan's intention to form a 'resident sisterhood' whose principal work would be that of 'visiting and ministering to the poor of the immediate neighbourhood'. *The Examiner*, however, reporting in its issue of 20 October 1904 an interview with Swift, stated that the deaconesses would be 'ladies by birth and training, who would meet the better-class residents in their homes' and be able to follow 'the line of their own social practices'. The apparent conflict between the two statements is probably resolved by the further statement that 'a large number of workers' would be needed for Pimlico (the very poor district a mile or so south of Westminster Chapel) and that 'paid workers' would also be needed. The

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assumption is that the sisters would operate among those of their own class and that others would be recruited to serve elsewhere.

By the beginning of 1905 five sisters were operating, dressed in a uniform of navy-blue and scarlet.⁶¹ They included the private secretaries of Campbell Morgan and Swift, Charlotte Murdoch who was a medical doctor from Baltimore, and Mrs. A. M. Gardner who, before her marriage to the general secretary of the London Missionary Society, had been a sister with the West London Mission. From time to time they were joined by others who possessed administrative, educational and even artistic gifts. The sisters, together with the ministers, the church evangelist, the caretakers and the organist constituted the staff of Westminster Chapel.

It was a series of addresses given to the staff in 1905 or 1906 that was published in 1908, with the encouragement of Campbell Morgan, under the title, *First Principles of Christian Citizenship*. A brief summary will give some idea of the nature of Swift's thinking on the subject. He insists that the Christian has responsibilities as a citizen. If a man denies this, then 'either he should be taken out of the world, with the life of which he has absolutely nothing to do, or he should belong to a people entirely segregated, forming independent colonies, if not nations. It is inconceivable', he goes on, 'that the Christian should partake of the profits of the world's life, and bear no part of its responsibilities' (17). He goes on to argue that if Christ calls his people to social activity he must have a plan to which they should all conform (20). 'We need a fuller understanding of the first principles of Christian citizenship', he concludes (22). Asking the questions 'Why?' ('The Sanctions of Christian Citizenship'), 'Whither?'

⁵⁹ *ibid.* (1905) 24.

⁶⁰ *ibid.* (1909) 219.

⁶¹ Morgan, *Man of Word* 146.

(‘The Social Conditions of the Kingdom of God’) and ‘How?’ (‘The Method of Christian Citizenship’), he enunciates five principles:

1. ‘The purpose of Christ includes the realization in this world of the perfect social order of the Kingdom of God’ (43).
2. ‘The Christian is called to co-operate with Christ in all His work’ (59).
3. ‘The social conditions which the Christian seeks to establish must be those of the Kingdom of God’ (83).
4. ‘The Political Economy which the Christian citizen seeks to establish must be that of the Kingdom of God’ (110).
5. ‘The method of the Christian citizen must be governed by the principles which determined the method of Christ’ (138).

The fleshing out of these principles takes Swift deep into Scripture and theology, as well as contemporary society and its many problems, and, of course, into the social responsibilities of the Christian. It is almost impossible to do justice to it in a brief summary, such as the one that follows.

Christ’s purpose is not confined to spiritual salvation (30) nor to the teaching of an ethical code (30-31). It is much more ‘spacious’. ‘The work of Christ, stated in its simplest form, is two-fold: He aims at the restoration of man to a right relation to God, and consequently to his

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fellow-man’ (37). This leads Swift to a discussion of the nature of the kingdom of God which is not ‘the invisible Heaven which becomes the home of departed saints’ (39). Nor is it synonymous with the church. Openly following Josiah Strong, Swift asserts that the church is the means to which the kingdom is the end. ‘The individual Church is intended to be a base of operations, a centre of influence and activity, the aim and purpose of which is the realization of the Kingdom of God’ (41). Thus he establishes his first principle.

If in the establishment of the first principle, Swift makes use of the twofold command—to love fellow-men as well as God—in the establishment of the second he relies heavily on Matthew 5:13-14, which he describes as ‘a very definite social commission’ (52), as well as other aspects of the teaching of Jesus. Drawing even more heavily and explicitly on the writings of Josiah Strong, he vigorously asserts that Christ called his followers to a life of service to others: ‘The motive underlying all the activities of our complex life should be that of service. The Christian working man should not labour simply for a wage, but rather that he may contribute to the world’s weal. The business man whose life is governed by Christ’s law will not serve in order to make his own future but rather to further the well-being of his fellow-men...’ (54-55). Again drawing specifically on Strong, Swift distinguishes between ‘*denying self*’ (in the sense of one part of man being denied for the sake of another part) and ‘*denying self*’ (in the sense of putting an end to self-will) (55-57; cf. 64). He moves on rapidly to establish his second principle—that the Christian is called to co-operate with Christ in his work which, in accordance with the first principle, includes the realization in this world of the perfect social order of the kingdom of God.

