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TRUE RELIGION: REFLECTIONS OF BRITISH
CHURCHES AND THE NEW POOR LAW IN
THE PERIODICAL PRESS OF 1834

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Camille K. Dean, B.A.

Denton, Texas

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This study examined public perception of the social relevance of Christian churches in the year the New Poor Law was passed. The first two chapters presented historiography concerning the Voluntary crisis which threatened the Anglican establishment, and the relationship of Christian churches to the New Poor Law. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 revealed the recurring image of "true" Christianity in its relation to the church crisis and the New Poor Law in the workingmen's, political, and religious periodical press. The study demonstrated a particular working class interest in Christianity and the effect of evangelicalism on religious renewal and social concerns. Orthodox Christians, embroiled in religious and political controversy, articulated practical concern for the poor less effectively than secularists.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. HISTORIANS AND THE CHURCH CRISIS	8
III. THE CHURCH AND THE NEW POOR LAW	27
IV. THE WORKINGMEN'S PRESS AND THE CHURCHES	43
V. THE POLITICAL PRESS AND THE CHURCHES	73
VI. THE RELIGIOUS PRESS AND THE CHURCHES	106
VII. CONCLUSION	140
BIBLIOGRAPHY	145

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study began as an investigation of the dramatic decline in Christian faith in British society since the nineteenth century. What had made the churches ultimately ineffective? To what extent would a survey of public discourse in the year 1834 depict Christian churches in a relevant, helping role in British society? I proposed to examine contemporary public perception of Christian churches. Based on the New Testament definition of "pure and undefiled religion" as that which cares for the "fatherless and the widow," I had chosen 1834, the year in which the New Poor Law was passed as the context for the study. As I examined several periodicals in that year representing a broad spectrum of society, I discovered a diffuse and persistent interest in the idea of "true" religion. The widespread effect of evangelical religious revival had helped to produce such a preoccupation. Vigorous public debate regarding the legitimacy of a legally established church sharpened the focus. As might be expected, the periodicals portrayed different images of the

"true" church.¹ Most of the periodicals evidenced concern for the poor. They differed, however, in the weight assigned to spiritual or material welfare. Varied political and economic agendas also influenced concerns for the poor.

I had originally chosen to examine periodical discourse during the year 1834 because it was the date of passage of the New Poor Law, but my survey revealed additional events which coincided to make the study of "true" Christianity in that year especially significant. Elie Halévy referred to 1834 as a year of "crisis" concerning the privileges of the established church, a period in which some envisioned the possibility of politically destabilizing religious warfare.² Other historians have agreed with the seriousness of the situation, citing the fact that the attacks on the religious establishment were part and parcel of democratizing attacks on the old system. Since the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and the passage of Catholic Emancipation had precipitated the fall of the Tories and the Reform Bill

¹Josef L. Altholz, in The Religious Press in Britain, 1760-1900 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 4, observed that in the analysis of "key words" in religious periodicals, "the most misleading word is true."

²Elie Halévy, A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, vol. 3, The Triumph of Reform: 1830-1841 (London: Ernest Benn, 1927; third impression of first paperback edition, 1965), 144, 152.

triumph of the Whigs, the offensive was continuing.³ Thus, religion was a volatile issue in politics, having led to the overthrow of the Tory government in 1830. Religious differences over the issue of appropriating lands belonging to the Irish established church would in turn lead to a brief upset for the Whigs in 1834. The Whig government had begun reform of the Irish establishment, abolishing ten bishoprics and reducing the income of the others. Many Anglicans saw in Parliament's treatment of the Irish church a presage of things to come to the English establishment. In addition to discussing challenges to the legitimacy of an Irish Protestant establishment that did not represent the religious beliefs of most of the Irish people, the journals were hotly debating the civil and political grievances of English Dissenters, who claimed to constitute a majority of the churchgoers of Britain. Such threats to the Anglican establishment had precipitated the rise within it of the reforming Oxford Movement, which published the first of its famous tracts in 1834. In addition to debate surrounding the passage of the New Poor Law, the year saw further tensions in the area of social reform as the Factory Act of

³Thomas William Heyck, The Peoples of the British Isles: A New History from 1688-1870, vol. 2 (Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth Publishing, 1992), 305-6. Alexander Llewellyn, in The Decade of Reform: the 1830s (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971), 97, upheld the urgency of religious and political issues. He stated that "the popular anti-clericalism of the 1820s and 1830s has been ignored or underestimated."

1833 went into effect. A radical free workingmen's press responded to these events, having won a significant concession from repressive government regulation in 1834.

It is essential in this study to appreciate the prominence of religious concerns in nineteenth century British life. George Kitson Clark described "the revival of religion" as a sociopolitical force equal to the "blind forces" of population growth and industrialization; it "became fused with the objectives of most political parties and the hopes of every class."⁴ The revival to which Kitson Clark referred was a consequence of the impact of the evangelical movement. Evangelicalism emphasized personal conversion, adherence to the scriptures, and the performance of good works. Its fervency was a challenge to the often easy-going latitudinarianism of eighteenth century Anglicanism. Owen Chadwick, describing the cultural heritage of the Wesleyan revival of the 1730's, spoke of religious enthusiasm which spread beyond Methodism to affect every denomination. He defined it as "the strongest religious force in British life."⁵ Evangelical devotion revived the established church, as well as other religious sects. Between 1800 and 1850 evangelical affiliation

⁴George Kitson Clark, The Making of Victorian England (London: Methuen & Co., 1962), 147.

⁵Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church, vol. 7, pt. 1 of An Ecclesiastical History of England, ed. J. C. Dickinson, 3rd ed. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1971), 5.

increased among the clergy, comprising at the end of that period one-third of the Anglican clergy and a majority of the Nonconformist. The evangelical moral frame of reference affected "many who were indifferent or even hostile to its religious basis."⁶ Thus, while only two of the periodicals I examined, the Christian Observer and the Record, were openly identified with Evangelicalism, this dominant religious ethic no doubt influenced the others to some extent.⁷

To examine the public perception of the Christian church in 1834, I surveyed the workingmen's, political, and religious press. To represent the free workingmen's press, I chose primarily the Poor Man's Guardian and also referred to Figaro in London and William Cobbett's Political Register. Charles Knight's Penny Magazine reflected government sponsored propaganda for the workingman. The political periodicals consulted included two Tory organs, the Quarterly Review and Blackwood's Magazine; the Whig Edinburgh Review; and the Utilitarian Westminster Review.

⁶G. M. Young, Portrait of an Age: Victorian England (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), in Boyd Hilton, The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785-1865 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 26.

⁷For the purposes of this study, capitalization of the word Evangelicals will refer to those of evangelical persuasion who chose to remain within the fold of the established Church of England (Anglican); noncapitalization will refer to evangelicalism within all the denominations under study, as well as in secular contexts.

The British Critic and the Christian Remembrancer voiced the thoughts of the High Church party of the Church of England. I examined the Record as the dominant voice of the Low Church, or Evangelical, party of the Church of England and have referred to the Christian Observer as its more courteous voice. While acknowledging that they were not, strictly speaking, religious periodicals, I chose the Eclectic Review to represent broadly the views of Dissent, and the Monthly Repository for the views of Unitarians. While these latter estimable literary journals devoted their pages to secular material and purposed to treat religious subjects within that context, in the highly charged atmosphere of 1834 they contained significant religious rhetoric. I have tried to define what each group's image of "true" religion was and to relate it to the economic, political, and social change which came in the wake of the French Revolution and the Reform Bill of 1832.

This study touched upon several historiographical issues. In chapter 2, I discussed issues relating to the crisis in 1834 surrounding the status of the established Church of England, and in chapter 3, those concerning the churches and the New Poor Law. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present the views of the workmen's, political, and religious press respectively: the image each presented of the "true" church and its relationship to the church crisis and the New Poor Law. Such a particularized study of several periodical

sources provides a fresh synthesis of the events of a single pivotal year in the religious, political, and socio-economic life of nineteenth century Britain.

My investigation confirmed Gerald Parsons' recent work which claimed a distinct, if heterodox, working class interest in Christian faith. Another value in my study was that it permitted each of several groups in society to speak for themselves, defining their beliefs. Too often secular judgments have been applied to sincere religious beliefs and charges of hypocrisy hurled rather than more appropriate observations of short-sightedness. Religious and political conservatism survived the liberalizing winds of 1834, and the religious Establishment did go on to achieve some degree of reform. Christian faith continued to wield powerful influence in British society throughout the nineteenth century. Victorian churches expended enormous sums and energy in ministering to the poor. However, the forces of secularism remained strong, and in the twentieth century they have been ascendant. My study of the rhetoric of both the religious and secular press indicated a degree of self-absorption by those of orthodox Christian faith in doctrinal controversy, political concerns, and sectarian competition. Such preoccupations allowed the challenges of 1834 to be recognized but not met.

CHAPTER II

HISTORIANS AND THE CHURCH CRISIS

Historians have generally agreed upon the critical nature of church and state relations in 1834. Historiographical interpretations have varied, however, regarding the actual state of the established church and the nature of its secular and Dissenting critics. In the eyes of some, the repeal of the Test and Corporation Act in 1828 and the Roman Catholic Relief Act in 1829 had, in fact, left the Church of England "as good as disestablished." Seizing upon the democratizing reform spirit of the 1830s, some Dissenters had allied themselves with radical politicians and were seeking disestablishment and "the general adoption of the Voluntary System of religious endowments."¹ Anglican churchmen feared that the alliance of Dissent with liberal politicians gave added strength to the growing threat of secularism in British society. The zeal of evangelical revival had nourished a widespread interest in the idea of "true" religion. Much of the "true" religion rhetoric in periodicals involved either a comparison to the position of

¹G. F. A. Best, Temporal Pillars: Queen Anne's Bounty, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and the Church of England (Cambridge at the University Press, 1964), 270-71; E. R. Norman, Church and Society in England, 1770-1970: A Historical Study (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 93.

the established church or a defense of it. Which church was "true"--the one with legally established privilege or the ones chosen voluntarily by the people? Meanwhile, in 1834, the religious establishment was "first on every reformer's list," and the ascendant Whigs were delighted:

Toryism, with its narrowness and abuses, prostrate! . . . Whiggism no longer the watchword of a faction but expanded into the public creed! . . . The Church everywhere shaking in its gross temporal pillars, tho' rather strengthening in its true spiritual foundations!²

Such threats led to the rise of the High Church Oxford, or Tractarian, Movement and to the formation of an extremist party within the Anglican Low Church, or Evangelical, party.

In the winter of 1833-34, tensions between the established church and its Dissenting critics achieved unprecedented proportions.³ In his apologist account of the established church during this period, E. R. Norman observed that this was a "bleak interlude of extreme unpopularity for the Church of England." He maintained that the attacks of Dissenters (principally Baptists and Independents, or Congregationalists) wounded Anglican churchmen, who were disappointed that concessions made to Dissent had only seemed to make the Dissenters more adamant for equality. In Norman's view, many clergy had supported the repeal of the

²Best, 271.

³Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church, vol. 7, pt. 1 of An Ecclesiastical History of England, ed. J. C. Dickinson, 3rd ed. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1971), 61.

Test and Corporation Acts in a spirit of toleration which evidenced the "spiritual integrity of the Church." He stated the desire of churchmen to distinguish between Dissenters with primarily religious motives and those with political motives.⁴

The individualistic "Nonconformist conscience" was anti-aristocratic in politics and dedicated socially to teaching the poor self-improvement. They viewed the religious establishment as "a form of antiquated privilege." In religion, Nonconformists emphasized individual liberty in terms of personal conversion and self-governing congregations. Most Dissenters eschewed the call for disestablishment because they feared such radicalism would defeat their efforts to obtain relief from various vexatious forms of legal discrimination.⁵ But those who did call for a voluntary system had carefully reasoned arguments to oppose those of the establishment:

Thus while Anglicans reasoned that state support of the establishment was a divinely appointed responsibility incumbent upon the government of a Christian nation, radical Dissenters argued that the state had no right to favor one religious

⁴E. R. Norman, Church and Society in England, 1770-1970: A Historical Study (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 77-79, 89.

⁵Richard Helmstadter, "The Nonconformist Conscience," in The Conscience of the Victorian State, ed. Peter Marsh (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1979), 140-57 passim; Donald M. Lewis, Lighten Their Darkness: The Evangelical Mission to Working-Class London, 1828-1860 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 18.

group among Christians. In their view, state support of the Church was inevitably counterproductive because it identified the sacred with the secular.⁶

In fact, both Anglicans and Nonconformists, influenced by the evangelical ethic, were pursuing the vision of "true" religion. The Church of England itself was full of Evangelicals who defended the Establishment, but wished to purify and reform the church from within. Nonconformist evangelicals felt that disestablishment would best serve the evangelical cause and that voluntary religion would flourish without state interference. In fact, the Nonconformist group wondered how so many Evangelicals could remain within such a corrupt institution as they esteemed the established church to be.⁷ So great was the influence of evangelical revivalism on British society, that it has been the object of historiographical controversy. My study confirmed W. R. Ward's view that "evangelical voluntarism" acted as a radical force in opposing the special privileges of the Church of England. It was a paradox that, "while radical leaders viewed Methodism as a conservative force, the Anglican establishment often feared it as a radical, if not a downright dangerous movement." In general public opinion, allegiance to the Church of England was linked to patriotic

⁶Donald M. Lewis, Lighten Their Darkness: The Evangelical Mission to Working-Class London, 1828-1860 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 26.

⁷Lewis, 18, 25-26.

feeling. Accordingly, the general attitude of Anglican Evangelicals, who wished to demonstrate loyalty to the established church, had been to dissociate themselves from evangelical Dissent in the anxious years following the French Revolution. Interestingly, the one bright spot in the otherwise strained relations between Establishment and Dissent--and between Anglican Evangelical and evangelical dissent--was in their tenuous cooperation in philanthropic ministries to the urban poor.⁸

As mentioned above, in order to gain their demands for religious equality, Radical Dissenters had formed an uncomfortable, but politically expedient alliance with Whiggism. The Church of England adopted a "siege mentality" as they associated that alliance with an even greater enemy, Liberalism:

They shared [John Henry] Newman's diagnosis of its primary assertion: 'No religious tenet is important, unless reason shows it to be so.' Liberalism was any philosophy of life not built on divine revelation. Its adherents were called the 'Infidel, or indifferent party of our politicians . . . who separate the Policy of the state from the Supremacy of religion.' The grand crime of the

⁸Ibid., 1-4, 11-12; Chadwick, 3. Taking a similar position to that of Ward, Alan Gilbert emphasized the socially ameliorative function of evangelicalism for members of the working class. In Gilbert's view, Methodism stirred and facilitated the rising social aspirations of the working class. Eric Hobsbawm saw popular evangelicalism and popular radicalism as twin reactions to religious and political establishments. Ward and Gilbert differed from E. P. Thompson, who argued that popular evangelicalism, particularly Methodism, had a palliative and diluting effect on working class discontent.

Dissenters was entering a coalition with such men and worshipping 'their idol liberalism' It [liberalism] insinuated that 'the people, and not God, are the source of legitimate power.' The true foundation of political authority was, on the contrary, that kings hold power delegated by Christ. And political economy, fostered by Liberalism, denied the paternalist responsibility of Christian governments to care for the poor and oppressed.

The defenders of the church establishment discerned in Liberalism a dangerous individualism that would interfere with God's set purposes.⁹

Many sincerely feared that disestablishment of the Church of England would be a step toward "a secular, nonconfessional state." There is a temptation for the modern reader to assume hypocrisy on the part of defenders of the Church establishment, or indeed on the part of any of these ardent religionists. Loyal churchmen felt the pressure of charges of bigotry even at the time and complained of a "liberal press" which distorted their sincere opposition to the Whig government's policies regarding the Irish church establishment.¹⁰

Indeed, a newly powerful press played a significant role in the "church crisis" of 1834. Geoffrey Best observed that public opinion was the most significant of all factors in forcing church reform. He believed that many churchmen

⁹D. W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 98-99.

¹⁰Lewis, 17.

who wanted some reform realized that public discourse, though often painful, would prove helpful. On the other hand, Chadwick noted:

The press made religious strife more strident, aggressive, and continuous. It had the merit of making everyone more exercised about the debate, the demerit of breaking tables of Sinai in the dust.¹¹

In the same vein, E. R. Norman quoted the Bishop of Bristol's reaction to the Dissenters' attacks on the established church:

When sentence of condemnation is once passed upon supposed delinquents, it is never reversed; nor are the calumnies we are assailed with, however often and satisfactorily refuted, ever forgotten.

Regarding the charges made against the establishment, Norman accused the Dissenters of overstating their case for political gain. He likewise charged that Jeremy Bentham had "wildly exaggerated the wealth and abuses of the Church, regarding as typical evils which were very occasional, or which were sustained by Parliament rather than by the will of Church leaders." He passed the same judgment on The Extraordinary Black Book, produced in 1831 by John Wade, a Unitarian propagandist. Norman stated that the report of the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Duties and Revenues later called in question many of the radicals' criticisms,

¹¹Best, 5; Chadwick, 4.

but that the effect of slanderous assertions lingered.¹²

Best maintained that, while real reform did come to the Church of England in 1836 with the establishment of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, many ranking churchmen had desired it much earlier, and that much had, in fact, already been done by the 1820s. He acknowledged that the constitutional changes of 1832 hastened reform of the religious establishment, but he maintained that the Whigs were not effective in the "arduous and unspectacular practical business of church reform." They were more interested in the large issues of church and state and religious liberty. The High Church Quarterly Review, by edifying and cultivating public interest in the subject, actually served the cause of church reform better than the Whig Edinburgh.¹³

In balance, it appeared that both the critics of the established church and its defenders had a measure of truth and sincerity on their side. It was also clear in reading the periodicals that a crisis situation was fostering very emotional rhetoric. Political agendas were obviously involved. Most thoughtful observers agreed that the Church of England needed some reform, though they differed on the

¹²Norman, 89-90, 95. Soloway (168) agreed that the Ecclesiastical Revenues Commission revealed that critics of the religious establishment had exaggerated its egregious wealth.

¹³Best, 239-41.

extent of abuses. There clearly was a great amount of interest in "true" Christianity but a disparity in perception of its essence. It was discouraging that sincere efforts at church reform seemed to constitute a damaging admission of guilt and to bring even sharper criticism from such unfriendly sources as the Edinburgh Review, the Eclectic Review, the Monthly Repository, and the Westminster Review. Best observed that the readers of these magazines were "keen on things like education, economics, and parliamentary reform," but were not particularly well informed regarding the inner workings of the established church. In their adherence to such intellectual leaders as Jeremy Bentham, "a fierce and exceedingly shallow critic of organized religion," they tended to be unaware of practical obstacles which lay in the path of church reform.¹⁴

A frequently cited impediment to sincere reformers was the weak administrative structure of the Church of England. It had not been restructured as the continental establishments had been. It faced a bewildering array of new social problems, and it was handicapped by the trappings of "an elaborate, hierarchical, and largely rural institution, which required the sanction of Parliament for its own adjustment and reform."¹⁵ The Anglican Church had

¹⁴Ibid., 242.

¹⁵George Kitson Clark, The Making of Victorian England (London: Methuen & Co., 1962), 151; Norman, 5.

prided itself on its unique church/state constitution. Even when a reformed Parliament, more open to the influences of Dissent and secularism, seemed to be becoming undesirable as a legislature for the church, still the idea of separating from Parliament seemed frightening to many. Fearing a separate hierarchy such as that of the Roman Catholics, even conservatives preferred Parliamentary control of the church. Thus many churchmen perceived the Church of England to be hampered by its established status and legal limitations in a way that the various Dissenting groups were not.¹⁶

While the bulk of the clergy was conservative and fearful of the times, lay reformers had convinced the bishops of the necessity for compromise, and the episcopacy became increasingly involved in plans for reform. Publication on the subject of church reform peaked in 1833. As noted above, although they were frequently accused of disloyalty by High Churchmen, Evangelicals were actually among the strongest defenders of the established church. Because they wished to make the Establishment less vulnerable to attack, Anglican Evangelicals were leaders in advocating church reform. The Plan of Church Reform published in the summer of 1832 by Lord Henley, an active Evangelical and brother-in-law of Sir Robert Peel, was particularly influential. Interestingly enough, his ideas,

¹⁶Best, 254-55, 257-58, 271-73.

not Benthamite in origin, were to make the church more useful to the people, partly by providing better salaries for the poorer clergy.¹⁷

The Evangelicals were not the only Anglican party aware of the need for reform. The Hackney group of High Churchmen, characterized by Kitson Clark as "pre-Tractarians," had secured from Parliament the funds in 1818 for a huge church building program in populous areas. I found reason to support Kitson Clark's contention that the motives of those churchmen who desired reform went beyond mere "social control or political expediency" to a desire that the church should "serve the purposes for which it was intended." He further noted the involvement of those who were not from either Evangelical circles or the Oxford movement. "If it had not been so, the reform of the Church in the middle of the century would not have been so relatively thorough and so unexpectedly quick, and the Church would not have rallied so effectively from the attacks made upon it at the time of the Reform Bill."¹⁸

It was not church reform itself that many churchmen feared, but reform undertaken in the hostile environment of

¹⁷Best, 265, 278, 284-86; Ian S. Rennie, "Evangelism and English Public Life 1823-1850" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1963), 5; R. A. Soloway, Prelates and People: Ecclesiastical Social Thought in England, 1783-1852 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 2.

¹⁸Clark, 155-57.

a liberal Whig government. In the liberal view, the church was the creation of the state as a vehicle of social control; "persons who professed veneration for its religious character were hypocrites." Even within the church, there were many who were blending the sacred and the secular to a disquieting degree. Among the liberal churchmen who had visions for reform was Sydney Smith, the "more publicist than clergy," editor of the Whig Edinburgh Review. Smith took a very sincere interest in the church's role in ministering to the poor. Thomas Arnold was impressed with the vision of Coleridge for a "truly Christian state," in which there would be no distinction between the sacred and the secular. His Principles of Church Reform (1833) made little impression upon Evangelicals, who viewed religion as a matter of the heart and generally claimed to eschew politics, and upon the High Church, which, "on the eve of its great revival," had other ideas for church reform. My study supported Norman's defense of the sincere motives of many of the clergy in fearing the power of political liberalism: "Theirs was not a wilfully ignorant adherence to a comfortable old order from which they derived social privilege. It was a fear for the very survival of exclusive Christian truth."¹⁹

¹⁹Best, 256-57; John R. H. Moorman, A History of the Church in England (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1963) 331-32; Norman, 95.

The pressures of a liberal decade provoked acute reaction in both the High Church and Low Church parties, as the Tractarians, and extreme Evangelicals each pursued their version of "true" Christianity. The former group issued a call for revival that would lift the beleaguered Church of England completely out of its vulnerable position of subordination to an increasingly secular Parliament. The first of the Tracts for the Times appeared in September, 1833. It confronted Utilitarian ideas of religion:

Men, it said, 'have been deluded into a notion that present palpable usefulness, produceable results, acceptableness to your flocks, that these and such like are the tests of your Divine commission. Enlighten them in this matter.'²⁰

With a passion for "true" Christianity, John Henry Newman emphasized a holy life. As John Moorman observed:

He appeals to every individual; he stresses all the time the need for a true religion. People must take themselves seriously, they must face religion for what it really is. . . . Newman's sermons touch the very heart of the Christian religion. What is a Christian? he asks over and over again. Christianity is not just goodness, honesty, justice. All these things can be shown by Jews, infidels and heretics. To be a Christian is to love and worship Christ with everything that we have. It is to make Christ the very centre of our lives.

Newman, who had been an Evangelical early in his life, was Bible-centered in his teaching and enjoined works of charity, but he differed from the popular Evangelical view of the church. Evangelicalism, which had permeated many

²⁰Moorman, 341.

denominations, had emphasized heartfelt, personal conversion more than specific doctrine regarding the nature of the church. Newman and others of the Oxford Movement adopted the Roman concept of "the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ . . . even as the extension and prolongation of the incarnation." In the Tractarian view, because of the doctrine of apostolic succession, clergy should be respected for the office they held, if not for their own persons. Salvation was only sure in the apostolic Church. (As to that apostolic commission, "the dissenting teachers have it not.") Most significantly, with regard to the crisis of 1834, the Tractarian view of the "true" church obliterated the idea of the church as part of the state.²¹

In one sense, the Oxford Movement was part of a conservative reaction to the liberal tide that had been unleashed by the French Revolution and was continuing its menace in the Whig reform atmosphere of the 1830s. The church represented an unchanging refuge from the winds of secular change. In another sense, though many in the Church of England feared its Roman Catholic tendencies, its powerful emphasis on the spirituality of the "true" church had a reinvigorating effect on the Establishment and

²¹John R. H. Moorman, The Anglican Spiritual Tradition. (Springfield, Ill.: Templegate Publishers, 1983), 155-59.

facilitated reform.²² With regard to the pressing social challenges of the period, the Tractarians once again pursued a different course from that which the Evangelicals had set. As leaders of the fastest growing party within the established church, the politically influential Evangelical Clapham Sect, had sponsored reform legislation and a host of philanthropic societies, in addition to developing the Sunday school movement and pouring out pamphlet literature. The Tractarians, on the other hand, were notable for simply sending their priests into the slums to bring comfort and the "true" church to the masses.²³

Just as the threatening liberal trends of the 1830s had prompted the rise of Tractarianism in the High Church, similar anxieties promoted the rise of an extremist party among Evangelicals. Recent studies of British evangelicalism have argued for the novel influence of Romanticism around 1830 in dividing "moderate" and "extreme" Evangelicals.²⁴ In this view, despite evangelicalism's appeal to heartfelt personal conviction, the moderate

²²Moorman, Anglican, 153-54; Moorman, History, 343, 347.

²³Rennie, 4-5.

²⁴Hilton, 3-35, 73-113; Bebbington, 75-104; Lewis, 1-5, 9-27, 49-51, 151-54. Earlier scholars had presented Romanticism as typical of evangelicalism. Hilton (10) argued that the emotional enthusiasms of evangelical Methodism emphasized by E. P. Thompson were the opposing face to the respectable "moderate individualists of Clapham."

version of Anglican Evangelicalism which was dominant before 1830, descending from the Clapham Sect, had existed comfortably within eighteenth century rationalism:

Reason, not emotion, had been the lodestar of the Evangelicals; . . . they used normal contemporary methods, whether in business, politics or religion, to accomplish their aims.²⁵

As noted above, the moderates had wielded considerable political influence under the leadership of William Wilberforce and Charles Simeon and, in a new generation, continued to be optimistic in changing times. However, the studies cited described the emergence and ascendancy in the 1830s of an extremist group who reacted to the looming changes represented by industrialization and political liberalism. This group was concerned about the effect of such events as the repeal of the Test and Corporation Act in 1828, the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, and the Reform Bill of 1832 upon the changing face of religion in Britain. They accused the moderate Evangelicals of having achieved influence by accommodating secular elements in the state and in the Establishment; second-generation Evangelicals could afford to be more bold in the indulgence of religious feeling. Under the popular leadership of Edward Irving, the extremist group adopted a "Calvinistic" label, which basically referred to "depth of conviction," and a fascination with "the ideal of a primitive apostolic

²⁵Hilton, 8; Bebbington, 81.

Christianity." There was strong emphasis among the extremists on the supernatural and premillennialism, and there were instances of Pentecostal tongue speaking. Irving and his associate, banker Henry Drummond, eventually led their followers into an offshoot Catholic Apostolic Church, but many of their ideas remained influential in Evangelicalism, being effectively propounded by the most widely read Evangelical periodical, The Record.²⁶

Among the characteristics of this Romantic "revolt against the conventions of the Evangelical world," was "a stronger sense of churchmanship" and emphasis on the confessional nature of the British constitution and the idea of a "covenanted nation." The writings of S. T. Coleridge in Church and State (1830) had strongly influenced Irving with "the complementarity of church and nation." Where evangelicalism had been accused of emphasis on individual conversion at the expense of the doctrine of the church, the extreme Evangelicals anticipated, and indeed had preceded, the Tractarians. Accordingly, they also placed a greater significance on the sacraments.²⁷ The editor of The Record, Alexander Haldane, and the Scottish Evangelical Recordites, were leaders in this extreme Evangelical party. The extremists became dominant in Evangelical circles after 1831

²⁶Bebbington, 75-79, 103-04; Hilton, 10.

²⁷Bebbington, 80-81, 94-97.

partly because there was "a vacuum in Evangelical leadership" since many of "the sons of the Clapham Sect," had left Evangelicalism for humanitarian liberalism.²⁸

Under Recordite influence, Anglican Evangelicalism became less interested in philanthropy and put increased emphasis on issues of public morality and the defense of the religious establishment. They questioned the effectiveness of the typical evangelical strategies for bringing the gospel to the poor. The work of a multitude of societies had not significantly improved church attendance. In fact, the challenge of meeting the new needs of the increasing poor population had helped produce the extremist schism. The followers of Edward Irving tended to reject human strategies and to "rely on God alone."²⁹

There was much interest in "true" Christianity in 1834 as the established Church of England battled its Dissenting and secular critics. Many Churchmen had long recognized the need for church reform and had begun difficult practical steps in that direction. The publication of many suggested plans for reform, in fact, verified the general interest in "true" religion. At the end of the year, the Whig

²⁸Rennie, 2-6. Lewis (16) noted that Alexander Haldane disclaimed the title of 'editor' of the Record, but that speaking through its pages "for half a century" he "'might well be considered the most important single influence on the Evangelical party in the Victorian age.'"

²⁹Ibid.; Bebbington, 76-77.

government had been turned out without having achieved the church reform measures they had proposed. Many viewed the Tory victories in the election of December 1834 as a confirmation of the strength of religious sentiment among Britons and felt much more optimistic regarding the accomplishment of salutary reform under the Conservative leadership of Robert Peel.³⁰ While frequently acrimonious controversy that ill suited both Anglican and Dissenting Christians had characterized the Voluntary crisis of 1834, it is noteworthy that their one area of cooperation was in developing ministries to the urban poor. Meanwhile, Romantic conservatism influenced Tractarians and Evangelical extremists to react to the French Revolution by enshrining the established church as a refuge from the disturbing influences of liberalism and modernization:

There grew up a desire for no change. The Church was all that people needed. It must never be touched.³¹

Thus those groups were inclined to focus more on religious doctrine and less on energetic philanthropy than the moderate Evangelicals had been. Such varying images of "true" Christianity affected British society's approach to social problems.

³⁰Chadwick, 95, 100; Best, 273.

³¹Moorman, Anglican, 153-54.

CHAPTER III

THE CHURCH AND THE NEW POOR LAW

Political discourse surrounding the passage of the New Poor Law is very revealing of the perceived relationship between religion and poor relief in the nineteenth century. Bishops of the Church of England sat on the government commission that reformed the poor laws in 1834. In so doing, they identified the Establishment with a measure that did little to enhance its popularity with the British people. While many in the upper and middle classes viewed the amendment of the poor laws as economically essential and morally healthful, increasingly, in the years that followed its passage, the New Poor Law was popularly viewed as "harsh and brutal."¹ Current principles of political economy were a dominant influence in the shaping of the New Poor Law. Though these principles are most often identified with Utilitarian philosophy, they also proved attractive to many evangelicals. The leading Evangelical expounder of political philosophy was Thomas Chalmers. His moderate Evangelical beliefs accommodated the political economy concepts of "self-help and free contractualization." Boyd

¹Boyd Hilton, The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1785-1865 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 242.

Hilton has argued for the pervasive societal influence of the evangelical doctrine of the Atonement on such challenging socioeconomic issues. In his view, while political economy sought to bring prosperity from the reform of poor relief; evangelicals sought "moral shaping" from such measures. Hilton has also explored the relationship of the schism between moderate and extremist Evangelicals to the New Poor Law. Their different beliefs regarding the working of Providence dictated their attitudes toward such pertinent issues as laissez-faire and paternalism.²

Many voices had been raised against the maladministration of the Old Poor Law, particularly since the widespread implementation of the notorious Speenhamland system. That system, in a stopgap attempt to prop up wages during the economic slump following the Napoleonic wars, had created a virtual dole for able-bodied workers. Many employers had seen in this situation an opportunity to keep wages low. The New Poor Law proposed to fix this by prohibiting "outdoor relief" to those who could work. Workhouses, with strict regimentation and separate quarters for men, women, and children, were to provide the only

²Hilton, 1-17, 237-44. For further discussion, see Peter Mandler, "Tories and Paupers: Christian Political Economy and the Making of the New Poor Law," The Historical Journal 33, I (1990): 81-103 and Anthony Brundage, David Eastwood, and Peter Mandler, "Debate: The Making of the New Poor Law Redivivus," Past and Present 127 (May 1990): 183-201.

relief, and the purpose was to make the workhouses undesirable for all those but the most desperate. This was the unpopular principle of "less eligibility," which seemed to define poverty as a crime and make bastilles of the workhouses. Defenders of the New Poor Law said that they wished to force workers back on the job and to protect the integrity of independent workers from a system which had been making it more profitable to receive a poor law allowance than to work. Another controversial aspect of the New Poor Law was the revoking of the traditional system of "outdoor" parochial support for bastard children and their mothers; support would be available only in the workhouse. Responding particularly to the theories of Thomas Malthus, the shapers of the New Poor Law, wished to halt the increase of illegitimate population. General unrest and incendiarism was so great in the countryside that it was clear that the inefficient and corrupt administration of the Old Poor Law was not working even though it was consuming one-fifth of the national budget.³

In Parliament, the New Poor Law provoked nowhere near the controversy and political debate which surrounded measures attached to the "church crisis," such as the

³Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church, vol. 7, pt. 1 of An Ecclesiastical History of England, ed. J. C. Dickinson, 3rd ed. (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1971), 95; R. A. Soloway, Prelates and People: Ecclesiastical Social Thought in England, 1783-1852 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul), 160.

appropriation of Irish church funds and the admission of Dissenters to universities. The reason for the rapid general acceptance of the recommendations of the Poor Law Commission by Parliament and its passage into law was the need for financial relief from a crushing burden imposed by the poor rates. The overruling political motives were to save the treasury and to avoid acts of violence by the poor. Owen Chadwick observed that "the measure was not the panacea which its proponents supposed, but was medicinal. Wages were raised by necessity."⁴

Historians of the established Church of England depicted division within its ranks, as in society as a whole, over such social issues as the New Poor Law. The religious establishment had suffered widespread unpopularity among the poor, especially since the Peterloo incident, in which bishops had acted unsympathetically toward the people. The Church had even felt it necessary to call for the protection of blasphemous libel laws. The chairman of the government commission to reform the poor laws was Bishop Blomfield of London. He was joined by Bishops Richard Whately and J. B. Sumner, a leading Evangelical. These bishops with government ties were adherents of laissez-faire political economy. Blomfield and Sumner wanted to do away with poor law relief altogether believing that it "promoted

⁴Chadwick, 95-96.

immorality by encouraging idleness, and increased bastardy by child allowance." Moreover, they feared that government aid to the poor "restrained the compassion of the rich." The principal architect of the New Poor Law, Utilitarian Edwin Chadwick, however, persuaded them that social unrest in the troubled times since the French Revolution made abolition of the poor laws unwise. Chadwick placed less emphasis on Malthusian theory and concentrated on reforming the administration of the poor laws along Benthamite lines.⁵ The attitudes of the rank and file clergy, who tended to be more conservative than the bishops, varied regarding the New Poor Law. Many of them were suspicious of the centralizing effect of administrative reform; some perceived a threat to their own influence in local parish affairs. Some who opposed any form of poor relief indulged in romantic visions of bygone days when the church took care of all the needs of the poor.⁶

It was ironic that, while the involvement of Anglican bishops with the New Poor Law hurt the church's popular image, the Church had been spending large sums of money to attract the poor to church. The Establishment had sent its

⁵E. R. Norman, Church and Society in England, 1770-1970: A Historical Study (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 61-62, 65; Donald M. Lewis, Lighten Their Darkness: The Evangelical Mission to Working-Class London, 1828-1860 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 152-54; Chadwick, 96; Soloway, 161-62.