Having dealt with the 'Why?' of Christian citizenship, Swift then moves on to consider the 'Whither?'. He stresses the need for a goal and in doing so defends socialists against the charge that their goal is utopian (incidentally asserting that the real defects of socialism are 'its tendency to hardness and the dominance of the materialistic') (66). This takes him back to the theme of the kingdom of God which he sees in terms of an organized community under the rule of God. As to the character of the social order of this kingdom, he argues from Romans 14:17 (incidentally, defending his use of this text by arguing that, though it refers to the manifestation of God's kingdom in the future, that kingdom is already operational in this world, according to Luke 17:21). So, God's kingdom is to be characterized by righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost (72-82). Righteousness means the recognition of the individual's right to live (and therefore to procure the necessities of life *i.e.* the right to work), his right to realize his own life (*i.e.* his individuality will be safeguarded) and his quest for happiness. These rights, however, are qualified by limitations, summed up in the Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12, in order to prevent the abuse of any right. Thus he establishes his third principle: that

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the social conditions which the Christian seeks to establish must be those of the kingdom of God.

So, according to the fourth principle, must be the political economy. While the Bible is not a treatise on economics, it does indicate 'the foundation principles upon which the final and perfect system of economy will be built' (87). Assuming that the options, as far as foundation principles are concerned, lie between competition and co-operation, Swift dismisses the first as 'unthinkable' (91). Whether we look at production (96-101), distribution (102-107) or use (107-110), the Bible is on the side of co-operation.

Finally addressing the question 'How?', Swift argues for his final proposition that the Christian must adopt the methods used by Christ in moving towards the goal. In answer to the objection that the kingdom will not be introduced until the return of Christ himself, Swift argues that this age is a necessary part of the divine process of bringing in the kingdom and that, therefore, the methods used by Christ when on earth apply consistently (117-118). These, Swift asserts, may be summed up in two negative and two positive principles. The negative principles are:

1. 'My Kingdom is not of this world.' This was why Christ repudiated the use of force (120). This is not to deny the necessity of good government, but it does require us to accept that this can do no more than 'create an environment in which it is easy to do right and hard to do wrong' (123).
2. 'The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation.' The implication of this is that 'its operations have to do with the subtle action of spiritual influences ... The result alone appears' (125).

The impression that this represents a retreat into a spiritual world of inaction is removed by the two positive principles:

1. Christ always moved from the centre to the circumference. His method began with regeneration, but this was intended to create character which, in a series of concentric circles, would affect behaviour in the home, the business, the town, the nation and the world. 'Conversion', asserted Swift, 'is, in the purposes of Christ, preparation for social responsibility. The point at which Evangelical Christianity has often failed, has been its blindness to this fact' (128-129).

2. Christ always kept step with the progress of the purposes of God. Jesus had a keen sense of timing (Luke 4:29-30; 9:51) (132-133). The kingdom of God suffers both from the misdirected zeal of some and—even more—by the sheer indifference of others (134-135). Christ knew 'the needs of men' as well as 'the movements of God' (John 2:25; 8:28-29). God, Swift affirmed with confidence, is at work in the fabric of today's life, so 'if Christians really desire to know the progress of the purposes of God, they must get into touch with the needs of their age' (137-138). 'The Christian citizen', he concludes, 'whose methods are determined by these principles will not go far astray' (138).

It is difficult to know which to admire most: the clarity with which these

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ideas are set out; the balanced way in which notions that are fairly novel (for an evangelical) are canvassed without doing serious despite to received evangelical theology; or the courage of the man in aligning himself so clearly—though so guardedly—with the socialist side of the debate.

Before exploring the background to these ideas and discussing the extent to which Swift was aligning himself with the so-called social gospel, it will be helpful to look at the third source of information regarding his attitude to social and political questions—his contributions to *The Westminster Record*.

One of Swift's most enduring contributions to the life and work of Westminster Chapel was the launching of *The Westminster Record*. With his background in journalism it was natural for him to edit⁶² a journal for the church which would not only publish sermons (preached by Campbell Morgan) but also contain news of the church's activities and additional material likely to be of interest or value to church members and other readers. Of particular importance to us is Swift's major contribution—a monthly column⁶³ entitled 'The Social Outlook' which reveals his attitude towards a wide range of contemporary economic, social and political issues.

In the first issue of *The Westminster Record* (January 1905) Swift laid the foundation for his column with a discussion of 'Social Responsibility'. Grounding it securely in the command to love one's neighbour—as well as to love God—Swift declared his intention to view the 'social outlook' from 'the standpoint of the Master'. Eschewing party politics, he would endeavour 'to understand and declare the Divine purpose concerning our social life'. What he would have to say might appear idealistic, but at least it would point in the right direction. The primary need, he asserted, is 'Christlike compassion'. The church's social conscience

⁶² Campbell Morgan is also named as an editor, but it is clear that it was Swift who did the actual work.

⁶³ In the summer the column was devoted to the affairs of the Mundesley conference.

should lead it to 'the exercise of a social compassion, which will compel it to take a foremost place in activities which aim at the redemption of the whole man—spirit, soul and body'.