⁶Norman, 62; Chadwick, 96.

clergy into the slums and had raised money to build churches in newly overpopulated urban areas in order to accommodate the masses. The problem was that while the clergy maintained that it was the role of the Church of England to protect the poor, they failed to identify with their suffering realistically. Church prelates acted benevolently, but not truly compassionately. At one extreme were those who, in a naturalist framework, viewed poverty as an unfortunate, but unavoidable, situation. At the other extreme, Utilitarians and evangelicals embracing political economy, were more harsh on the poor, viewing poverty as moral failure; they wanted to fix the problem. Thus the bishops on the New Poor Law Commission proposed the "harsh abrasive of unsentimental political economy" to clean up the poor and conform them more closely to middle-class values. Bishop Blomfield saw in the New Poor Law a way to protect the church tithes from jeopardy due to the increasing burden of poor rates, but in his view the protection of church property, which was dedicated to the church's spiritual ministry to the poor, was a legitimate end.⁷ Local clergymen gave mixed reports of the effectiveness of the New Poor Laws in "improving" their parishioners. Some reported little discernible effect on the morality of their

⁷Norman, 54-55; Soloway, 75, 163-65, 168-69.

parishioners. Others reported that the threat of the workhouse caused laborers to drink less and work harder.⁸

Boyd Hilton has argued that the principles of the New Poor Law were a blend of optimistic Utilitarian pragmatism and the retributive evangelical theory of the Atonement. He noted the evangelical leaning of Lord Althorp, Chancellor of the Exchequer, who proposed the New Poor Law bill in Parliament, and he cited studies by Peter Dunkley, Peter Mandler, and Richard Brent which have supported evangelical influence on "Young Whigs" such as Althorp. Hilton conceded that such evangelically tinged Whig Liberals were more influenced by Utilitarianism than by evangelical influences in crafting the New Poor Law. They were more likely to envision greater prosperity as the outcome of such measures as the New Poor Law than improved morality of the poor. In like manner, Poor Law Commissioners, Bishop Whately and Nassau Senior, were acting on a Utilitarian premise when they believed that a dole for the poor would be counterproductive in merely supplying the means for them to "procreate themselves back into all their old misery." But the Evangelical political economist, Thomas Chalmers, in keeping with evangelical Atonement philosophy, believed that a dole would be "spiritually vicious" because it would "let men off God's carefully contrived ecological hook, and undo

⁸Chadwick, 96.

by misplaced sentiment and humanity the 'moral ordination' which was built in to the natural world." Hilton acknowledged the Utilitarian political basis of the New Poor Law, but he maintained that an understanding of the theological and philosophical rift in evangelicalism, because it was the most pervasive religious ethic, is helpful in understanding the public discourse surrounding its passage.⁹

The views of Thomas Chalmers regarding the New Poor Law are illustrative of the ambivalence many in the evangelical community felt toward the measure. Since Chalmers's writings had popularized the ideas of political economy among evangelicals and because the New Poor Law reflected many of his views, the proponents of the amendment were surprised when Chalmers disapproved of it. He had been on record in opposing the maladministration of the Old Poor Law.¹⁰ Chalmers supported the New Poor Law's denial of an allowance to able-bodied workers; he insisted that "no encouragement should be given to waste, vice, and improvidence." However, he deplored the fact that the New Poor Law "deterred not only the undeserving poor, which was excellent, but also the deserving poor, while its workhouses

⁹Hilton, 83-84, 237-44.

¹⁰Ibid., 242; Derek Fraser, The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976), 16.

would undermine the family, the parish, and other units of private and communitarian philanthropy.¹¹ Chalmers felt that workhouses were "dehumanizing" and removed the poor from the responsibilities of community life. Moreover, he feared that the bureaucracy of the New Poor Law would interfere with "the Church's role in social services and further the secularization of society." Accordingly, Chalmers actively opposed the extension of the ideas of the English New Poor Law into Scotland.¹²

It should be noted that Chalmers was widely respected for his Christian ministries to the poor in Scotland. He had put into practice his belief that voluntary Christian charity was better than poor laws administered by the government in his own Glasgow parish, the largest and poorest in the city. In Chalmers's program, domestic missionaries engaged in "house-to-house visitation and religious exhortation." Chalmers believed that "such Christian evangelism was the only sure way to effect a moral regeneration of society." He wanted to instill in his poor parishioners "sagacity, foresight, and self-esteem."

¹¹Lewis, 152; Thomas Chalmers, The Sufficiency of a Parochial System, Without a Poor Rate, for the Right Management of the Poor (1841) in Works, xxi. 139, 152-3, cited in Hilton, 242-43.

¹²Stewart J. Brown, Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 205.

Chalmers believed in Malthusianism and political economy, but he wanted to place them in the context of evangelical theology. He endorsed a moral, or Christian, political economy, but he opposed the harsh, Benthamite "less eligibility" features of the New Poor Law.¹³

As early as 1828, however, the Evangelical Record, had agreed with the individualism of Chalmers's political economy in stating:

'A man's position, in whatever class of society he may be placed, depends chiefly upon himself, under the over-ruling providence of God' The overarching purposes of God did not include a civil government to provide for the necessitous.¹⁴

Moderate evangelicalism was grounded in an eighteenth century rational framework which depicted God as "a fond and affectionate parent," but Thomas Chalmers followed the earlier lead of William Wilberforce in expanding that portrayal to include God's "moral nature, based on his righteousness as well as his benevolence." Chalmers feared that liberals, Utilitarians and Socinians, would reduce "all moralities into benevolence alone . . . thus setting aside the doctrine of the Atonement."¹⁵

¹³Hilton, 81-82; Gertrude Himmelfarb, The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 174. Fraser (16) stated that Chalmers's "achievements in parochial poor relief may not have been quite as impressive as he claimed."

¹⁴Lewis, 152.

¹⁵Hilton, 83-84.

It was upon the attitude toward Providence that the schism in Evangelicalism manifested itself with regard to such social measures as the New Poor Law. The Record, representing the extreme Evangelical faction, opposed the New Poor Law as impious interference with Providence. The Christian Observer, representing the moderates, gave its approval to the measure. The extremist group perceived the social, economic, and political dislocations of the 1830s as providential visitations indicating that the millennium was eminent. They were to be received with resignation as "'special'. . . judgments on men and nations, inflicted for unspecifiable spiritual offences, and requiring miraculous suspensions of natural law." According to their belief, "Providence always acted miraculously, and it was presumptuous to expect to comprehend its dispensations" or to amend behavior "to avoid its blows in the future." In contrast to this view, the moderates tended to be more optimistic, believing that Providence generally acted "in the way of natural consequence." Thus, they believed in a "predictable in-built system of rewards and punishments appropriate to good and bad behaviour":

Almost always in the case of individuals, and sometimes in the case of communities, suffering was the logical consequence of specifically bad behaviour. It could therefore incite as well as guide men to virtuous conduct in the future, but they must of course take the opportunity to examine their own actions in the light of their sufferings.

In such a light, Chalmers, a moderate Evangelical, regarded "the Malthusian trap" as a blessing to his generation. The calamities of the time were forcing Evangelicals to evangelize the nation.¹⁶ Each group's social and political philosophy mirrored to a great extent its concept of God and his dealings with men.

To the moderates, with their grounding in eighteenth century rationalism, since God ran the material world on a laissez-faire basis, neither should man's government interfere. According to their reasoning, laissez-faire socioeconomic policies, of which the New Poor Law was an example, would make people better morally. The extremists, including Shaftesbury, Drummond, and Sadler, who backed factory reforms and defended the old poor law system as "humane," believed governments should intervene paternally just as they perceived the miraculous interpositions of Providence.¹⁷ While modern readers may view the laissez-faire policies of the moderate Evangelicals as "callous," they were actually acting more paternalistically in the nineteenth century understanding of the term. To them, "improvement" was seen "in moral rather than material terms." "Indeed, they supported laissez-faire economic and social policies precisely because these would best nurture

¹⁶Ibid., 14.

¹⁷Ibid., 14-15.

individual morality." The extreme Evangelicals, who are often linked with "Tory paternalists," were pessimistic about the possibilities for man's improvement in this world. They were more willing to accept the poor as they were, and defended the right of the poor to relief under the poor laws. The pre-millennialists regarded the moderates, with their political economy, as the paternalists and "despised them for it."

Bible Societies and the like were devices of impotent but presumptuous men, attempting to do the Almighty's work for him, and to no avail, since God would "not let the desire of promoting salvation -- much less the desire of promoting civilization and the amelioration of moral and political society -- be joined with his glory."¹⁸

Many criticized Chalmers's support of political economy. Representative of the extreme Evangelicals' view was Richard Oastler's statement: "The Bible is put out, and Miss Martineau is come in." In answer to critics who said that his Christian moral economy was not consistent with the New Testament, Chalmers defended "true" Christianity such as Jesus practiced, ministering more frequently to disease than to "mere indigence."

The poor wanted "bread before bibles," but Chalmers believed that bread was impossible without bibles, and if he had seen any conflict between the two, there is no doubt where his priority would have lain: "I should count the

¹⁸Ibid., 17. Hilton stated that the extremists were less interested in saving souls than in bearing witness to the coming millennium.

salvation of a single soul of more value than the deliverance of a whole empire from pauperism."¹⁹

Thus it was important to administer charity wisely, "discriminating between deserving and undeserving recipients--which Poor Law bureaucracies might not do properly," lest one do more harm than good by interfering with the wholesome chastening offices of poverty. But the same society which was so chary of official poor relief was lavish in its support of private charities.²⁰

Christian churches were concerned about the condition of the poor in 1834. Churchmen were involved in the New Poor Law's attempt to quell the unrest of the poor without bankrupting the country. The individualistic political economy principles of the New Poor Law were acceptable to the moderate evangelical tradition, but the newly powerful extreme evangelical party was less optimistic about the moral improvement of the poor. What was the effect of all this religious controversy on the working classes? Commenting on the popular reaction, G. M. Young stated that the poor reacted to "the economists and the reformers," and the Evangelicals as well; "even goodwill was suspected if it came arrayed in religious guise." "To be numbered, to be visited, to be inspected, to be preached at, whether the visitors were furnished with a Poor Law Order or a religious

¹⁹Ibid., 84-88, 97.

²⁰Ibid., 99-101.

mission, whether they came to feed the children or to save their souls" was distasteful to them.²¹ Chadwick stated that unbelief "was not the problem among the poor, but apathy and indifference and hostility":

The literature of the working man was violently anticlerical, antichurch, antimethodist, antichapel. It rollicked in the abuse of the establishment. But it was not usually heathen. Pamphlets and newspapers used simple texts of scripture to beat church of merchant and chapel of shopkeeper.

He further noted that "most working men would have been horrified to be told that they were not Christians" and described the Chartist leader Lovett's reaction to the question of his religion. Lovett replied that "he was 'of that religion which Christ taught, and which very few in authority practise,' if he might judge by their conduct."²² During the period in question, there was greater concern on the part of the clergy generally regarding their effectiveness in ministering to the common people. Evangelical revivalism, the Roman Catholic Act, and the repeal of the Test and Corporation Act had introduced an element of competition which challenged the exclusiveness of the Anglican establishment. Each religious group tried "to be better organised, more liberal, more popular, and open-minded. A placard of All welcome outside church or chapel

²¹G. M. Young, Portrait of an Age: Victorian England (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 64.

²²Chadwick, 333-34.

is an offspring of that age." Indeed, by the end of the 1830s, Christian churches thought in terms of domestic, as well as foreign, missions.²³

²³Soloway, 4; Chadwick, 4-5.

CHAPTER IV

THE WORKINGMEN'S PRESS AND THE CHURCHES

My survey of periodicals directed to the working class revealed exasperation with organized Christianity, but it also found an abiding and unique working class interest in "true" Christianity. With conditions as they were in Britain in 1834, I expected the most adversarial voice regarding the Christian church to arise from the working class. The churches were primarily the domain of the middle class. Ill-clad workers were noticeably absent from churches, especially in the industrial towns, where they swelled the population. The country parish ties which had drawn them to the village churches had severed.¹ The lax and neglectful eighteenth century church bore the fruit of popular disaffection and irrelevance.² Despite the charitable exertions of fervent evangelicals who had

¹K. S. Inglis, Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963), 3-4.

²J. C. D. Clark, in English Society, 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice During the Ancien Regime (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 7, disagreed with this concept of the Establishment in decline; he portrayed a strong confessional state up until the 1830s. Joanna Innes, in "Review Article: Jonathan Clark, Social History and England's 'Ancien Regime,'" Past and Present, 115 (May 1987): 165-200 passim, has joined others in sharp reaction to Clark's revisionist approach.

quicken the pulse of the church, both Established and Nonconformist, the free workingmen's press spoke out against the church as a major contributor to the problems of the working class, and not as its tender shepherd.³ But even in Radical reproach, a certain ambivalence of feeling toward the Christian church existed.

The very existence of a free workingmen's press was a vital issue in 1834; the year marked a signal victory in the battle of the Unstamped Press. The standard-bearer in that battle was publisher Henry Hetherington, of the Poor Man's Guardian. It was primarily to the pages of the Poor Man's Guardian, as one of the most widely circulated true working class papers that I turned in this study to look for its perception of the role of the church in society.⁴

Additional insight came from the radical humor of Figaro in London, and William Cobbett's Political Register brought his very personal, unorthodox radicalism to the subject. The government-backed Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge supported publisher Charles Knight's Penny

³J. L. and Barbara Hammond, The Age of the Chartists, 1832-1854: A Study of Discontent (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1930), 218. The Hammonds cited the harsh conduct of the typical parson magistrate as overcoming the influence of "individual parsons of wide sympathies and humane feeling."

⁴Gertrude Himmelfarb, The Idea of Poverty (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 232. Himmelfarb cites the Poor Man's Guardian as "the most successful and influential of the radical unstamped papers."

Magazine as an antidote to the political poison of the Unstamped. The workingmen's actual feelings could be interpolated from its pages of government prescribed pabulum.

The political excitement of the 1830s for reform had given birth to the Unstamped Press. Patricia Hollis noted of the beginning in October 1830 of Hetherington's Penny Papers (which became the Poor Man's Guardian in July 1831) that it followed only three months after the July Revolution in France had revived English popular radicalism.⁵ Working class radicals who had lent their support to the Reform Bill of 1832 were not pleased with its results. The Poor Man's Guardian noted the addition of middle-class masters to the aristocratic ones the working classes already had: "the new representation gave us new masters not new principles."⁶

In fact, radical leaders, Hetherington among them, foreseeing the betrayal that the Reform Bill constituted, had formed the National Union of Working Classes in April 1831 as a modified Owenite approach to restructuring society. Principal planks in the platform of these working class radicals were universal suffrage and the end of an Established church. Their movement cultivated class-

⁵Patricia Hollis, The Pauper Press: A Study in Working-class Radicalism of the 1830s (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), vii.

⁶Poor Man's Guardian 3 (15 February 1834): 9.

consciousness, and they sought a society that allowed complete freedom of religious belief. In addition to the feelings aroused by political reform and extension of the franchise and by the discussion of church disestablishment or reform, a third emotionally charged issue dominated the public discourse in 1834, the imminent passage of the New Poor Law. The working class voice would naturally express the greatest disappointment with the church's traditional role relative to the relief of the poor.

E. P. Thompson particularized the concept of "class" as more a relationship than an entity of itself. He suggested that the perception of "an identity of interests" emerged out of a complex blend of attritional factors involving working people and "their rulers and employers." He placed the realization of this consciousness between 1780 and 1832 and stated that "the working-class presence was, in 1832, the most significant factor in British political life." Dorothy Thompson described the radicalism of the free workingmen's press as "the most significant and influential" of the early phases of Chartism; she viewed it as the practical schoolroom for later activism.⁷ The tone of the Unstamped Press was strident. R. K. Webb noted that the

⁷E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Random House, Pantheon Books, 1963), 11-12; Dorothy Thompson, The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 37, 40.

ruling classes were aware of and quite concerned about "a class war," with the term "working class" describing "a broad grouping of types, levels, and occupations . . . even accepting some middle class cultural attributes."⁸

Asserting "the certainty of the existence of a working class reading public," he suggested an over-all literacy of three-quarters, noting that the degree of literacy varied widely.⁹ Significantly, the "favorite criterion" of literacy was "the ability to read and explain a passage from the Bible."¹⁰

The fourpenny stamp had deliberately kept newspapers high-priced and out of the reach of common people since 1815.

Hetherington's paper, begun in 1830, was one of the pioneers of the Unstamped; by 1833 its circulation reached 16,000 copies per week, second to Richard Carlile's The Gauntlet.¹¹ Before the government relented and reduced the stamp tax to a penny in 1836, a host of other unstamped penny papers had addressed the workingman. Some were literary or theatrical, but most were politically oriented. Hetherington received

⁸R. K. Webb, The British Working Class Reader, 1790-1848: Literacy and Social Tension (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1971), 3.

⁹Ibid., 23. Also see E. P. Thompson, 712-717. He vividly described the wide range of effective literacy.

¹⁰Webb, 13.

¹¹Donald Read, Press and People, 1790-1850: Opinion in Three English Cities (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), 97. Himmelfarb (232) observed that the custom of reading papers aloud greatly increased working class readership, raising the circulation of the Poor Man's Guardian to around 50,000.

much of the credit for the survival of the free press; he personally served two six-month jail terms and a one-year prison sentence for providing a paper in sustained defiance of the legal tax. During the period 1830-36, the government had instituted over 700 prosecutions in a losing effort to stop the flow of radical political thought. As the stamped papers had predicted, when the repressive tax was removed, the unstamped papers became competitively unprofitable and dried up. ¹²

William Cobbett's Political Register began as a shilling-halfpenny weekly newspaper in 1802; starting in 1816 two-penny reprints of lead articles were directed specifically toward workingmen. Originally a reactionary conservative, particularly dedicated to the interests of the agricultural worker, Cobbett found that his opposition to government policies led him to a popular radicalism which blended with the interests of the working class agitators of the 1830s. E. P. Thompson referred to Cobbett's dramatic persuasive powers to impress his "audience" with democratic ideals and move them to radicalism.¹³ Having successfully

¹²Read, 97.