During the next couple of years Swift looked at a wide range of social and political issues in the 'Social Outlook' column. On unemployment, he asserted that, as a matter of justice, work should be found for those who are willing to work. Only when this has been done may harsh measures be taken against those who will not work (February 1905). On the vexed education question he was prepared to accept 'secular education in the public school' since 'religion will never be promoted by any teaching that is only made possible by injustice' (April 1905). In the October 1905 issue of *The Westminster Record* Swift spoke out on the subject of socialism. 'The Socialistic tendency', he declared, is 'the inevitable result of our social evolution and the outworking of the Kingdom of God.' He argued that capitalists themselves were unwittingly among the greatest promoters of socialism, since it was their creation of monopolies that made it necessary

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for the state or the municipal authority 'to take over and administer in the interest of all every productive enterprise which has become the monopoly of the few'. But the 'supremely important' influence in the promotion of socialistic thought is 'the larger appreciation of the ethic of Christ'. The 'inherent selfishness' of 'individualistic philosophy' is becoming more and more apparent, he affirmed, as, by contrast, is the altruism of the teaching of Christ. Swift had only two criticisms to make of the Independent Labour Party and other socialist organizations—they were too exclusive, and they tended to use coercive measures that were out of keeping with the method of Christ.⁶⁴

'The Social Outlook' for January 1906 discussed the forthcoming election, and contained comments on education, unemployment, the scandals associated with the use of Chinese labour in South Africa, and the drink question. In February, Swift warmly welcomed the emergence of the Labour Party as a significant force in the new House of Commons. The great mass of the people belonged to the 'working class'; it was only right that they should be well represented in Parliament; it 'can only contribute to the good of all'. Labour members will be able to 'contribute towards the solution of those great problems of Social Reform which have to be faced in the immediate future'. 'Some of them', he admitted, 'may be extreme in their views, but if there is quiet and resolute progress in the righting of wrongs and the promotion of the common weal, these will have little opportunity for expression. It is when the streams of progress are dammed up', he added, 'that presently the barriers break and the floodtide of revolution sweeps forth.' 'We stand upon the threshold of a new age', he confidently concluded.

In the March 1906 'Social Outlook' Swift returned to the problem of unemployment, commenting on a series of articles in *The Tribune* by J. A. Hobson which distinguished between the unemployed and the unemployable. Swift asserted that 'careful classification' of the unemployed was essential and argued that the aged and the physically and mentally sick should be cared for by methods that imply no reproach and carry no stigma. Unskilled but willing workers should be dealt with as such (Swift touched on the question of re-training) but the 'criminal and vagrant' element should be dealt with in the most drastic way.

⁶⁴ *Westminster Record* (1906) 143.

Next month, Swift reviewed the collection of essays recently edited by G. Haw and published under the title *Christianity and the Working Classes*. He fastened on the claim that, among the working classes, there existed widespread reverence for Christ—alongside strong criticism of churches and Christians—and suggested that the former might be exploited as common ground between the churches and the working classes.

The 'Opium Question' was the subject for May 1906. Swift's discussion bore rapid fruit, for on 28 May a prayer meeting was held at Westminster Chapel after the evening service, at which a resolution was proposed by

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Campbell Morgan and seconded by Lord Kinnaird expressing strong disapproval of the export of opium from India to China and calling on the government to put an end to the traffic. The resolution was carried unanimously, and a copy was sent to the Secretary of State for India.

The Sweated Industries Exhibition, held during May 1906 in order to draw public attention to the exploitation of labour, certainly succeeded in rousing Swift. In 'The Social Outlook' for June 1906 he urged that a social conscience be created on the matter, strong enough to secure radical action. His eloquence thoroughly aroused, he said of sweated labour: 'In the last analysis, it is the inevitable product of that unlimited competition which enriches the strong and drives the weak to the wall. The more fierce the conflict becomes', he continued, 'the more tragic and awful the devastation which marks its track. Surely the men of faith must see in the movements of today the handwriting upon the wall—the doom of an order the necessary corollary of which is the poverty and wretchedness which abound in the richest nations in the world! "Thy kingdom come!" Yes, and while we pray', he asked his readers, 'isn't it time we began to lend a hand?'

All this was heady stuff for Westminster Chapel. After the summer break, during which Swift's column was, as usual, devoted to the Mundesley conference, Swift turned from the British scene to discuss the quickened moral consciousness which he discerned worldwide. In October he returned to the fray with a discussion of the Independent Labour Party and socialism. November's 'Social Outlook' was devoted to 'Municipal Elections', and in December the column was filled with an account of 'Our Work'—the domestic affairs of the church. It may be significant that the December 1906 issue of *The Westminster Record* carried a review by the Rev. J. Ossian Davies of a book, J. Sutter's *Britain's Hope*, to which Swift had referred approvingly in 'The Social Outlook' for June that year. The review, which was little more than an outline of the contents, contained the prefatory statement: 'It is said that we are all Socialists now, but the assertion is too sweeping. We may be Sociologists, ardent for social reform, but we are not Socialists in the extreme Continental sense.'⁶⁵

It begins to look as if Swift had gone too far. 'The Social Outlook' was replaced in 1907 by a series of innocuous articles by Swift consisting of little more than the stringing together of texts drawn from the Bible on social matters. But these soon came to an end. In January 1908 Swift turned to other subjects; but already his departure from Westminster Chapel was under consideration, and the February 1908 issue of *The Westminster Record* announced that departure. Before examining the question whether this was precipitated by a divergence of opinion on social matters between Swift and Campbell Morgan, we must turn aside to explore

⁶⁵ *ibid.* (1907) 367-368.