¹³E. P. Thompson, 746, 749; Himmelfarb (223 and 228-229) noted the sustained, broadbased appeal of Cobbett. In the 1830s, "even at the price of sixpence, circulation far surpassed that of The Times or even the most popular of the cheaper, unstamped papers." He appealed to both radical and conservative camps and to "several classes in the name of 'the people.'"

defended himself in a celebrated seditious libel case in 1831, Cobbett himself was a well recognized martyr of radical thought. In 1834 he was serving rather unsuccessfully as a member of Parliament. Elie Halévy noted that as a Radical in Parliament Cobbett had joined the call for disestablishment in 1833, but that his own views reflected the public's conservative trend in instead calling for reform. Halévy said that he "had begun to return by imperceptible degrees to his original Toryism" shortly before his death in 1835.¹⁴ The Poor Man's Guardian of 1834 made several references to Cobbett's opinions and carried advertising on March 29, 1834 which described Cobbett's Magazine as espousing the interests of the laboring classes, agricultural, mechanical, and trades' unions alike.¹⁵

Figaro in London, a political humorous paper, born in December 1831 during the crisis of the Reform Act legislation, escaped the persecution directed at the more straightforward political heresy of the Poor Man's Guardian

¹⁴Elie Halévy, A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, vol. 3, The Triumph of Reform: 1830-1841 (London: Ernest Benn, 1927; second impression of first paperback edition, 1961), 165-66.

¹⁵Himmelfarb (251) noted the shared viewpoints of the Register and the Guardian regarding universal suffrage and the general rhetoric of "the old Corruption," but observed their temporary falling out in 1833 over the issue of property. Cobbett regarded "property as such, whether of land or capital and whether acquired by one's own labor or not" as legitimate and "part of the divine order." The Guardian aimed for a restructuring of the capitalist system.

and Cobbett's Register because its political views were couched in humor. In attempting to identify the voices of the workingmen's press, I found mobility in the pool of radical journalists. Thomas Mayhew, one of the editors of the Poor Man's Guardian until December 1831, probably later served as editor of Figaro. Hetherington, who was known popularly as the "Guardian," took public credit or blame for his paper, but the editor in 1834 was probably James Bronterre O'Brien, later a prominent Chartist leader.¹⁶ The government's actions in hounding the editors of the unstamped political papers were particularly notorious in journalism history because they applied the stamp law selectively to those newspapers that focused on political radicalism while ignoring many others, most notably the "useful knowledge" papers.¹⁷

Prominent among the "useful knowledge" papers was Knight's Penny Magazine, begun in March 1832. Under the leadership of Henry Brougham, powerful Whig radicals who wished the support of the workingmen for their own middle-class reform agenda, professed to be concerned with providing reading matter for those who could not afford stamped papers. Thus the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK) eschewed politics and presented what

¹⁶Hollis, 124-5.

¹⁷Ibid., xii.

Michael Feldberg termed a "so-called 'workingmen's' journal," which was actually middle class propaganda. Feldberg observed that the writing style of these papers displayed "the editors' lack of intimacy with the conditions of working-class life."¹⁸ In its opening number, the Penny Magazine stated its purpose:

For these we shall endeavour to prepare an useful and entertaining Weekly Magazine . . . that may tend to fix the mind upon calmer, and, it may be, purer subjects of thought than the violence of party discussion, or the stimulating details of crime and suffering.¹⁹

The August 25 issue contained a grammar lesson, and an entry entitled "Cleanliness" in the November 8 number suggested that "the purifying and most salutary practice of bathing" should become a habit among the working classes.²⁰ The Penny Magazine was notably silent on controversial matters, such as religion. Its attractively illustrated pages contained pleasant travelogues and descriptions of flora and fauna; it seemed they would have imparted dignity and tranquility to the reader. Knight's Penny Magazine circulated freely without a stamp, thereby revealing the

¹⁸Michael Feldberg, "Knight's Penny Magazine and Chambers's Edinburgh Journal: A Problem in Writing Cultural History," Victorian Periodical Newsletter 3 (November 1968): 13-14.

¹⁹"Reading for All," Penny Magazine 1 (31 March 1832): 1.

²⁰"Meanings of Words," Penny Magazine 1 (25 August 1832): 202-203; "Cleanliness," Penny Magazine 3 (8 November 1834): 438.

stamp's politically restrictive purpose. Not surprisingly, the Penny Magazine did not sell well to the workingman, nor did the religious tracts that were targeted against the "infidel" Unstamped by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK). Hollis noted that they were pushed on "such captive groups as the hospital sick, school children, and the prison poor."²¹

The provision of truly useful knowledge, that is, politically liberating knowledge, was one of the great concerns of the radical workingmen's press. Part of the ground on which working class leaders opposed them was the claim that Christian churches propagated working class ignorance and superstition. The Unstamped Press generally echoed the standard radical view of the church earlier stated by Thomas Paine, who was frequently honored on the pages of the Poor Man's Guardian. Cobbett and Richard Carlile had taken up this cry against Old Corruption, "kingcraft, lordcraft, and priestcraft" in the 1820s.²² This was "the uncompromising free-thought of revolutionary France" which Hetherington and other Unstamped Press, and

²¹Hollis, 141.

²²Hollis, 206.

later Chartist, leaders passed on to "working class 'secularism' of the later nineteenth century."²³

Donald Read, in Press and People, 1790-1850, discussed to what extent a large readership equated influence and the question whether newspapers reflected or influenced opinion.²⁴ Granted, the Poor Man's Guardian, Figaro, and Cobbett's Register did not represent all working class readers. Nevertheless, what the papers said--as well as what they did not say--certainly reflected working class perceptions of the church. Historians have brought forward abundant evidence of the disaffection that working men and women were feeling toward the organized Christian church. These journals provide additional insights into the source of this disaffection and into working class perceptions of "true" Christianity.

Typically, scholars have portrayed the working classes as largely unmoved by the revivalism that so deeply affected the rest of British society. Anglican Evangelicalism primarily affected the middle class and later, portions of the aristocracy, while among the Nonconformists, the practice of evangelical ethics had quite often raised

²³Robert F. Wearmouth, Some Working-Class Movements of the Nineteenth Century (London: The Epworth Press, 1948), 173.

²⁴Read, 204.

working class adherents to the middle class.²⁵ Through a lavish outpouring of voluntary charity, Evangelicals had expressed and demonstrated concern with the physical condition, and especially the spiritual state of the poor. But the outspoken radical voices of the working class evidenced little sympathy from or with organized Christian religion. Cobbett did speak kindly of "the Factory Bill of the considerate and humane Lord Ashley,"²⁶ who was the personification of Evangelical philanthropic reform. But Figaro condemned the Evangelical Sabbatarian reformer, Sir Andrew Agnew, calling him "that prince of humbugs and most indubitable of asses." Figaro then detailed Sir Andrew's calling for the arrest of a man who merely "looked as if he was going to ask for charity" and observed Agnew's "pious principles not extending to his purse."²⁷ Typical of Figaro's harsh tone was the picture of "holy swine . . . glutting themselves piously and piggishly on the sweets of religious exaction."²⁸

²⁵J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, The Town Labourer, 1760-1832: The New Civilisation (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1925), 270-72; Ian Bradley, The Call to Seriousness (New York: Macmillan Co., 1976), 55.

²⁶"To the People of Oldham," Cobbett's Political Register 86 (29 November 1834): 521.

²⁷"Agnew in Agony," Figaro in London 3 (22 February 1834): 30.

²⁸"The Defender of the Faith," Figaro in London 3 (14 June 1834): 93-94.

In an article entitled "The Church! The Church!," February 1, 1834, the Poor Man's Guardian endorsed the current outcry for reform of the religious establishment. It cited "malice, envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness shewn by its members to dissenters of all kind," and "the cruelty of its officers and tools in selling the goods of the poor for church rates." However, it claimed that the principal grievance lay not in these ills, nor in non-resident clergy, pluralities, amount of clerical incomes, clerical morality or lack of it, or quality of sermons, but in the very fact of compulsory contribution. The article stated:

This establishment now absorbs property amounting to between 12 and 13 millions per annum, a sum for which it ought to do a great deal of good certainly; it ought to reform the world for this sum, and yet it needs more reformation itself than any thing in the world!

Indeed, in the same issue of the Guardian, listed as numbers 5 and 6 in the "National Objects of the Productive Classes" (a sort of platform for political working class radicalism) were: "Liberty of expression of conscientious opinions, upon all subjects, without limitation" and "No dominant religion to exist, nor any one to be encouraged by any worldly temptations whatever; but all to be equally protected in the rights of conscience."²⁹

²⁹"The Church! The Church!" Poor Man's Guardian 3 (1 February 1834): 2-3; "Progress of Civilization," Poor Man's Guardian 3 (1 February 1834): 7.

Still, although Hetherington was himself a Freethinking Christian, he was aware of how deeply woven the thread of orthodox Christianity was in English society and in the hearts of many of his readers.³⁰ Thus, in the December 6, 1834 issue of the Guardian, describing the "Political State of the Country," the writer made a radical prophecy of the demise of the Establishment, but at the same time he acknowledged popular religious sentiment. He spoke of "veneration for the Established Church, hoary as it is where they were baptized and confirmed; where they have been married, and where they will be buried." He then stated, "[It] will soon be gone," and it now "is regarded as the greatest moral nuisance which there is in the three kingdoms!"³¹

But the Guardian held no quarter for Methodism or Dissent either. Cobbett inveighed against them:

Hostile to freedom as the established clergy has been, its hostility has been nothing in point of violence compared to that of these ruffian sectaries.³²

³⁰Hollis, 311. She cited (329) the following publication by Hetherington: Principles and practice contrasted; or, a peep into 'The only true Church of God upon earth', commonly called Freethinking Christians, 1828. Hammond and Hammond, Age of Chartists (252) mentioned Hetherington among other later Chartist leaders who were "propagandists against Christianity," in the context of other Chartists who were Methodists.

³¹"Political State of the Country," Poor Man's Guardian 3 (6 December 1834): 345.

³²Hammond and Hammond, Age of Chartists, 218.

Both Methodist and Evangelical leaders generally discouraged political involvement, especially condemning radicalism. But because Catholics and Methodists engaged in evangelistic activities among trade unionists, radical leaders viewed them as a greater threat than the Establishment. In fact, the writer stated that one good reason to destroy the Established Church was that it would lead to the destruction of Methodism. He felt that, with the end of the Establishment, Dissent would lose its comparative appeal and then "would be tried by the New Testament, and would be found lamentably wanting. Interestingly, the writer stated, "I have lived all my life amongst Dissenters of all kinds, and know them well and all their ways."³³

As a matter of fact, many leaders in factory reform, Chartism, and the trade unions learned their early skills in the Methodist movement. While historians have disagreed regarding the influence of popular evangelicalism upon working class movements, I have argued above for its effect as a radical force. Robert Wearmouth noted the effect upon some Chartist leaders of a religious background: "religious idealism, sentiment, and fervour would keep breaking in."³⁴

³³"The Destruction of the Established Church," Poor Man's Guardian 3 (22 February 1834): 20-21.

³⁴Wearmouth, Some Working-Class Movements, 174. See J. A. Jaffe, in "The 'Chiliasm of Despair' Reconsidered: Revivalism and Working-Class Agitation in County Durham,"

Sensing imitation of the Methodist form of organization in the National Union of Working Classes, Cobbett observed that they "divide themselves into classes after the manner of the Wesleyan Methodists."³⁵

Whatever effect evangelicalism may have been working among them, working class radicals were outspoken in consciously repudiating its political agenda. An article in the February 22, 1834 issue of the Guardian connected Dissent with the middle class radicals' betrayal of the goals of working class radicalism. In September 1834, a letter written to the Guardian advocated no further assistance to the Dissenters in seeking separation of church and state, stating that it "does not appear to be of the slightest utility to the working classes." What really mattered to them was repeal of the corn-tax and the stamp-tax, among other issues.³⁶

In the political cross-currents of the 1830s, as both Tories and Whigs manipulated the interests of the working

Journal of British Studies 28 (January 1989): 23-42. Jaffe explored the contemporaneity of Methodist revivalism and radical activism. He presented the well-known historiographical controversy, which I have discussed in chapter 2, surrounding the Elie Halévy thesis that Methodism had a quietist effect on the English working class.

³⁵Robert F. Wearmouth, Methodism and the Working-Class Movements in England: 1800-1850 (Clifton, N.J.: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1937), 122.

³⁶"Dissenters and Reformers," Poor Man's Guardian 3 (20 September 1834): 260-61.

class and of the churches, the debate raged regarding the establishment. Should it be separated from the state; should it be strengthened and made more useful? Regarding the latter, the Guardian commented, August 16, 1834:

Are we not told that this church is founded upon a rock, and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it? Surely such a church needs no human means to increase its strength. 'Aye, but this was said of the church of Christ!' Well, is not the church of England the church of Christ? It either is, or it is not, -- if it is not, it ought not to be strengthened. If it is, it may be safely left to God.³⁷

It was on the issue of "true" religion versus false religion that the pages of the Guardian revealed some departure from the stereotypical working class radical view of the Christian church: the attack on Old Corruption inherited from the French Revolution and Thomas Paine, carried on by Carlile and Cobbett in the 1820s. A striking respect for Christianity as an ideal coexisted with an impatience with and disgust for the actual practice of religion. The Guardian and Cobbett's Register cited Scripture effectively and at some length on several occasions in 1834 to exhort religious people to truly Christian actions.³⁸ In the June 7, 1834 issue of the

³⁷"The Bastardy Clause in the Miscalled Poor Laws' Amendment Bill, as Amended by the House of Lords," Poor Man's Guardian 3 (16 August 1834): 220.

³⁸"The Profit-Hunting System in England, France, and America," Poor Man's Guardian 3 (18 October 1834): 289-91; "Public Meeting at Gateshead," Cobbett's Political Register 86 (18 October 1834): 182-84. E. J. Hobsbawm observed that

Guardian carried an article entitled, "Police.--Marylebone. Hypocrisy and Cruelty of Rawlinson, the Marylebone Magistrate.--Parallel Between His Religion and That of Our Saviour" [my emphasis]. The writer described the turning away from the poorhouse of an elderly man who would not declare membership in one of the "established artificial religions." Deploring this perversion of religion, the article referred to "the pagan worships which the Rich have substituted for the religion of Jesus" and referred to Westley [sic], Knox, and Luther as "successful imposters." In the article, he made the following statements concerning Jesus Christ: He was "poor, and the friend of the poor." "Jesus Christ knew that the rich caused all the crime and misery of the poor; he therefore devoted his life to the instruction of the Poor, and the humiliation of the Rich." "Jesus Christ was for distributing to all, and giving to each what was needful." "In short, Jesus Christ laboured from the age of twelve to thirty-three, to destroy the

"the Bible (is) a highly incendiary document"; interestingly, he noted that Thomas Paine, lionized in the pages of the Guardian, was equally renowned for The Age of Reason, the first popular refutation of the divine inspiration of the Bible, as for The Rights of Man. E. J. Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848 (New York: New American Library, a Mentor Book, 1962), 262.

cannibal system which immolates the many to the murderous avarice and ambition of the few."³⁹

Not only did Cobbett and the Guardian distinguish and appeal to pure religion, they defended it on occasion. E. P. Thompson mentioned that Cobbett "defended with force" the people's "right to publish arguments against the Christian religion." "But when Carlile went further and committed what was (in Cobbett's eyes) offensive blasphemy by dating the Republican 'in the year 1822 of the Carpenter's wife's son,'" Cobbett denounced him.⁴⁰ A signal variation on the standard anticlerical line in the Guardian in 1834 revolved around the writings of a Miss Frances Wright, who was currently on the lecture circuit in England and America. The Guardian carried advertisement of her writings, recommending them as "Useful Knowledge," but in a review on October 25, 1834 it took exception to her wholesale rejection of religion as "the bitterest enemy of liberty." The article stated:

³⁹"Police.--Marylebone," Poor Man's Guardian 3(7 June 1834): 141-42. Hammond and Hammond, in The Town Labourer (286-87), made the interesting point that many times radical reformers with Methodist backgrounds, though enjoined by their leaders from political activity, had learned "gifts of oratory, leadership, (and) organisation" and were "holding meetings, partly religious, partly political, in which they quoted the Bible on the subject of the possessions of the rich." They told of "a working-class leader . . . [who] once preached a sermon describing Christ as the greatest Reformer, a most blasphemous libel in the eyes of the magistrates."

⁴⁰E. P. Thompson, 756.

By transferring the blame from priests to religion, she goes too deep, for certain it is, that the very basis of Christianity is equality of rights and that every deviation from this equality is treason to the Redeemer. No! no! Miss Wright, the work of slavery is not the work of Christianity, but of priests and tyrants, who have usurped its name only the better to overthrow the doctrine.

Expanding on his subject, the writer shaped doctrine to his own ends in reference to the Golden Rule:

. . . every Christian is released from its obligation the moment it is violated against him by another. Were this not the case, the doctrine would be worse than useless, for how could any man love his neighbour as himself, if that neighbour had proved himself a villain or an oppressor? . . . It is true Christ also taught forgiveness of injuries; but this was with a view to heal the wounds of oppression, not to sanction it; for, were it otherwise, our Redemer [sic] would appear in the equivocal light of denouncing oppression on the one hand, and preaching submission to it on the other.