Swift's indebtedness to Josiah Strong, whose name has been mentioned more than once already, and the Social Gospel Movement.

Several times in his *First Principles*, Swift refers to Strong (44, 55-57,

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64) and acknowledges indebtedness to him for a number of ideas, such as that of co-operating with Christ in the service of others. In one of his 'Social Outlook' articles, Swift alludes to 'Dr. Josiah Strong, whose words are always worthy of careful consideration'.⁶⁶ In the light of all this, it may not be altogether fanciful to read the name of Strong into the statement by Campbell Morgan in his introduction to Swift's *First Principles* that he had undertaken 'a definite course of study in Sociology suggested by one of its most able exponents' (7). In view of his undoubted influence upon Swift—even if the extent of that influence is not easy to determine—it is necessary for us to turn aside to consider that remarkable man.

5 Josiah Strong

Josiah Strong was a Congregational minister in the United States whose experience as a 'frontier' missionary in Wyoming and subsequent urban pastorates in Sandusky and Cincinnati disposed him to preach a 'social gospel'.⁶⁷ Appointed secretary of the Congregational Home Missionary Society in 1881, he called a conference which has been described as the first interdenominational conference specifically devoted to the problems of the city.⁶⁸ The publication of *Our Country* in 1885 made Strong a national, and, soon, an international figure. An immediate publishing success, it had sold 175,000 copies by 1916.⁶⁹ *The Dictionary of American Biography* describes it as a 'pioneer sociological treatise, already radical in its emphasis on the dangers of over-accumulation and concentration of capital, its sympathy with the discontents of labour, and its challenge to the church for concern with social problems'. H. F. May calls it 'the Uncle Tom's Cabin of city reform',⁷⁰ and Jurgen Herbst, the editor of the 1963 edition, asserts of its author, with pardonable exaggeration, that from the time of its publication 'he devoted all his energies to practical solutions of urban problems'.⁷¹

Somewhat surprisingly, Strong was invited in 1886 to become the general secretary of the Evangelical Alliance of the United States, a post which he held until 1898. Under his leadership, the Evangelical Alliance, which was already beginning to stir itself, was to experience the most exhilarating period of its history. Strong organized 'the three most significant conferences ever held in the United States in the interest of social Christianity'.⁷² They were held in 1887, 1889 and 1893.

⁶⁶ *ibid.* (1905) 123.

⁶⁷ D. R. Muller, 'The Social Philosophy of Josiah Strong: Social Christianity and American Progressivism', *Church History* 28 (1959) 184.

⁶⁸ *loc. cit.* H. F. May, *Protestant Churches and Industrial America* (New York 1949) 194.

⁶⁹ J. Strong, *Our Country* (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1963 ed.) xvi.

⁷⁰ May, *Protestant Churches* 114.

⁷¹ Strong, *Our Country* xx n.

⁷² C. H. Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1914* (New Haven 1940) 113-114.

The Washington Conference of 1887, as the title of the volume reporting its proceedings suggests, dealt with *National Perils and Opportunities*.⁷³ Among the perils social issues loomed large; among the opportunities co-operation in Christian work was predominant. Washington Gladden—another rising social gospeller—gave an address on this theme, and Strong spelled out a plan for active co-operation in terms of: 1. 'Co-operation in the study of sociological and industrial problems and the application of Christian principles to their solution.' 2. 'Co-operation in reaching our entire population for the gospel.' 3. Co-operation of 'the

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Christian millions of the land' to secure necessary reforms and to defend 'cherished American institutions'. To be effective, such co-operation would need to operate at the levels of local alliances, county and state alliances, and national conferences.⁷⁴ The mood of the conference may be gauged by the utterances of that redoubtable evangelical, A. T. Pierson. In the course of a forthright address on the 'Estrangement of the Masses from the Church', Pierson asserted that he did not believe that a more important assembly had met since the Council of Jerusalem. He was so carried away that he went on to say that it reminded him of the Council of Nice [*sic*—hastily adding, 'at which I was not present, however'! His euphoria continued at least to the end of the conference, for he solemnly declared near the end: 'I have stood on supreme mounts of privilege in my life, but I calmly say, in the presence of God, that this is the supreme hour of my life.'⁷⁵

The conferences of 1889 and 1893 built upon the foundation that had been laid at Washington in 1887. Frank Russell, field secretary of the Evangelical Alliance, toured America addressing meetings of all kinds and setting up several state committees and many local alliances. Over 40 of these latter were in operation by 1889.⁷⁶ Though the plan developed slowly, its influence was considerable, and it has won high praise from historians of the Social Gospel Movement.

Nevertheless, in 1898 Strong was asked to resign from his post. The precise reasons for this are not clear. In general terms it would not be inaccurate to say, as is often said, that Strong's views were too broad for the Evangelical Alliance. For example, E. T. Root, the author of a short study entitled 'Josiah Strong, a Modern Prophet of the Kingdom of God'⁷⁷ who knew Strong personally—though rather surprisingly he never discussed with him the reasons for his resignation—surmised that EA was not prepared to 'apply the teachings of Jesus to citizenship and social and industrial problems'.⁷⁸

The crux issue may have been Strong's association with George D. Herron and the Kingdom Movement. Strong had been present at the retreat held at Iowa College in June 1882 out of which the so-called Kingdom Movement grew, one of whose leaders was George D. Herron.⁷⁹ Strong wrote the introduction to one of Herron's books (*The Larger Christ*, 1891). He also served on the editorial board of *The Northwestern Congregationalist*, a weekly journal,

⁷³ (New York 1887).

⁷⁴ *National Perils* 345-355.

⁷⁵ *ibid.* 116, 402, respectively.

⁷⁶ A. I. Abell, *The Urban Impact of American Protestantism 1865-1900* (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1943) 93.

⁷⁷ *The New Church Review* 29 (Boston 1922) 47-54.

⁷⁸ *ibid.* 49.

⁷⁹ R. T. Handy, 'George D. Herron and the Kingdom Movement', *Church History* (June 1950) 101.

renamed *The Kingdom* in 1894, which published articles by Herron and other exponents of a social gospel.⁸⁰ He was closely associated with the American Institute of Christian Sociology, founded at Chautauqua, New York, by Herron and other social leaders such as Richard T. Ely, John R. Commons and Washington Gladden, and served as its second president.⁸¹ In 1894 Strong, along with Ely, Commons and others, took part in a Summer School of Applied Sociology at Iowa College.⁸² The Kingdom Movement was at the height of its influence in 1894-95, and Strong's involvement in it was

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proving embarrassing to EA. Already in 1893, Herron had been given an opportunity of setting forth his views to the executive committee of EA, and it was no doubt as a result of this that in 1894 Strong was asked by that committee to resign from the editorial board of *The Kingdom*.⁸³ Herron's increasing radicalism had lost him the support of most churches by 1896⁸⁴ Strong managed to survive at EA until 1898, when, at last, he was asked to resign.

In that same year Strong founded the League of Social Service (renamed the American Institute of Social Service in 1903) which played an important part in gathering and distributing the statistics and factual information whose social significance he was one of the first to see.⁸⁵ His writing and speaking continued unabated. As for EA, its new-found interest in social concern and its new phase of fostering co-operation among the churches largely evaporated. Some of its local alliances became federations, joining the Federation of Churches Movement which had come into existence in 1895 as a more comprehensive and sociologically-oriented body than EA.⁸⁶

What impact did Strong—and the new line temporarily taken by EA in the United States—have upon the Evangelical Alliance in Britain? *Evangelical Christendom*, the organ of EA in Britain (and a remarkably comprehensive coverage it provided) reported the new drive of EA in the United States in its issue of 1 January 1887, adding, 'The Alliance is to be commended for seeing and seizing the opportunity of the century for cooperative work, and is to be congratulated upon securing as its secretary a man who has already made a profound impression upon the thought of the age. Dr. Strong will be welcomed to New York and supported by a powerful constituency.'⁸⁷ *Our Country* had evidently made its impact on Britain as well as North America. Another of Strong's influential books, *The New Era*, was published simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic in 1893. As late as 1896, Strong attended the Jubilee Conference of the Evangelical Alliance, held in London, and gave a forthright address on 'The Churches and the Signs of the Times'.⁸⁸ In the course of his address he referred to 'the rediscovery of the kingdom of God, of which Christ said so much, and of which His followers until recently, have said so little' (221). 'We are beginning to see', he declared, 'that the religion of Jesus is not individualistic, but pre-eminently social' (224).

⁸⁰ *ibid.* 107.

⁸¹ *ibid.* 108.

⁸² May, *Protestant Churches* 254.

⁸³ *ibid.* 255, drawing on a MS biography of Strong by E. and M. Strong.

⁸⁴ *Church History* (June 1950) 110.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 189-190.

⁸⁶ Abell, *Urban Impact* 188-191.

⁸⁷ *Evangelical Christendom* (1887) 30 cf. 159 (2 May 1887) for the full text of the statement issued by the American EA setting out its policy.

⁸⁸ published in A. J. Arnold (ed.), *Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference* (London 1897).

Wherever the law of God is perfectly obeyed the kingdom of God has perfectly come. The kingdom pervades every area of life. The churches should proclaim the laws of service and love which Jesus laid down; they should both influence and be influenced by the new social science; they should educate public opinion and popular conscience regarding the need for political reforms; they should be concerned with the new philanthropy—though not as a substitute for 'the old Gospel'—and they must co-operate together, even though organic church union will not be possible for 'many generations yet to come' (217-230).