Interestingly, the writer noted that Christians in Roman times were considered as radical as the contemporary disciples of Robert Owen or of the Guardian.⁴¹

On November 22, the Guardian printed a letter from one of its readers who expressed shocked disapproval that this notorious radical Unstamped paper would "step forward as an advocate to defend Christianity." Claiming that "priests are but the necessary and nominal tools of Christianity" and inseparable from it and pronouncing Scripture obscene, the writer asked that the Guardian not "pander to the worst

⁴¹"Course of Popular Lectures with Three Addresses," Poor Man's Guardian 3 (25 October 1834): 298-300.

vices and prejudices of the multitude." Subsequently, on December 13 1834, on an advertisement page that once more recommended Miss Wright's writings, the editor of the Guardian replied to a letter from yet a different reader who had been offended by the intemperance of the November 22 criticism:

The writer of the letter signed 'A. C. R.' is assured that the Editor disapproves as much as himself the letter in No. 181 of the 'Guardian,' of which he so justly complains; and that in giving it to the printer for insertion it was the Editor's intention to accompany it with a sharp comment corrective of its evil tendency; but, in the multiplicity of objects which engaged his attention at the time, it completely escaped his recollection till too late. Indeed, a glance at the letter referred to would convince any one that nothing but inadvertency could have caused the omission of such comment.

The editor then closed by recognizing the right of the writer of the letter in No. 181 to his "anti-Christian opinions," but blaming him for his "bigoted intolerance." "Such conduct in a person professing superior enlightenment, is proof positive that infidels are often as devoid of charity and just feeling as those on whom they would bestow a monopoly of these qualities." In ascertaining the significance of this correspondence, it was interesting to note Himmelfarb's comment that "it was not unknown for editors to use the letter columns as a vehicle for their own

opinions." In letters one might say "boldly what the editorials only intimated."⁴²

In fact, such moderation as was implied in the censure of Miss Wright seemed inconsistent with the reputation of the Guardian. This was particularly true in light of Hetherington's prosecution for publishing the "Palafox letter" in the May 25, 1833 issue. The letter had "recommended that working men (after having been attacked by armed troops at a meeting) should bring sharp knives with them with which to cut their food at subsequent open air meetings."⁴³ In August 1834 the 'Guardian' raised alarm regarding the imminent passage of the Poor Laws Amendment Bill, "alias The Poor Man's Destruction Bill." Equating class with virtue, the Guardian once again paraphrased Scripture: "Now weep and howl all ye widows and orphans, ye lame, ye halt, and ye blind, ye poor, ye honest, ye industrious, and ye needy, for your day of desolation draweth nigh!!" The writer proceeded to delineate the unfairness of England's distribution of wealth. "The idlers having shared the working peoples' wages," when asked to give some of that "money back again in the name of a poor's rate [sic]," refuse, saying they wish to "raise the dignity"

⁴²"Miss Wright's Lectures," Poor Man's Guardian 3 (22 November 1834): 333; "To Readers, Correspondents &c.," Poor Man's Guardian 3 (13 December 1834): 360; Himmelfarb, 244.

⁴³"Notes on the Spa-Fields Meeting," Poor Man's Guardian 2 (25 May 1833): 169-70.

of the poor. The Guardian was claiming for the people what was theirs by right, not by condescension.⁴⁴

With the New Poor Law Bill having passed, in October the Guardian continued to link it with inequity and made an interesting connection to the traditional role of the church in providing for the poor:

Here is an Act to rob (we might almost say to murder) some three or four millions of the most desolate of mankind. The right of these poor people to parish relief is of more than two centuries' standing. It was given them in exchange for their share of the church property, of which the Reformation had despoiled them. It was their "vested interest," in the most enlarged sense of those words, for it was not only guaranteed by the law of the land, but also by those of justice, humanity, and sound religion.⁴⁵

The article then provided graphic instances of cruel conditions under the new law, but disclaimed a desire to stir up class hatreds. "Our object is not to make one class hate another, but to give to each equal liberty and protection against the other."⁴⁶ November issues of the

⁴⁴"The Anti-Reform Bill and Poor Laws Amendment Bill; alias The Poor Man's Destruction Bill," Poor Man's Guardian 3 (2 Aug. 1834): 205-206.

⁴⁵"Profit-Hunting System," Poor Man's Guardian, 290-91. Himmelfarb (242) noted that here the Guardian was echoing Cobbett's frequently stated idea that the tithes were given to the parochial clergy as trustees for the people: "one-third to build and keep in repair churches for the people to worship God in; one-third for the relief and sustentation of the sick and indigent poor; and the remaining one-third for the . . . clergy to administer to the spiritual wants of the people." ("Tithes!" Cobbett's Political Register 86 (11 October 1834): 107-108).

⁴⁶"Profit-Hunting System," Poor Man's Guardian, 289-91.

Guardian carried reports of incendiarism and worker uprisings. Noting that the stamped press "has observed a discreet silence, through fear of aggravating the evil by publicity," the Guardian disclaimed being "the apologists of incendiarism," but warned that such acts would continue unless the New Poor Law Act was repealed. Gertrude Himmelfarb presented an illuminating discussion of the unique approach of the Guardian to the New Poor Law. She commented that "it may seem remarkable that a journal called Poor Man's Guardian should have paid so little attention [in her view] to the poor law at a time when most radicals, and a good many non-radicals, were passionately exercised about it." She further explained that basically, the Guardian viewed any Poor Law as only a symptom of the real disease, capitalistic distribution of property. They hoped that universal suffrage would remedy this and "thenceforward render all poor laws unnecessary."⁴⁷

Given the tumultuous flux in society in 1834 and the identification of Christianity with the state, either by law in the case of the Church of England or by influence in the post-Reform Bill case of Dissent, the general outcry against the Christian church in terms of Old Corruption in true working class papers was not surprising. Especially in view

⁴⁷"Effects of Poverty and the New Poor Law Bill," Poor Man's Guardian 3 (8 November 1834): 313-14; Himmelfarb, 242-47.

of the unfair government persecution of the Unstamped Press, the relatively balanced and fair-minded statements relative to pure religion cited above in the Guardian were surprising. They stood in sharp contrast to the intemperate polemics that were so typical of writers of the period, including clergymen. Did they reflect a deep-rooted, pervasive Christian faith in English society. Were the statements sincere or mere rhetoric? The fact that the Guardian was an illegal paper and under government scrutiny suggests the possibility of a whitewash. Hollis stated that ordinary commercial concerns, as well as the fear of prosecution, did affect the free expression of the Unstamped papers. Hetherington may well have been trying to not offend his readers by maintaining a respectable face. Hollis noted the eagerness of the Unstamped Press radicals to silence their detractors by exhibiting good moral character.⁴⁸

As an example of such concern for public opinion, Hetherington and other working class leaders, in forming the National Union of Working Classes in 1831, had modified Robert Owen's ideas in order not to frighten "many persons who were strictly religious." Himmelfarb observed that the Guardian, its chief interest being the fair distribution of the workingman's property, distanced itself from the

⁴⁸Hollis, 107-64 passim.

Owenites' increasing preference for "radical moral reform" after 1834. The Owenites were "repudiating marriage as the worst kind of social tyranny, the family as the bastion of private property . . . , and religion as the primary obstacle to the creation of a 'New Moral World.'" The Guardian denounced them as "unnecessarily provocative and utterly irrelevant."⁴⁹

On the other hand, would the Guardian, in fact, have offended its radical readers by moderate, and even sympathetic, statements regarding Christian faith? What of the defiant spirit so typical of the Unstamped? The Guardian was, above all, a recognized radical voice, bearing the scars of government prosecution. Its tone was partisan, sometimes even carping. There was no mention in its pages of evangelical good works. Was the Guardian merely overlooking these, pursuing its own class agenda; or were they relatively insignificant? What of Hetherington's ideal "real" church? Because the church was connected to the government, was it unable to do what, in the eyes of the people, it was designed to do? As part of an unfair economic system of unbridled capitalism, was it alienated from the people? The Guardian still abounded in instances of typical radical invective against the alliance of lawyers and priests and the organized churches' abuse of the poor.

⁴⁹Wearmouth, Some Working Class Movements, 52-53; Himmelfarb, 239.

A March 8th article entitled "More Clerical Rapacity -- Seizure for Church Rates" spoke to the churches' public image and future: "Is this the way to win converts?" It then described the "church harpies" as "knaves [who] will strike only those that are least capable of resistance." On March 15th the Guardian mocked the church's Evangelically motivated desire for Sabbath laws that would enlist government to force men to do what the church has failed to win them to. Then it cited the additional failure of the church to assist people with what they really want, wishing that "if they are disposed to serve the people let them move for universal suffrage [sic]." ⁵⁰

As mentioned previously, Henry Hetherington was a Freethinking Christian, and his paper contained numerous references to unconventional Christian beliefs. The March 22nd issue advertised a New-Christian St. Simonian School and St. Simonian lectures, and the May 24th issue recommended a portrait of "The Rev. Dr. Wade," a clergyman who was active in trade union causes. ⁵¹ Eric Hobsbawm has

⁵⁰"More Clerical Rapacity--Seizure for Church Rates," Poor Man's Guardian 3 (8 March 1834): 37; "The Agnewites and the Sabbath Again," Poor Man's Guardian 3 (15 March 1834): 43; Hollis (299) stated that because Hetherington and other Unstamped leaders of the 1830s extended the radical rhetoric of the 1820s into a context of class and economic exploitation, some have exaggerated their pre-Marxism. To refute this, she cited their belief in gradual improvement through universal suffrage.

⁵¹Poor Man's Guardian 3 (22 March 1834): 56; "The Rev. Dr. Wade," Poor Man's Guardian 3 (24 May 1834): 125.

argued for "the prevalent secularism of the new labour and socialist movements" and stated that this was predicated upon "the equally novel and more fundamental fact of the prevalent religious indifference of the new proletariat."

By modern standards the working classes and urban masses which grew up in the period of the Industrial Revolution were no doubt rather strongly influenced by religion; by the standards of the first half of the nineteenth century, there was no precedent for their remoteness from, ignorance of, and indifference to, organized religion.⁵²

He further stated that "the mechanics of the 1820s followed Robert Owen not only for his analysis of capitalism, but for his unbelief . . . ," that "among the industrial labouring classes the sects were never more than a minority," and that "the working class as a group was undoubtedly less touched by organized religion than any previous body of the poor in world history."⁵³

I compared Hobsbawm's views to recent studies by Gerald Parsons and others which have posited a distinct religious pattern for workers, one which featured "rejection of official Christianity, but retention of an alternative religious framework in which vague theism, practical ethics, and occasional worship were prominent, but from which doctrine, church commitment or churchly morality were absent." Parsons documented the general concern which began

⁵²Hobsbawm, 263.

⁵³Ibid., 262-3.

in the 1830s for the "unchurched masses," climaxing in Horace Mann's report on the 1851 Census of Religion:

Once church-going was defined as the key test of religiousness, and in the absence of articulate and sustained secularism on the part of the majority of the working classes, the inevitable conclusion to be drawn from a continued absence of the majority of the working classes from regular church attendance must be that they were, indeed, as Mann had suggested, simply 'unconscious secularists,' and indifferent to religion.

These recent studies have challenged the Victorian idea that church attendance and religious faith were inseparable and suggest the presence of a particular working-class form of religion, a kind of "diffusive Christianity."⁵⁴ Moreover, I gave consideration to the claims which I have discussed above regarding the influence of Methodism. I have stated my agreement with the positions taken by W. R. Ward and A. D. Gilbert, who viewed evangelical revivalism as a radical, and socially ameliorating, force for the lower classes. The concepts held by Parsons, Ward, and Gilbert seemed to accommodate the many positive references to an idealized, "true" Christianity which I discovered in the workingmen's

⁵⁴Gerald Parsons, ed., Religion in Victorian Britain, vol. 2, Controversies (Manchester: Manchester University Press, Open University, 1988): 64-67 and 82-85. Parsons cited A. J. Ainsworth (1977) "Religion in the working-class community and the evolution of socialism in late nineteenth century Lancashire: a case of working-class consciousness," Histoire Sociale -- Social History, Vol. 10, pp. 354-80; J. Cox (1982) The English Churches in a Secular Society, Lambeth: 1870-1930, Oxford, Oxford University Press; and H. McLeod (1984) Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth Century Britain, Studies in Economic and Social History, Macmillan Education.

press. Using a repeated historical explanation of what happened to the real church, the Guardian referred to the feigned conversion that the Roman emperor Constantine underwent in order to subvert the church to the purposes of government. Looking backward, and perhaps with a prophetic eye to the future of British society, the Guardian somewhat wistfully declared:

The real Christians sunk immediately into neglect; . . . desperate at what they saw, they either quitted the stage in disgust Hypocrisy, cant, and humbug became the order of the day; sincerity went entirely out of fashion; so completely so, indeed, that we doubt whether it has ever raised its head from that day to this. . .⁵⁵

⁵⁵"Course of Popular Lectures," Poor Man's Guardian, 300.

CHAPTER V

THE POLITICAL PRESS AND THE CHURCHES

In analyzing discussion of Christian churches in major political periodicals in 1834, it is instructive to look first at the image of the churches each review presented. Then we may examine the political stance taken by each paper with regard to the threats to the established church and the grievances of dissenters. The journals also reveal Christian perspective on such social issues as the passage of the New Poor Law. Basically, the Tory papers, the Quarterly Review and Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, defended the Anglican establishment. The Whig Edinburgh Review, on the other hand, reflected religious skepticism, but perceived the utility of the establishment for social control and displayed a politic stance to its conservative readers. The more radical Benthamite Westminster Review, meanwhile, favored religious diversity and freedom, and evaluated the serviceability of the established church as an institution of government. Despite widespread dissatisfaction with the performance of the Church of England, disestablishment did not occur, and politicians (and their political papers), of whatever stripe, were well advised to remember the importance of Christian faith to

British society even, as we have previously noted, in diffuse forms among the lower classes.

The Tory Quarterly Review began in 1809 in piqued response to the brash political pronouncements of the Edinburgh Review. Together they shared preeminence among periodicals.¹ The Benthamite Westminster Review called the Quarterly "the greatest gun of the ecclesiastical battery" and disparaged it for "discharging salvos in defence of Mother Church, chiefly remarkable for voice and for smoke."² The Quarterly revered the Anglican establishment as "an ancient landmark,"³ placed a low value on evangelical fervor, and enjoined an attitude of noblesse oblige on both the clergy and its frequently, though not at all exclusively, aristocratic readership. Its pages presented the Church of England standing "as it were, in the midst, between the extreme opinions of the Christian sects" and the "superstitious forms and blind credulity of the Roman Catholics":

Her intermediate position, but still more her moderation -- her tolerant spirit -- her learning -- her rank -- her wealth -- her political

¹Walter James Graham, English Literary Periodicals (New York: T. Nelson & sons, 1930), 233, 247.

²"Church Monopoly," Westminster Review, vol. 21 (July 1834): 62.

³"The Prostration of Government," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 35 (April 1834): 545. This phrase represents the view both Tory papers held of the Church of England.

influence, and her spiritual purity, all combine to give her a kind of moral authority.⁴

The Establishment was that which rescued the "weary and woful [sic] nation" from the strife of factionalism. Thus the Quarterly appealed to the spirit of compromise enshrined in the Elizabethan Settlement. Recalling the threat of popery under James II, for instance, the writer noted that Dissenters "ultimately clung to the Church in what they had then the prudence to see was a common danger; and, by their joint power, popery was defeated and repressed."⁵ The implication was that Dissenters were making a mistake in allying themselves with false friends against the Establishment. The Quarterly saw no need to tamper with such an ideal arrangement, even in liturgical reforms being proposed by "professed" friends, that is those clergymen who, having once chosen to follow the Articles of the Church, then presumed to propose changes in order to conciliate Dissenters. The Quarterly gave an "uncompromising negative" to such tinkering with the ecclesiastical constitutions.⁶ An article reviewing several suggestions for liturgical reform mocked their lack of agreement and praised the Establishment as being "as far as

⁴"Liturgical Reform," Quarterly Review 52 (January 1834): 510.

⁵Ibid., 510-11.

⁶Ibid., 512-13.

human institutions can work -- the fittest and the happiest frame of mind!" It was "this beautiful, rational, wisely-graduated, and soul-inspiring order, [which] every one of the proposed alterations tends to disturb, and most of them to annihilate."

The stance taken by the Quarterly supported Elie Halévy's contention that "generally speaking the High Church party was averse to the idea, almost to the very name, of reform."⁷ However, the Wellesley Index took a kinder view and quoted Disraeli in 1835 regarding "an underlying habit of mind":

This respect for precedent, this clinging to prescription, this reverence for antiquity, which are so often ridiculed by conceited and superficial minds . . . appear to me to have their origin in a profound knowledge of human nature and in a fine observation of public affairs, and satisfactorily account for the permanent character of our liberties.

The Wellesley Index then referred to a Toryism that had avoided extremes of either conservatism or liberalism, but that had sought or gladly received many improvements.⁸

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, published weekly, tended to take a more partisan and lively tone than its

⁷Ibid., 530; Elie Halévy, A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, vol. 3, The Triumph of Reform: 1830-1841 (London: Ernest Benn, 1927; 3d impression of 1st paperback edition, 1965), 136.

⁸Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals: 1824-1900, vol. 1, ed. Walter E. Houghton (University of Toronto Press: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 699-700.

staid Tory counterpart, the Quarterly. Its briskly satirical tone led it to rival the Quarterly's impressive circulation figure of 10,000 in the 1830s.⁹ Blackwood's also presented the establishment in a highly favorable light. The writer of "Attacks on the Church" described its salutary influence in works of benevolence and in preserving national morals. Expanding into intemperate celebration, he stated that while "ignorant men may rail at the sloth and indolence of the Establishment," that is, "of a few of its unworthy members," the institution itself is "the most astonishing monument of Christian beneficence that ever has existed upon earth. He praised the social diversity of the Anglican clergy as a "happy combination of . . . plebeian vigour and ability with patrician lustre and descent."¹⁰ The writer claimed that taking away the privileges of the upper clergy would adversely affect its contribution to society as its "most important of professions," as its educators. He further stated that "the clergy are, in truth, landed proprietors, who draw their share of the produce on the condition of furnishing gratuitous instruction to the people in the momentous subjects of

⁹Richard D. Altick, Victorian People and Ideas: A Companion for the Modern Reader of Victorian Literature (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1973), 66, and David Roberts, "The Social Conscience of Tory Periodicals," Victorian Periodicals Newsletter 10 (September 1977): 155, 164.