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The similarities between ideas like these and the ones found in Swift's *First Principles* are so striking that it would have been necessary to ask whether there is any dependence between the two, even if there were no supporting evidence. But, as we have seen, there is. In view of Swift's confessed indebtedness to Strong, the opportunities he would have had, on both sides of the Atlantic, to imbibe his views, and one further piece of speculative evidence, held in reserve until now, it is likely that Swift felt the full force of social gospel thinking, and may, indeed, have been helped by Strong to retain his balance. For in the eulogy of Swift, preached by Campbell Morgan at Westminster Chapel in January 1914 (in place of the normal sermon) there occurs this passage: 'At one moment in his life, Albert Swift very nearly crossed the line, and turned his back upon the Church, because he felt that she was failing to realize the ideals of the Kingdom within her own borders; and therefore failing to represent them to the world. But his life was too firmly rooted in Christ for him to do so, and he gave himself to yet more careful consideration, the result of which is expressed in his book.'⁸⁹ The first part of the statement is enigmatic, and no names are mentioned. It may well be that it was Strong's influence that helped to bring him back from the brink. For it is interesting that Strong's book, *The Next Great Awakening*, which was published in 1902, even more than his earlier works, bears striking similarities, in many places, to ideas put forward by Swift in his lectures given to the staff of Westminster Chapel in 1906 or thereabouts. Its view of the kingdom of God (chaps.3-5) and its enunciation of the laws of service, sacrifice and love (chap.6) are examples. But there is no doubt that Campbell Morgan was correct when he referred to Swift's own 'careful consideration' of these matters, for his *First Principles*, while they contain ideas which must surely have been derived from Strong, are moulded, filled out biblically and applied practically in a way that was undoubtedly his own.

6 Swift's Subsequent History

It remains only to look at Swift's career after leaving Westminster Chapel in order to see whether there is any evidence of a change of opinion on social issues, and to examine Campbell Morgan's attitude towards him and regarding social issues during this period.

In his eulogy of Swift, Campbell Morgan perceptively distinguished three successive visions that 'caught and carried' Swift. First was evangelism, which he had shared with Campbell Morgan in their youth. This was followed by a vision of 'the realized Kingdom of God'. This vision was the inspiration of his book, *First Principles*. Swift's final vision 'which', said Campbell Morgan, 'at the last, completely mastered and inspired him' was the value of 'young life' to the church 'and the necessity for realizing that life around the distinctive and central things of the Christian faith'. Its literary fruit was another little book entitled *The Institute Department of the Sunday School*.⁹⁰ Campbell Morgan drew

⁸⁹ cited in Harries, *Morgan* 116-117.

⁹⁰ (London [1910]).

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attention to the further fact that these visions were not mutually exclusive, saying, 'In each of the succeeding stages, he retained the values of that which had gone before.' So, Campbell Morgan explained, he 'never lost his vision of, and passion for, the Kingdom of God. He watched, prayed and wrought with all the power he had, to bring men to understand their responsibility about the conditions that spoiled humanity. Whenever opportunity offered, he made his plea for a living interest on the part of Christian men in the things of the city and of the State, from the standpoint of righteousness.'⁹¹

The truth of this analysis, as far as our limited quest is concerned, is confirmed by a glance at Swift's book *The Institute Department*. In the introduction, Swift states that its basis lies in his experience at Dulwich, Westminster and Reading of running institute departments as an outgrowth of the Sunday school (xvi). An institute department should include among its various sections a social services section whose object would be 'promotion of service for others, kindly and helpful ministry of any kind, and the cultivation of an interest in and preparation for the responsibilities of Christian citizenship' (75). At Trinity Congregational Church, Reading, whose pastor Swift had become after leaving Westminster Chapel, he had introduced a League of Service with separate 'courts' for young men and women which met monthly for transaction of business and the study of social problems. During the first session, members were introduced to the social work carried on in their town (51-52). A significant piece of evidence from *The Institute Department* that Swift had retained his social concern was his recommendation that the programme of the literary section of an institute should include an evening studying F. G. Peabody's *Jesus Christ and the Social Question* as well as debates and short papers on social and economic issues. Here is a nice blend of evangelistic concern, kingdom ethics and concern for young people.

Peabody has been described as a social gospeller,⁹² though he was well to the right of the 'movement'. A theologian of the idealist school, he is said to have been the first American to introduce the subject of social reform into a divinity school curriculum, and his most important contribution, according to Herbst, was his introduction of social science as an academic subject into the curriculum of Harvard. 'He subjected philanthropic social research to the scrutiny of scholarship and placed it upon empirical observations and inductive study guided by a systematic theology.'⁹³ Peabody's *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*⁹⁴ is a moderate book which, while it sees the social ideal of Jesus as summed up in the term 'kingdom of heaven', asserts that the 'supreme concern' of Jesus was 'not the reorganization of human society, but the disclosure to the human soul of its relation to God'.⁹⁵

Trinity Congregational Church, Reading was, like Westminster Chapel, a church with a history of social and political involvement. From 1891 to 1898 its pastor had been Ambrose Shepherd. A former Lancashire

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⁹¹ cited in Harries, *Morgan* 115-119.

⁹² J. Herbst's study of him is entitled 'Francis Greenwood Peabody: Harvard's Theologian of the Social Gospel', *Harvard Theological Review* 54 (Jan. 1961) 45-69.

⁹³ *ibid.* 68-69.

⁹⁴ (New York and London 1900).

⁹⁵ Peabody, *Jesus Christ* op. cit. 77; cf. Herbst, *art. cit.* 58.

mill-hand, Shepherd has been described as an 'uncompromisingly Radical type of politician'.⁹⁶ He himself referred to his 'twenty years of service to the Radical cause'.⁹⁷ While in Reading, he became involved in what one writer has described as 'cripplingly manifold town activities'.⁹⁸ The church possessed 320 members in 1908,⁹⁹ and Swift threw himself into its work, particularly among young people. He was set free by his church to travel widely in the country, popularising the idea of adding an institute department to the Sunday school for the benefit of young people above the age of 14 or 15. The Sunday School Union had formed an Institutes Committee in 1904, and Swift was commissioned to write his book on the subject as part of a campaign to promote institutes.

In 1912 Swift moved back to London to join Dr. L. E. Broughton in the ministry of Christ Church, Westminster Bridge Road, that remarkable church which F. B. Meyer made famous for its wide range of social services. During the short time that he was there, Swift reorganized the Sunday school and added an institute department.¹⁰⁰ His reversion from a sole pastorate to an assistantship may have been dictated by the state of his health. This suffered a complete collapse, and in the summer of 1913 he withdrew to Littlehampton where he soon succumbed to the tuberculosis that had dogged him for much of his life.

After his departure from Westminster Chapel in 1908, relationships between Swift and Campbell Morgan continued to be warm and as close as distance and business permitted. Too much should not be read into Campbell Morgan's resolution never again to have a dual pastorate.¹⁰¹ This might be taken as an indication that the partnership had not been a success. Against that must be set Campbell Morgan's firm statement that 'without hesitation and without qualification, I affirm that the partnership has been vindicated'.¹⁰² The two men clearly remained in close contact with each other. It has been said that they constantly met 'for no other reason than the delight of each other's company'.¹⁰³ Swift occupied the pulpit of Westminster Chapel for four Sundays in August 1909¹⁰⁴ and attended the Mundesley conferences year by year. At the 1910 conference he preached a sermon on Mark 10:42, 45 'in which he set forth as fundamentals of the Kingdom: i The Law of Service; ii The Law of Sacrifice; iii The Law of Love'.¹⁰⁵ At the 1911 Mundesley conference, Swift indulged another of his consuming interests, giving five addresses on 'The Problem of Youth from the Standpoint of the Church' in the course of which he outlined his concept of an institute department.¹⁰⁶ Swift also played an influential part in the formation and work of an association of Bible teachers that was one of Campbell Morgan's many projects.¹⁰⁷ For his part, Campbell Morgan conducted a five-day mission in Swift's church in January 1909. Swift wrote an appreciative report in the February issue of *The Westminster Record* (37-39). The relationship between the two men evidently remained cordial and reciprocal.

⁹⁶ T. H. Walker, *Fellow-Labourers* (Greenock 1916) 238; cf. J. F. Shepherd (ed.), *Ambrose Shepherd D.D.* (London 1915) 47-48.

⁹⁷ cited in S. Yeo, *Religion and Voluntary Organizations in Crisis* (London 1976) 295.

⁹⁸ *loc. cit.*

⁹⁹ *Congregational Year Book* (1909).

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.* (1915).

¹⁰¹ *Westminster Record* (1908).

¹⁰² *ibid.* 26.

¹⁰³ Morgan, *Man of Word* 168.

¹⁰⁴ *Westminster Record* (1909) 167.

¹⁰⁵ *Westminster Bible Record* (1910) 170 (shades of Josiah Strong!).

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.* (1911) 183-231.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.* (1910) 64-68; (1914) 25.

As for Campbell Morgan's attitude towards social issues after the

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departure of Swift from Westminster Chapel, the evidence is somewhat equivocal. In a lengthy protest against Campbell Morgan's departure for the United States in 1919, a journalist, F. A. Atkins, declared about his preaching: 'He is much more than a Bible teacher, for all through his ministry he has preached a very definite and uncompromising social gospel ...the most eloquent of Labour leaders would have to give way to Campbell Morgan in his scorching denunciation of social wrongs, and his passionate advocacy of brotherhood and justice.'¹⁰⁸ Supporting evidence for this is meagre. The editorial notes contributed by Campbell Morgan to *The Westminster Record* continued to include references to and some discussion of issues like an earthquake in Italy, press sensationalism and the opium trade.¹⁰⁹ And the editorial notes for December 1913 called for a voice to speak out against war, adding, 'let us pray with new earnestness for the coming of His Kingdom; and let us see to it that our actions are in harmony with our praying' (266).