¹⁰"Attacks on the Church," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine 35 (May 1834): 736-37.

religion"; they are, in fact, the most responsible of the landowners, "who spend their incomes most directly and immediately among the people of their own vicinity," and "who are most resident." He then painted a glowing picture of pastoral care:

[Who can replace] a Christian clergyman, living in the several parishes, visiting the poor, heading all the undertakings for their improvement, instructing them in their religious duties, rejoicing with them when they rejoiced, and weeping with them when they wept.¹¹

While admitting that the great disparity in clerical livings needed correction (that is, raising the standards of the more humble clergy), the writer maintained that any attempt to make all clergymen equal would discourage ambition, and along with it, achievement and intellectual distinction.¹² Thus the Tories valued the Anglican establishment, imbued with aristocratic paternalism, as an institution of tradition and distinction and as an encourager of religious moderation and relative tolerance.

The rhetoric of the conservative papers in 1834 demonstrated a deep concern with the liberalizing trend of British government as a result of the Reform Bill of 1832 although the power structure remained essentially aristocratic. Joseph Hamburger referred to the popular

¹¹Ibid., 739-41. This picture contrasts with the widely held picture of anti-clericalism presented by Llewellyn, as previously cited in chapter 1.

¹²Ibid., 741.

image of the Whigs as reformers, but noted that many contemporaries questioned this, pointing to the wealth and social position of the Whig oligarchy.¹³ The Edinburgh Review, the first of the great quarterlies, began in 1802 as an adventure in independent-minded literary criticism, but it quickly became known as the mouthpiece of the Whig Party. The Wellesley Index, noting that "its intended audience was essentially aristocratic and conservative," quoted the editor of the Edinburgh regarding its middle-of-the-road political view. He stated that "we are for the natural and wholesome influence of wealth and rank, and the veneration which belongs to old institutions, without which no government has ever had either stability or respect, as well as for that vigilance of popular controul, and that supremacy of public opinion without which none could be long protected from abuse."¹⁴

G. I. T. Machin has discussed contemporary doubt concerning the Christian faith of leading Whigs, and Geoffrey Best noted that high Whig circles gave such an impression. However, Best maintained that Whigs did have principles that supported a very secular view of religion,

¹³G. Kitson Clark, An Expanding Society: Britain 1830-1900 (Cambridge at the University Press, 1967), 25; Joseph Hamburger, "The Whig Conscience," in The Conscience of the Victorian State, ed. Peter Marsh (Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1979), 19-20.

¹⁴Wellesley Index, vol. 1, 417-18.

but they found it difficult to understand individuals who held exclusive religious scruples. Machin cited a mixture of religious views in the Whig government and referred to Earl Grey as "a sure defender of the Church." Richard Brent portrayed a generational development from skeptical Foxite Whigs, such as Grey and Holland, to Evangelical "young" Whigs, such as Althorp, to liberal Anglicans, such as Lord John Russell. Brent thus disagreed with Kitson Clark's categorization of religious influences on Anglican politics as either High Church or Evangelical, posing this third Liberal Anglican category which was a forerunner of the Broad Church affiliation. Brent also cited Evangelical influence on Liberal Anglicans in differing with Best's overall characterization of Whig religion as "an irreverent, 18th century, Enlightenment form of Christianity."¹⁵

The Edinburgh presented a different picture of Christian churches, the Anglican establishment in particular, from that of the Tory papers. Best noted that the Whigs believed that, while religion was between a man and his God, an established church was the creation of the state and therefore answerable, as was the king, to the

¹⁵G. I. T. Machin, Politics and the Churches in Great Britain: 1832-1868 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 28; G. F. A. Best, "The Whigs and the Church Establishment in the Age of Grey and Holland," History 45 (June 1960): 103-05, 114; Richard Brent, Liberal Anglican Politics: Whiggery, Religion, and Reform, 1830-1841 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 104-06.

representatives of the people.¹⁶ In the Whig view, the Establishment was a human institution and therefore not beyond criticism. Therefore, the Edinburgh could direct its poison pen and brisk style against Anglican pompousness in the review which criticized Parson Overton's "Poetical Portraiture of the Church." The reviewer noted that the parson brought "to the aid of a falling Church . . . a neat octavo-ful of holy heroics," and the Edinburgh had a good time at the expense of "as full and foaming a bumper of bigotry [and foolishness and doggerel] poured forth as ever was yet pledged by priest."¹⁷

In an article titled "The Church of England," however, Chancellor Brougham assumed the usefulness of an establishment for purposes of social control. Brougham was one of the original contributors to the Edinburgh, and he was its most prolific writer. Brent referred to Brougham, who wrote on the topic of "natural religion," as an example of the "Whig tradition of indifference masquerading as a form of rational religion"; Arthur Aspinall noted Brougham's conversion, later in life, to spiritualism and his connections with Robert Owen. Brougham was notorious for his "political infidelity," which he demonstrated in 1834 as on the one hand he deplored the condition of the

¹⁶Best, 112-13.

¹⁷"Overton's Poetical Portraiture of the Church," Edinburgh Review 57 (October 1833): 33 and 38.

Church of England to radicals, and on the other, he recommended to Whigs in general a policy of moderate reform.¹⁸ When the politician Brougham praised the religious establishment for its useful services in promoting public virtue, he was gratifying the bulk of his conservative readership. He observed that "the chapels of the dissenters are attended chiefly by persons of easy circumstances," and he questioned whether a voluntary system of religion would be able to supply needed "spiritual comfort" and "religious and moral instruction" for the lower classes.¹⁹

But then, in the same article, Brougham spoke out of the other side of his mouth in an effort to conciliate his radical and dissenting allies. He wondered why the Established Church in England was so unpopular and proposed that the cause, more than tithes or particular grievances of Dissenters, was more general. He stated that the real problem was "not essentially inherent in the frame of the Establishment, but accidental, and as it were personal," that is, "the unhappy determination of the Established Clergy, on all occasions, and in every way, to set

¹⁸Brent, 110, 114; Arthur Aspinall, Lord Brougham and the Whig Party (Manchester University Press, 1927; reprint, Hamden, Ct.: Archon Books, Shoe String Press, 1972), v-vi, 206.

¹⁹"The Church of England," Edinburgh Review 58 (January 1834): 502-3.

themselves in opposition against the liberal and enlightened spirit of the age, . . . their implacable hostility to all the late reforms, beginning with the Bill [of 1832]." He further characterized the response of the people to such a church:

Then, said the people, if it must be so, we are for improvement. They identified their Church with all corruption. . . . our grievances we are resolved to shake off; and, if it must be so, we are against the Church which you identify with all we abhor.²⁰

Brougham delineated the mistakes the Established clergy had made by acting as magistrates and supporting oppressive, "illiberal" politics. He pointed to their involvement with the Edinburgh's opponents:

The fact is understood to be beyond all dispute, that the Papers on the Tory side in politics, which notoriously drive a constant traffic of private slander, number among their chief supporters the clergy of the High Church party all over the country.²¹

He then presumed to instruct the Church of England: "They must conform themselves to the spirit of the age, or be content to survive their establishment." Accordingly, he counseled churchmen to cease any political involvement. Regarding the burning issue of church-rates, "the measure must be such as to content the Dissenters: none other can ever be looked at in these times, and by the present

²⁰Ibid., 499.

²¹Ibid., 500.

Parliament." Tithes must be extinguished "upon fair and reasonable compensation." Pluralities and non-residence must cease. Brougham's tone was imperious and threatening. Having portrayed the established church as self-interested and reactionary, he called on the public, through Parliament, to act in its own best interest.²²

As noted above, historians have differed regarding the private religious beliefs of leading Whigs during this period. Machin took the view that the Whigs had "basic goodwill" toward the Establishment, but they wished to conciliate Dissenters by carrying out further reforms. Brent noted the religious indifference of "older Whigs" like Brougham, who nevertheless saw religion as a useful tool for social control. Hamburger cited the Whigs' dislike for religious zeal, which tended to upset political stability, but their recognition that in moderation religion had its political uses. Both Halévy and Best noted the Whigs' predilection for a weak, and therefore controllable, church.²³ My survey detected these tensions in the Edinburgh's discussion of religion. Certainly, in 1834, the Whigs had a difficult task politically in pleasing their radical and dissenting allies and at the same time not

²²Ibid., 504-6.

²³Machin, 29; Brent, 120-22; Hamburger, 25; Halévy, 139; Best, 114-18.

offending a generally conservative and earnestly religious public.

Like the Edinburgh, the Benthamite Westminster Review presented an image of the Establishment as a servant to the government. To the Westminster, freedom of thought and the usefulness of institutions were the prime criteria applied to "true" religion. Walter Graham cited the Westminster Review, begun in 1824 by James Mill, as "the most important imitator of the Edinburgh and Quarterly." Its later editor, John Bowring, was a Unitarian, as were many of the contributors to the Westminster. Philosophic Radicals, who included Benthamite intellectuals like the Mills and liberal businessmen and politicians, were distinct from popular working class radicals. The meaning of the term "liberal" varied during this period. Sometimes it referred to the Whig party. With reference to religion it alluded to latitude in matters of faith and the submission of the church to the state. More generally, it became a "rough synonym of watered-down Benthamism" and suggested mild reform. David Roberts noted the moral influence of a religious upbringing on various Utilitarian leaders, despite their reputation for irreligion, and Joseph Hamburger cited Lord Acton's opinion that liberals had a public conscience, while Whigs did not. Halévy described Benthamites, working class radicals, and Nonconformists in 1834 as "first and foremost among the enemies of the Church," but he noted that

the Unitarians, contrary to the others in the group, had political experience and ability to compromise.²⁴

When the Westminster reviewed the contribution of the eminent Scottish Evangelical, Rev. Thomas Chalmers, to the famous Bridgewater Treatises, it expressed frustration that many established clergymen opposed free inquiry. In the Westminster's reviewer's opinion, this desire to discourage people's use of their own rational powers explained why clergymen had "little influence . . . over men and men's affairs." Further expanding on this repressive characteristic, the article stated that churchmen were jealously guarding "the tree of knowledge of good and evil in their own garden" and wanted to continue to be "the servers-out of morals."²⁵ The article contrasted Christian morality as expounded by Dr. Chalmers with Utilitarian morality, which Chalmers had described as "'the selfish system of morals,'--meaning thereby the opinion of the Utilitarians, that things are good when they tend to happiness."²⁶

²⁴Graham, 251; Altick, 29, 115; David Roberts, "The Utilitarian Conscience," in The Conscience of the Victorian State, ed. Peter Marsh, 47-48; Hamburger, 20; Halévy, 133, 157.

²⁵"Dr. Chalmers's Bridgewater Treatise," Westminster Review 20 (January 1834): 4, 10, 15.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 17. According to pure Benthamite theory, the only moral and ethical criterion was "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." They refrained from using abstract measures involving religion, tradition, or natural

A review of the noted Unitarian minister, W. J. Fox's, book on Christian morality, in which the Westminster Review writer found "nothing narrow or sectarian," revealed an interest, once again, in "real Christianity," similar to that voiced in the workingmen's press and in the Edinburgh Review. Fox described "the morality of philosophical utility" as "the true spirit of the christian religion." He stated that changes in modern society called for new ways to imitate Christ's example in caring for the poor. He advocated educating them in ways of diligence and "personal prudence" and defending their rights in society. Fox considered it odd that, though Britain had been "professedly Christian for ages," Jeremy Bentham, who was "understood to have been, to a certain extent at least, an unbeliever," should have been "the ablest expositor of what is really Christian morality, the true law of the Lord as to social duty." In Fox's opinion, Christian clergymen had been more involved in "controversies and commentaries" than in such "true" Christianity.²⁷

In the article "Church Establishments," the Westminster portrayed the Church of England as an obstacle to progress in serving the needs of the people. He stated that the Establishment feared "new advances" as "disturbances of the

 law. Marsh, 40.

²⁷"Christian Morality," Westminster Review 20 (January 1834): 100-101, 104-105.

ancient faith." "The Founder of the Christian church sought to unite all in brother love," the writer observed, but he charged the Anglican church with fostering sectarian strife by its exclusivity. The reviewer believed that there was a "natural demand for religion," and that it was greater and more varied than the establishments had supplied, and argued, therefore, for voluntaryism.²⁸

In addition to the image of "true" Christian churches, the pages of each of these political periodicals, contained religiously oriented discourse regarding specific political battles and agendas. The Whigs had gained power as the party of reform, but as previously noted with regard to the workingmen's press, many groups that had allied themselves with the Whigs later felt betrayed. Tories accused Whigs of using an unscrupulous alliance of Dissenters and Radicals to achieve control of the government:

The dissenting interest, already predominant in the new House of Commons, is every hour becoming, if possible, more influential; and the Government is, we are convinced, prepared to prolong its own precarious existence by the sacrifice of the Church. . . .²⁹

Actually, Machin noted that although Dissenters had gained potential political clout with the Reform Bill, they still had only three M.P.s in Parliament, much less than the

²⁸"Church Establishments," Westminster Review 21 (October 1834): 376-77.

²⁹"The Reform Ministry and Parliament," Quarterly Review 51 (October 1833): 271.

better educated and socially acceptable Unitarians. Not having an adequate voice of their own in Parliament, Dissenters were forced to rely on their political ties with liberal Anglican or free-thinking radicals and Irish Catholic agitators. Best stated that relieving Catholics and Protestant Dissenters represented the cause of liberty to the Whigs. He further noted that in their strange alliance, Dissenters were willing to overlook the Whigs' worldly religious views in order to combat a corrupt and inhibiting establishment; but Whigs were genuinely surprised and disappointed at the Dissenters' doctrinal scruples and intransigent demands in desiring "the humiliation rather than the reform of the establishment."³⁰

The Quarterly Review expressed fear that this reforming, and even disestablishing, alliance, constituted a liberal threat to all Christian belief:

But it is not the Church of England alone that is in danger: the principles which are afloat menace eventually all churches and all religion -- they are essentially anti-Christian. We have watched, with increasing regret, the league -- ad hoc -- which the sectarian opponents of our Establishment have made with its infidel enemies. . . . they anticipate with complacency the early downfall of our Establishment; selfishly and foolishly hoping that their own separate religious interests will be not only not endangered by our danger, but advanced by our defeat and exalted by our fall.³¹

³⁰Machin, 39-40; Best, 104-08, 111.

³¹"Liturgical Reform," Quarterly Review, 510.

Blackwood's cited the Westminster Review's exultation over church reform victories and further stated conservative apprehensions:

The Radicals, like the Revolutionary party, in all ages and in all countries, consider the Church as their first victim, and exult more in the success of their attempts to depress or degrade religion, than in all their triumphs over the civil institutions of the Empire.³²

Blackwood's stated that the current Whig ministry's vacillating deeds had dismayed both Whig and Tory conservatives. Bowing "to the pressure of an insatiable democracy," the Whigs seemed ready to "concede to the Dissenters all their demands, except the separation of Church and State." Furthermore, Lord John Russell had declared in the House of Commons that church property belonged to the state.³³ Thus the conservative papers assailed the political posturing of the Whigs:

But there is one class of the aristocracy to whom in an especial manner, the weight of historical censure is due -- that is, the Whig nobility: the great and old families [who] . . . excite the people by language which they know at the time they use it to be as delusive as it is dangerous, and support their party in measures which, they confess themselves, are at once hazardous and unnecessary.³⁴

³²"The Prostration of Government," Blackwood's, 543.

³³Ibid., 543-44.

³⁴"Hints to the Aristocracy," Blackwood's 35 (January 1834): 79-80.

Blackwood's quoted Whig radicals like John Crawford, who, in addition to espousing the idea of state ownership of church property, held for voluntarism:

I hold that the communicants of each religious persuasion ought in justice to maintain their own pastors, and support their own churches; and that the followers of no one form of worship should be taxed for the maintenance of another.³⁵

Concerning the radical demand for the admission of Dissenters to the universities of Cambridge and Oxford, Blackwood's stated that such an attempt at coexistence would destroy their usefulness and "introduce the firebrand of religious discord, the jealousies of an established and rival church, into the calm retreats of science and philosophy." The picture of "jealousy, animosity, and heartburning of two rival sets of theologians in one University" was not flattering to Christian belief.³⁶ Blackwood's charged liberal Whigs with applying "the principles of free trade and unlimited competition to religious instruction." It decried the liberal view that religion was "an affair between a man and his Maker," and that one creed was as good as another. The conservative conscience feared leaving religious instruction up to the people, without government support. Such action would

³⁵"The Prostration of Government," Blackwood's, 545. This was Whig orthodoxy according to Best, as previously noted.

³⁶"Attacks on the Church," Blackwood's, 734.

presume "that the people are qualified to judge what it is good for them." The Blackwood's writer felt sure that "mankind, if left to themselves, will, in general, make no provision whatever for their spiritual necessities." What is reflected here is the fear, frequently cited in the conservative periodicals of the "infidel spirit," associated with the French Revolution. The writer attributed such a spirit to Lord Brougham:

What was the reason assigned by Lord Brougham, and the other founders of the University of London, for the exclusion of Theology? The utter impossibility of teaching doctrines to which all the members -- who were to be of all sects -- could in conscience conform; and the reason was valid. Therefore all the students are left to their own religion; and religion -- except in as far as all studies of man and nature comprehend it -- is never mentioned within the walls.