Yet there is a good deal of evidence which suggests that the departure of Swift from Westminster Chapel was followed by certain changes of emphasis, and even of policy. In May 1909, the editorial notes contributed by Campbell Morgan to *The Westminster Record* stated that the slum districts in the area around the chapel were disappearing and that there were no large business houses in which young people were resident. The conclusion drawn was that 'work of the Settlement or Institutional kind, absolutely necessary in certain districts, is not the work appointed for us. The one work which awaits us', wrote Campbell Morgan, 'is that of a most definitely spiritual kind.' The specific intention stated on this occasion was to become a strong missionary church 'attempting systematically to provide instruction in Missionary matters'.¹¹⁰ The September 1909 issue of the *Record* reported the setting up of a missionary council, composed of all staff, deacons, missionary collectors, study circle leaders and representatives from every branch and department of the church, which would meet three times a year. The new emphasis was promoted with typical Campbell Morgan thoroughness. On the third Sunday of each month Campbell Morgan brought a missionary topic to the attention of the congregation, prior to the Communion Service. Correspondence with missionaries was promoted, missionary magazines distributed, study circles organized and missionary topics introduced into the teaching of children. By September 1909 as many as 300 participated in a 'Watchers' Band' committed to praying for missionary work. Nor was finance overlooked. Missionary boxes were distributed and missionary collectors appointed.¹¹¹ Here is a clear example of social concern being diverted into a missionary channel.

At the beginning of 1910 *The Westminster Record* was renamed *The Westminster Bible Record*. The change of name was linked with an attempt to increase circulation, but it was also calculated to draw attention to 'the changing nature of the work'.¹¹² This time it was Bible teaching that

¹⁰⁸ cited in Morgan, *Man of Word* 236.

¹⁰⁹ *Westminster Record* (1909) 25-28.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.* 98.

¹¹¹ *ibid.* 195-198.

¹¹² *Westminster Bible Record* (1910) 1-2.

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was being emphasized. And this new emphasis (which was 'new' in a restricted sense since Campbell Morgan had stressed it from the beginning) was even made at the expense of the missionary emphasis, for in the editorial notes of the January 1913 issue of *The Westminster Bible Record* it was announced that the missionary notes previously contributed to the *Record* by Sister Dora would be discontinued, despite 'many tributes to their value', 'in order to make more space for directly Biblical work' (1).

There may have been some ambivalence in Campbell Morgan's mind after Swift's departure, for in the September 1909 issue of *The Westminster Record* he summed up his ministry since 1904 in terms not only of gospel preaching and Bible exposition but also 'the wider proclamation of the purposes of God for the world, and the consequent appeal to His people to co-operate with Him towards the establishment of His kingdom, together with the application of the principles of His government to the age' (194). But the direction in which Campbell Morgan was moving is fairly clear. The editorial notes in *The Westminster Bible Record* for October 1911 refer to current unrest and the desire for material betterment. While professing sympathy, Campbell Morgan went on to say: 'We shall remember that our special work is that of proclaiming by our living and by our preaching the fact of the Kingdom of God; and that, only as man seeks that first can he come to the full realization of his individual life, or to those social conditions in which there will be no place for oppression or the poverty that means the limitation and degradation of life' (217). Next year, a newspaper editor asked Campbell Morgan to reply to a number of questions, one of which was: 'Can social revolution be directed through the agency of religious influence? If so, what do you consider the best way of effecting it?' Campbell Morgan replied: 'In answer to this enquiry I can say only that my conviction is that there can be no social regeneration apart from individual regeneration.'¹¹³ It looks as though, whereas Swift retained his attitude on social questions more or less unimpaired, Campbell Morgan backed down. The ties of friendship were strong enough to prevent anything like an open rupture—indeed, Campbell Morgan was prepared to stand by his friend to the very end—but their accord on social matters became less than total. Perhaps Swift's open avowal of (moderate) socialism *did* contribute to his departure from Westminster Chapel in 1908, though Campbell Morgan's loyalty to his lifelong friend has concealed it.

Conclusion

A social gospeller at Westminster Chapel? Swift was certainly influenced by recognized leaders of the so-called Social Gospel Movement. They were moderates, however, and he made their ideas even more moderate, enriching them with his own biblical understanding. Despite the biblical balance and cautious presentation of his ideas, his espousal of socialism (albeit a moderate version) and his forthright criticism of the

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competitive and individualistic elements in capitalism may have contributed towards—if not precipitated—his departure from Westminster Chapel.

¹¹³ J. Morgan, *This was his Faith: The Expository Letters of G. Campbell Morgan* (London n.d.) 150

Harold H. Rowdon, "Albert Swift: A Social Gospeller at Westminster Chapel?" *Vox Evangelica* 15 (1985): 111-139.

Campbell Morgan's involvement in the story illustrates not only the disillusionment of many nonconformist evangelicals with the Liberal connection and, indeed, any kind of Party politics, but also the way in which (some) evangelicals backed away from social involvement, directing their energies into other channels (like overseas mission) or confining themselves to biblical exposition and evangelistic preaching in the expectation that the regeneration of individuals, coupled with the teaching of biblical ethical standards, would constitute the most effective contribution to the regeneration of society.

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Prepared for the Web in March 2009 by Robert I. Bradshaw.

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