According to Best, this was entirely consistent with the Whig view of the church, that religion be kept separate from education and politics.³⁷

Responding to the Tory charges of political insincerity, the Edinburgh Review had alleged that the Tories themselves were courting radicals, indeed "Ultra-Liberals, not perhaps . . . Mr. Hetherington and Mr. Carlisle [sic], but . . . the more respectable of the

³⁷"Admission of Dissenters to Degrees in English Universities," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine 35 (May 1834): 717, 721, 738; Best, 108.

extreme popular party."³⁸ Indeed Blackwood's, recalling the power of popular religious feeling in the anti-Catholic backlash that the Conservatives had suffered with the passage of the Catholic Relief Bill, predicted in the current crisis, a league of "the Conservative leaders and the rural population, in defence of the Church of England" in opposition to the Whigs' "selfish and revolutionary projects."³⁹ Deploring such "Tory machinations," Brougham inveighed against insincere and calculated Tory support for reform:

It is abundantly manifest that they have now but one object in view -- to obtain by any means the possession of power. In this some of them, and not the least considerable, would cheerfully adopt the very plans which they have been so strenuously opposing, provided they were convinced that nothing else would reconcile the nation to their rule. Their language is -- "All such reforms are bad enough, and most bitter to swallow; yet they will be carried whether we are in or out, and it is far better to be in."⁴⁰

He then forecast the violent reaction that would follow such manipulative power moves, predicting that "beyond all doubt, the innovating spirit, which must then rule and have the fullest scope, would not stop at the line which separates good from evil."⁴¹ Better, he said, to follow the middle-

³⁸"Tory Views and Machinations," Edinburgh Review 58 (January 1834): 459.

³⁹"Attacks on the Church," Blackwood's, 733.

⁴⁰"Tory Views", Edinburgh Review, 458-59.

⁴¹Ibid., 465.

of-the-road policies of the Whigs. As a matter of fact, according to Kitson Clark, both the Whigs and the Tories, each essentially conservative, aimed at and achieved the continuation of aristocratic influence over British government for most of the nineteenth century.⁴²

As previously noted, Chancellor Brougham took a high-handed approach toward conservative High Churchmen. He threatened that a defeat of the Whig reform ministry would discredit the High Church party in the eyes of the people. Reformers would regain power, but the people would hold the Tories accountable. If the Whigs went down, so would the Church of England, and that permanently. Brougham maintained that the Whigs regarded the establishment as potentially useful and that High Churchmen unjustly called them enemies. If they would tow the line, the Whigs would save them. But perhaps with friends like that, the defenders of the establishment felt little need of enemies. As I have previously observed, scholarly opinion has varied regarding the religious orientation of the Whigs and their sincerity in reform.

The Westminster Review was more outspoken for reform, and even for disestablishment. They claimed more sincerity than the Whigs:

But the Whig will always be a Whig; and his ways will be past finding out, except by calculating

⁴²Clark, 25.

that wherever men are gathered together to let an abuse down gently, there will he be in the midst of them.⁴³

But they, too, wanted to direct reform and were apprehensive of popular extremism. They expressed concern lest government appropriation of the Establishment's property might induce the "ignorant people . . . to think no better of the rights of private property" than that of the despoiled church. They wanted it "riveted in the people's minds exact notions of the distinctions between the two,--of trust property on the one hand, held so long as the office shall be executed usefully for the public,--and private property on the other, purchased with the hardly-earned produce of labour"44

In the article "Church Establishments," the Westminster listed issues germane to the Establishment that had faced the last session of Parliament. Among them were proposals for commuting tithes and abolishing church-rates, for removing Jewish disabilities, and for allowing civil registration of births, deaths, and marriages. Other issues had concerned Sabbatarian laws, ending clerical pluralism, removing Anglican bishops from the House of Lords, and admitting Dissenters to universities.⁴⁵ The Westminster

⁴³"The Suffering Rich," Westminster Review 21 (April 1834): 266.

⁴⁴"Church Establishments," Westminster Review, 375.

⁴⁵Ibid., 372-73.

then asked the key question: "what has the Legislature to do with religion at all, except to protect men in its peaceful exercise?" Continuing the argument, it further cited the incongruity of a Parliament "composed of every shade of belief, -- Infidels, as the clergy complain huge numbers of the educated classes are in their hearts, Church-of-England men, Catholics, Presbyterians, Dissenters of all sorts" ruling on an Establishment. It stated that the position of the Church of England was untenable and that it would be in the best interest of High Churchmen to withdraw and retain "the power of regulating their own affairs." The writer further wondered why Anglican leaders had failed to correct such notorious abuses as clerical non-residence and pluralism which had offended "the common-sense notions of the people." He then disingenuously revealed the reason, the force of habit, "the hand will not quit its hold on the money-bags."⁴⁶

The position of the Westminster was that of Benthamite utility: it had praise for Dissent because, in its opinion, those ministers were more nearly meeting the spiritual needs of the people. It cited the experience of the United States of America regarding religious establishments and attempted to show that religion had thrived more in America under a voluntary system than it had in Britain. The Westminster

⁴⁶ibid., 373-74.

challenged frequently defensive and specious reasoning in the Quarterly Review article "Life of Dr. Adam Clarke" and, in general, clothed all its rhetoric in this assumption: "it is reasonable to ask whether the service is requisite, or what all men require."⁴⁷ Finally, the Westminster Review charged that in the "almost fifteen centuries" that religious establishments had been maintained, they had typically produced "pride and indolence in the clergy; ignorance and servility in the laity; in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution." The writer noted that Christian teachers generally referred to the early days of the Christian church, before it was aligned with any secular government, as its period of "greatest lustre." However, suggestions of returning to a state "in which its teachers depended on the voluntary rewards of their flocks" elicited predictions of the downfall of the church. The writer concluded: "On which side ought their testimony to have greatest weight, -- when for, or when against their interest?"⁴⁸ Thus the Westminster Review, representing Benthamism and philosophic radicalism, sounded a similar note to that of the Poor Man's Guardian in quest of "real Christianity." It should have validity in its usefulness in society.

⁴⁷"Church Monopoly," Westminster Review, 62-77; "Church Establishments," Westminster Review, 376.

⁴⁸"Church Monopoly," Westminster Review, 77.

Finally, relative to the debate surrounding passage of the New Poor Law, how did the political periodicals relate the issue to Christian churches? The Quarterly Review and Blackwood's reflected less a moral zeal regarding the church's right relationship to the care of the poor than an admonition that the clergy, as part of the landowning class perform its duties of noblesse oblige. It expressed concern lest "the magistrates, country gentlemen, and clergy fail to do their part, and take an active share, as guardians and vestrymen, in the business of the parishes or unions in which they reside." The conservative papers defended the "right of the poor to relief in destitution," but that relief was to be administered under the auspices of "the educated and wealthy among their neighbours," who were their "natural protectors."⁴⁹ David Roberts stated that "none of the Tory periodicals had anything but enthusiasm for the social mission of the church, long a pillar of feudal society," and Peter Marsh observed that while "the churchmanship of many Conservatives was undoubtedly inert, little more than an excuse for warding off unwelcome action by the state," generally the "religious earnestness and

⁴⁹"The New Poor-Law," Quarterly Review 52 (August 1834): 258-59.

quiet philanthropy of the country gentlemen and men of suburban property" was praiseworthy.⁵⁰

The conservative periodicals maintained that the destruction of the established church would result in the polarization of society. Blackwood's stated that liberals desired to sever "the great bond" which the established church supplied as upper and lower classes joined "in the feelings of common devotion, and the worship of God under one common roof."⁵¹ In my survey, such ideal visions of social harmony seemed inconsistent with fears expressed regarding incendiaryism in the countryside and concern over the churchgoing habits of the poor.

Blackwood's stated that the poor laws were "the noblest monument, as they were originally conceived, of Christian benevolence and political wisdom, that ever was reared by man." Furthermore, especially because the poor laws were set up soon after the Elizabethan Settlement had secured the Anglican establishment, the Church of England was linked historically to the right of Poor Law relief. The writer painted a rosy picture of the abundant provisions of the English poor law system and of the philanthropy that had

⁵⁰Roberts, 159; Peter Marsh, "The Conservative Conscience," in The Conscience of the Victorian State, 215-16.

⁵¹"Attacks on the Church," Blackwood's, 733.

burgeoned since the Evangelicals had revived the church.⁵²

The conservative journals found fault with the New Poor Law on many counts and felt that it would, in practice, be a dead letter, as the Factory Bill of 1833 seemed to be. However, they resolved, in May of 1834, to cooperate because they were supportive of the general concept of poor law relief, and they were grateful this had not been overthrown. They defended the Church's record in treatment of the poor; and taking the paternalistic role, the Quarterly Review defended the poor against the political economists. The writer stated that it was unfair to blame the poor for overpopulating when the abuse of the poor laws through the allowance system had allowed farmers to pay low wages, at the same time that it had encouraged large families. The Quarterly suggested emigration as a better solution to overpopulation than the Malthusian idea of teaching the poor "by starvation" to limit their offspring.⁵³ Roberts cited Tory ambivalence regarding the New Poor Law; they were not invariably opposed to it. While they resisted the "crassness" of political economy and feared the centralizing tendencies of the measure, their own selfish interest engaged their support. Roberts confirmed the conservative belief in an aristocratic society, and their view that

⁵²Ibid., 736.

⁵³"The New Poor-Law," Quarterly Review, 252, 258-59.

social equality was both distasteful and unproductive. There was a disparity between such Tory ideals and social realities. In Roberts's view Tory philanthropy was sincere, but they failed to adequately implement it in society.⁵⁴

In contrast to conservative views, radical Whig Member of Parliament, Thomas Spring-Rice, writing for the Edinburgh Review, disputed connecting the Church of England historically with poor law relief. He stated that the Elizabethan poor laws had been based not so much on benevolence as on practical politics--to prevent vagrancy and social unrest. He denied that the poor laws had assumed the former function of Roman Catholic monasteries. He wanted to avoid a connection between the "rights" of the poor to relief and the church's traditional role in caring for the poor. In fact, he stated that the poor law system could be traced "to statutes much more ancient." He conceded that the clergy had been called upon in the time of Elizabeth to assist by encouraging private liberality to the poor, but he noted that as time passed, "the aid of the secular arm seems to have been required."⁵⁵

⁵⁴Roberts, "Social Conscience," 158, 161, 164; David Roberts, "Tory Paternalism and Social Reform in Early Victorian England," in The Victorian Revolution: Government and Society in Victoria's Britain, ed. Peter Stansky (New York: New Viewpoints, Franklin Watts, 1973), 164.

⁵⁵"Poor Laws into Ireland," Edinburgh Review 59 (April 1834): 235-236.

The Westminster Review, in its article on "Christian Morality," praised concern for the poor and the breaking down of class barriers:

One man seeks things which are above: how? he shuts himself up in a cloister, and repeats words, with sacred names often intermingling therein. Another seeks the things which are above: how? he goes amongst men, in their daily avocations, and he promotes their loving one another as brethren, inasmuch as God hath made of one blood all nations of men. That is Christian elevation.

In the article, "Church Monopoly," the Westminster praised Dissenting ministers for caring for the poor more adequately than the ministers of the Establishment.⁵⁶ There seemed, however, to be a contradiction between such concern expressed for the poor in society and the tough principles of political economy. The Benthamite Utilitarians were the chief proponents of those principles, but many Tories and Whigs also accepted them in the form of the New Poor Law. Altick observed:

As for St. Paul's celebration of charity as the crowning Christian virtue, when Parson Malthus confronted the apostle, Malthus won hands down. The poor might always be with us, but their prolonged survival, as encumbrances to an earth with a perpetually limited yield of food, did not have to be encouraged by charity.⁵⁷

In describing the political controversies surrounding social conditions and religious beliefs in the "crisis" of

⁵⁶"Christian Morality," Westminster Review, 111; "Church Monopoly," Westminster Review, 62-77 passim.

⁵⁷Altick, 124.

1834, Halévy's thesis held that orthodox Christian faith, revived by evangelicalism, provided a stabilizing influence for British institutions. He stated that the events of 1834 "began the decline of the anti-clericalism which had so lately been transplanted to England under the disturbing influence of the Parisian Revolution."⁵⁸ Halévy observed that by the end of the year, as political intrigue engulfed the Whigs and their odd assortment of Irish, radical, and Dissenting allies, and conservatives rallied around Peel, the tide had turned. "The Church, so unpopular only two years before, was now in the eyes of the nation the symbol of its order and its unity." Halévy cited several reasons why the issue of reforming the establishment became less interesting, and even distasteful, to the public. First, the idea of reform became unpopular partly because the public connected it with Irish demands for church reform and therefore with Catholics. He further noted the division among the Dissenters themselves and the mutual disparity in the alliance of Whigs, Irish, radical, and Dissenting foes of the establishment. Moreover, the Whig leaders themselves lost enthusiasm for reforming the Establishment. Since, for the most part, they themselves lacked strong religious conviction, they had never felt much sympathy with either Anglican or Nonconformist evangelicals. Even though

⁵⁸Halévy, 144.

evangelical fervor diffused the varied ranks of their political constituency, they had tired of religious issues and could not seem to avoid insulting those with earnest religious views. Halévy also noted that the Oxford Movement was successful in uniting the friends of the Anglican church, as well as in dismaying the forces of Dissent, and that Evangelical revival within the establishment was actually already bringing about reform. Additionally, other issues, political and social, drew public attention; these included continued agitation for tax relief and for broadening the franchise, as well as concern for conditions of workers and the poor.⁵⁹

Political tension over issues concerning the Irish established church, with its implications for the English establishment, and which briefly ousted the Whigs from government, overshadowed discussion and passage of the Poor Law Amendment Bill. Although there was disagreement over the centralizing tendencies and the laissez-faire principles of the New Poor Law, there was sufficient alarm about the ruinous effect of the abused poor relief system on the treasury, to prompt the necessary consensus. Therefore the

⁵⁹Ibid., 152-82.

New Poor Law was passed with very little opposition in Parliament.⁶⁰ More public opposition would follow.

The political periodical discourse in 1834 demonstrated the interplay of religious and social concerns. The Tory journals, defending a church establishment on trial, seem to protest too much. Roberts has stressed their essential sincerity, if partial romantic self-delusion. The Whigs present an enigmatic picture of "public men," sporting the reform label. Best has upheld their integrity to their own principles; Brent has insisted the picture was a complex one of generational change in terms of religious influence on political philosophy. The Benthamite Utilitarians, generally regarded as the sworn foes of religion, present to the modern reader a surprisingly engaging picture of ideal religion, one that is, not surprisingly, gauged by its usefulness to the people.

⁶⁰Thomas William Heyck, The Peoples of the British Isles: A New History from 1688-1870, vol. 2 (Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth Publishing, 1992), 312-13; Halévy, 127-29 and 174.

CHAPTER VI

THE RELIGIOUS PRESS AND THE CHURCHES

As was the case with regard to the workingmen's press and the political periodicals, "true" Christianity was a recurrent theme in religious periodicals in 1834. Related to these discussions was the theme of liberty, in reference to the freeing of Dissenters from restrictions on their civil rights, as well as the freeing of the people in general from the domination of nonrepresentative ecclesiastical and political systems. It was in the latter context that the issues of national education and concern for the poor arose.

Religious periodicals in 1834 reflected social and political turmoil which involved the churches. Every religious group felt it was essential to have its views articulated by a journal or newspaper.¹ In a period when the purpose of religion in society was being questioned and redefined, each periodical, whether purposefully or not, presented an image of the church's appropriate role. Earnest, and frequently polemical, dialogue demonstrated the centrality of religion in pre-Victorian British life. The

¹Josef L. Altholz, The Religious Press in Britain, 1760-1900 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 1.

established church of England was represented most prominently by the British Critic and the Christian Remembrancer. The most respectable voice of the evangelical wing of the establishment was the Christian Observer; the most controversial and influential, the Record. The Eclectic Review addressed Nonconformity in general, and the Monthly Repository reflected the views of many Unitarians and freethinkers. Protestant groups are the focus of this study. Although Parliament had passed the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829, anti-Catholic rhetoric remained prominent, and "no popery" was frequently a stalking-horse in the religious and political discussion of the period. The periodicals I have surveyed upheld Halévy's "crisis" construct concerning the events of 1834 which pertained to religion.

The image of the established Church of England was multi-faceted. In the crucial year 1834, the British Critic and the Christian Remembrancer reflected the views of the High Church party within the Anglican establishment. The wealthy Tory faction of that party, called the "'high-and-dry'" Church, was more interested in protecting the property and legally established status of the Church of England than with piety. The "old High Church" faction, on the other hand, based its esteem for the religious establishment on "solid piety of a truly English, understated sort." The former group's opinions found expression in various Tory

political papers, especially in the "scurrilous" newspaper John Bull. The latter group had its counterpart to the saintly Evangelical Clapham sect in the Hackney phalanx, and it was they who sponsored the British Critic and the Christian Remembrancer.²

As was typical of many religious periodicals, the original purpose of the British Critic, which began in 1793, was to "combat revolutionary tendencies and defend the Church." The quarterly publication of the British Critic gave it prestige and intellectual standing, but it also restricted its group of readers.³ It had been the ambitious early goal of the British Critic to provide more comprehensive criticism of literature than the more "modern" reviews, such as the Edinburgh, but by 1834, specifically religious matter had come to dominate the pages of the British Critic. In that year a change in policy caused the "Ecclesiastical Record" section to move away from listing clerical preferments to providing an omnibus of events and issues relating to "the ecclesiastical constitution of the country, in the hour of trial -- the hour of peril --, and, it may be, the hour of subversion."⁴ Interestingly, the

²Ibid., 23.

³Ibid., 11, 23.

⁴Alvin Sullivan, British Literary Magazines: The Romantic Age, 1789-1836 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), 57-58; "Ecclesiastical Record," British Critic, 4th ser., 15 (January 1834): 227.

British Critic itself would be caught up in the "church crisis," and would become the organ of the Oxford movement by 1838 under the editorship of John Henry Newman. Meanwhile, the monthly Christian Remembrancer, was more broadly representative of High Church views, but because its style was "distinguished, rather heavy, and 'conservatively orthodox,'" it was read primarily by clergymen.⁵

The British Critic and the Christian Remembrancer portrayed the "true" church restraining dangerous elements in society. Accordingly, the British Critic chided the high church group's false security and lethargy in not responding to attacks "from within and from without." It stated that "although a genuine, sterling, Christianity contains within itself a vital and indestructible power," the church stood presently in need of reinvigoration. Particularly threatening onslaughts against the church had come through the press:

The last few years are pregnant [with] active and unremitting assaults: they suffered their adversaries to gain an almost entire possession of the press, to win the ear and heart of the people, simply by their superior energy, and the fact of telling the same story until the public mind could receive no other⁶

⁵Altholz, 25.

⁶"Projects of Instruction by the State," British Critic, 4th ser., 15 (April 1834): 495.

According to the Christian Remembrancer, "an evil spirit is abroad" in the land, incorporating "the idolatry of the Papists -- the errors of Dissenters -- the charlatanism of the Fanatics." It included "Infidelity, with all its accompanying train of 'sedition, privy-conspiracy, and rebellion.'" The Christian Remembrancer pledged its continued faithfulness in setting forth sound doctrine and encouraging loyalty to the throne.¹

Revealing division within the religious establishment itself, however, were the Low Church, or Evangelical, periodicals. While many believers had left the Church of England for Nonconformist Wesleyan Methodism, many retained their evangelical convictions within the relatively broad confines of the Anglican fellowship. Wesley himself had remained within the Establishment. The Christian Observer had been founded by members of the socially eminent and politically influential Clapham Sect. It was this group that had used political pressure to reform English society to a new standard of seriousness and respectability, its most notable achievements being the abolition of slavery and factory legislation. The diffuse nature of the revival spirit and the evangelicals' habit of cooperating in interdenominational benevolent and missionary societies

¹"Address," Christian Remembrancer 16 (January 1834): 1, 3.

alarmed High Church Anglicans even while their Low Church brethren protested loyalty.

Evangelicals had tried to take the high road and had been conspicuously loyal to the Establishment in the years following the French Revolution. When the Quarterly Review had attempted to connect the poet William Cowper's depression and suicide to his evangelical religious enthusiasms, the Christian Observer had deplored "the evils of religious controversy" which tended to divide brothers and besmirch the image of Christian love in the eyes of unbelievers.⁸ Geoffrey Best observed that berating Evangelicals had become a popular pastime for the British Critic and Christian Remembrancer and that they thus demonstrated "stupidity and arrogance" in provoking hostility from the "fastest growing party in the Church of England," the Evangelicals. Such actions eventually forced the Christian Observer, to react to the High Church rhetoric. The Observer became characterized by a "liberal and reformist" tone and was a "consistent friend to the oppressed and suffering." Thus it had given cautious approval to Brougham's inquiry into church abuses and had

⁸"Review of Reviews--The Quarterly Review on Cowper's Letters," Christian Observer 24 (August 1824): 508 and 511.

opposed the "fashionable idealization" by the High Church of the country parish.⁹

But the threat posed to the Church of England by the "church crisis" drove the Evangelicals back toward the Establishment. The Christian Observer joined most Anglican Evangelicals in ending its ties with the Whigs during the 1830s, and especially after 1834. "Remaining Evangelical Whigs, in fact, became suspect. Peelite Conservatism seemed a bulwark of true religion."¹⁰ Overall, the Christian Observer presented Evangelical Anglicans as "sincere and faithful friends of the Church of England, and distinguished for a consistent adherence to her doctrines and discipline."¹¹ As "the principal organ of the Anglican evangelicals," the monthly Christian Observer maintained dignified charity toward its journalistic enemies, even joining debate with such illustrious adversaries as the liberal Edinburgh Review. The circulation of the Christian Observer, however, was relatively small, "a modest one thousand."¹²

⁹G. F. A. Best, Temporal Pillars: Queen Anne's Bounty, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and the Church of England (Cambridge at the University Press, 1964), 242-44.

¹⁰D. W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 99.

¹¹"Cowper's Letters," Christian Observer, 511.

¹²Altholz, 16-17.

Attracting greater attention with its polemics was the biweekly Evangelical newspaper the Record. The Record established its redoubtable reputation in the crisis atmosphere of 1834, by being the first periodical to attack the Oxford Movement. In a year when many were seeking to define the "true church," the Tractarians sought to ground the legitimacy of the Anglican establishment in the idea of apostolical succession. The disputatious Presbyterian editor of the Record, Alexander Haldane, had to grant that among his readers "many Anglican Evangelicals were devoted to episcopacy," but he maintained that this issue was not as important in defining the church as was zealous biblicism. Although the Christian Observer also condemned the Tracts, it lamented the Record's rancorous tone. The Record, however, was powerful--enough so in late 1834, to effect the cancellation of Cabinet Sunday dinners which, the Record claimed, profaned the Sabbath. While much of its readership, at its height, "about 4,000, of Evangelical clergymen and lay activists," deplored its tactics, they read it for its indispensable detailed reporting of religious news. Altholz stated that it was unfortunate that the Record became synonymous with the least attractive

aspects of Evangelicalism, presenting a harsh and dogmatic image of the church.¹³

My survey found that the rhetoric of the Evangelical Record in defense of "true" Christianity, was, at this period, at least no more harsh than that of its High Church counterparts, the British Critic and the Christian Remembrancer. The Record's passion was for the "revival of true religion" by the work of the Holy Spirit within the established church. Such a revival would mark the church as God's own.¹⁴ The Record felt duty bound to expose "whatsoever was unsound or untrue," particularly the practices of Roman Catholics and Unitarians, or Socinians. The former it identified with "the Man of Sin"; the latter with "an inflated and ambitious sect, which professes to reform Christianity by expunging from the Sacred Volume its fundamental truths." In the Record's view, "Christian and true charity is that which warns you of the evil, though it be dear to you." Curiously, in the same breath with which it scolded the Tractarians and excoriated Roman Catholics, the Record exhibited a certain latitude to sincere religious

¹³Josef L. Altholz, "Alexander Haldane, the Record, and Religious Journalism," Victorian Periodical Review 20, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 25-26.

¹⁴Donald M. Lewis, Lighten Their Darkness: The Evangelical Mission to Working-Class London, 1828-1860 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), p. 26.

Dissenters, to those whose heartfelt religious calling was based on grace:

On the other hand, do we not all acknowledge that "no man can call Jesus Lord BUT BY THE HOLY GHOST?" That the Spirit of God alone can make "able ministers of the New Testament." Looking at the worthies of the Scottish and foreign Churches, and among our Dissenting brethren in times past and present, can we hesitate to admit that they have known and loved the Gospel, and preached it with all boldness and faithfulness, while the Spirit has borne testimony to their labours in the conversation and salvation of their hearers. . . . How, then, if these things be, can we attempt to build on a foundation which would exclude these men from the communion of saints, . . . while it would place on at least equal ground with ourselves that apostate Church which is drunk with the blood of the saints and branded with the curse of God? How can we assume ground on which we shall stand solitary and alone, with the exception of "the Man of Sin," and separate ourselves . . . from the entire body of the spiritual Church of Christ?¹⁵

Beyond the pale of the divided and embattled Church of England lay the reaches of Nonconformity or Dissent. Old Dissent, tracing its origins back to the Puritan secession at the time of the Restoration, consisted principally of Congregationalists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. Unitarianism had replaced English Presbyterianism in the eighteenth century. But because Unitarians did not accept the Trinity or the divinity of Christ, many orthodox Christians did not, as noted above, regard them as

¹⁵"British Society for Promoting the Religious Principles of the Reformation," Record (16 January 1834), 3; "Socinian Endowments," Record (27 January 1834), 2; "The Record," Record (5 and 9 December 1834): 4, 3.

Christians. The eighteenth century evangelical revival had produced the New Dissent, predominantly Methodists. Following John Wesley's example of loyalty to the Church of England, for quite some time many Methodists continued to consider themselves part of the established church. They scheduled their services in order not to conflict with those of the Anglicans and tended to regard themselves as supplying the evangelical deficiencies of the Establishment rather than working against it. Most of the Methodist leaders were loyal Tories. However, the Establishment was not eager to accept Methodists, with their use of lay ministry. Old and New Dissent together claimed approximately the same number of active adherents as the Church of England.¹⁶

The most illustrious periodical representing Nonconformity in general was the Eclectic Review. The Eclectic appeared monthly, but its literary and intellectual quality approximated that of the more expensive quarterlies. Its writers were the "intellectual aristocrats of Nonconformity" and included such secular luminaries as James Mill. Although the Eclectic was of such eminence, it sold for a deliberately low price in an effort to attract as many readers as possible; they came principally from "the lower-

¹⁶Altholz, 57; E. E. Kellett, "The Press," in Early Victorian England: 1830-1865, vol. 2, ed. G. M. Young (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 84.

middle and lower class literate." Though its directors were Nonconformists, principally Congregationalists, the Eclectic typically dealt with religious subjects only in conjunction with other issues of current interest. However, the profits from the Eclectic went to the British and Foreign Bible Society, and Alvin Sullivan has acknowledged that "the underlying religious and philosophical tenets of its authors may have shaped its readership and affected its tone." But Sullivan emphasized that the Eclectic "steadfastly resisted denominational attachments" and generally demonstrated "remarkable tolerance" for other religious groups, including Roman Catholics and Jews. In addition, the Eclectic was a steady supporter of "various kinds of reform, political, social, and ecclesiastical."¹⁷

With all this being said, however, in 1834, even the pages of the Eclectic reflected religious crisis. The Eclectic denied that Dissenters had created "the prevalent hostility against the Church Establishment"; rather, it charged that the system was inherently unjust and

¹⁷Altholz, 58; Sullivan, 124, 126-27, 130-31. Sullivan claimed that under the editorship (1814-36) of Josiah Conder, a Congregationalist layman, the Eclectic strayed from its commitment to "'absolute neutrality' in religious matters." Altholz, however, dated this departure from "studied moderation" from the time of Conder's sale of the journal in 1837 to Thomas Price, a well known Baptist minister.

that rebellion was inevitable against its yoke.¹⁸ Its pages depicted two churches, "the Church of the Aristocracy and the Church of the people." The former church was on trial, charged with being "a political institution . . . , governed by barons spiritual, allied by blood or interest to the nobility, . . . and looked to as a means of provision for the younger sons of the church-proprietors." The writer praised the Church of the people as that "which the people have provided for themselves, which they shew that they prefer by voluntarily supporting it, and to the doctrines of which they adhere, from conviction, without either the compulsion of statutes, or the bribery of secular advantages." This, then, was the "true" church, the one that the people freely choose. Moreover, Protestant Dissent was claiming a majority of the nation's churchgoers.¹⁹ Donald Lewis argued that although the Anglican establishment had almost reached a minority status in 1830, it had begun to revive by that time and was beginning to catch up with the gains evangelical Nonconformity had made at its expense. Such a resurgence made Dissenters even more resentful of the Establishment's claims of exclusive privilege.²⁰ While

¹⁸"Claims and Opinions of the Dissenters," Eclectic Review, 3d ser., 11 (January 1834): 44-5.

¹⁹"Established and Voluntary Churches," Eclectic Review, 3d ser., 11 (April 1834): 320.

²⁰Lewis, 26-27.

Dissenters viewed voluntarism as a crucial aspect of "true" religion, they were eager to stress that their evangelical dedication to "the free propagation of the Gospel, and the final triumph of the kingdom of Christ" transcended mere political rights.²¹

Similar to the Eclectic Review, by 1834 the Monthly Repository, under the editorship of William Johnson Fox, also purposed to treat religious subjects only as they applied to secular concerns. However, in 1834, as I have demonstrated, religion was frequently at the center stage of social and political issues. Fox had gradually turned the pages of the Unitarians' chief periodical organ away from sectarian issues. He wanted to use the power of the press to advance a social agenda focused on improving the condition of the British people through education.²² He appealed to Unitarians, known for their intellectual and political leadership and their espousal of radical causes, to support him, but traditional Unitarians were offended by Fox's secularization of the Monthly Repository, as well as by his controversial views concerning divorce and the condition of women.²³

²¹"The Designs of the Dissenters," Eclectic Review, 3d ser., 11 (April 1834): 310-11.

²²Altholz, 73.

²³Ibid., 72; Mineka, Francis E., The Dissidence of Dissent: The Monthly Repository, 1806-1838 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944): 22, 256.

The Monthly Repository's circulation at its height in 1834 was around a thousand copies, which Francis Mineka observed, was not "despicable" in comparison with other periodicals of the day, but nevertheless underscored the fact that the Monthly Repository was "chiefly a labor of love." While the Monthly Repository commanded literary respect, it had lost many Unitarian subscribers. Its radicalism was offensive to the middle classes, while its price and intellectual level placed it beyond most of the working classes.²⁴

The idealistic and elusive image of true Christianity set forth on the pages of the Monthly Repository was what set Fox apart from traditional Unitarian heterodoxy. He deplored the "selfish interest" and "popular prejudice" which he saw too often in religious groups, whether in the Established Church or in Dissent. In the Monthly Repository, Fox urged that Unitarians employ their faith, not as "'a string of negations,'" but as a positive statement of "'the great and universally allowed principles of religion and morality.'" He wanted the name Unitarian to represent "'the power of a body of intelligent, wealthy and influential persons,'" who would "'in conjunction with like-minded men of other classes, take the lead of public opinion'" in order to produce a better society. For Fox,

²⁴Mineka, 364-65.

this would constitute "true" Christianity. He lamented the reactionary spirit of those who opposed his activist use of the pages of the Repository and his efforts to set up city missions. In his view, religion should seek the betterment of people. "'This advocacy is their mission, and I verily believe that they will flourish or fall, as they ought, in proportion as it is discharged or neglected.'"²⁵

There was, in fact, a correspondence between the views of W. J. Fox and the Benthamite Utilitarians. John Bowring, a well known Unitarian layman and editor of the Westminster Review, was a contributor to the Monthly Repository. Fox and John Stuart Mill were close associates during the 1830s. Mill's frequent contributions to the Repository illustrated the contemporary interaction of religious, social, and political concerns. I have previously noted the Westminster Review's approbation of Fox's "moral philosophy." In the opening issue of the Westminster Review, in 1824, Fox had been asked to write the lead article; in it he rejoiced in the fact that in public affairs there was increasing concern for the good of "the people at large."²⁶ Though Fox did not continue to write for the Westminster, he did embrace many of the ideas of the Philosophical Radicals, particularly the

²⁵Ibid., 254, 257-58.

²⁶Ibid., 185-86.

Benthamite principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

Because of the frequent coincidence of their views, public opinion tended to identify Unitarians with Utilitarians in a context of extreme rationalism. Both groups had difficulty reconciling their humanitarian concerns with their scientific belief in the principles of political economy. Having encouraged missions to the poor in London and other cities, even against the protests of fellow Unitarians, Fox was more sympathetic toward the poor than the Utilitarians. Unlike the Evangelicals, both Unitarians and Utilitarians "believed in the perfectibility of man and society," and were unimpeded by the concepts of original sin and natural depravity.²⁷

In the aftermath of the French Revolution and the Reform Bill of 1832, much of the public dialogue concerned liberty. Part of the outcry against the Old Corruption had been directed at "priestcraft" in league with aristocracy, and in Britain, as we have seen in the workingmen's and the political press, there were consistent calls for reform of the Church of England or even for its disestablishment. Critics brought two principal charges against the religious establishment. It abridged the civil rights of Dissenters, and it was an oppressively expensive establishment that was

²⁷Ibid., 145.

not effectively ministering to the true needs of the British people, especially in an expanding industrial society.

As might be expected, in the crucial year, 1834, the British Critic and the Christian Remembrancer were devoted to the defense of the Church of England "in this her hour of peril."²⁸ The Critic defended the establishment as the promoter of social order:

We assume, that a National Church is instituted for the good of all the nation: and that all the inhabitants of a country do actually derive a specific benefit from an established religion, as much as an established government. We affirm that a sound and scriptural Religion, standing between profaneness and fanaticism, upholding the State, and upheld by the State in turn, does more for the peace, the good order, the public and private virtue, the public and private happiness of an empire, than all its civil enactments and all its municipal police.²⁹

Chancellor Brougham and the Whig government would have agreed. The Critic went on to state, however, that if the established church provided such a salutary service to the nation, "the Dissenter, or the Infidel" should not object to being taxed for its maintenance.³⁰ This idea would be offensive to the Whigs' Dissenting allies. The Christian Remembrancer voiced the classic Tory connection of "Altar

²⁸"Address," Christian Remembrancer, 4.

²⁹"Ecclesiastical Record: "Question of Church Rates," British Critic, 4th ser., 15 (April 1834): 498.

³⁰Ibid.

and Throne," and that the "very existence of the latter depends on the stability of the former."³¹

Both the British Critic and the Christian Remembrancer expressed feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty as to pending actions by the alliance of Whigs and Dissenters in the current government: "Events are coming, but their shadows only are cast before them. . . . This is not merely a darkness which may be felt, but which may be felt with very uncomfortable sensations of misgiving and doubt."³² Regarding the machinations of Dissenters, the British Critic opined that it was impossible to satisfy them, short of disestablishment. Merely redressing grievances would not "reconcile two principles which are contradictory in their very essence." Recognizing the difficulty of untangling religious and political problems, it stated:

We must exercise all kindness and charity in our intercourse with the Dissenters, as man with man and Christian with Christian; but remembering that the question of a Church Establishment is a question partly religious and partly civil, we cannot surrender to them one jot of religious truth, or even of political principle.³³

³¹"Address," Christian Remembrancer, 3.

³²"Ecclesiastical Record," British Critic, 4th ser., 15 (April 1834): 496; "Bishop of Exeter's Charge," Christian Remembrancer 16 (January 1834): 21.

³³"Ecclesiastical Record: The Grievances of the Dissenters," British Critic, 4th ser., (April 1834): 498-99.

The Christian Remembrancer, however, gave the critics of the Church of England short shrift, describing them as "noisy and unscrupulous."³⁴ It carried a particularly scathing review of a notable address by the Nonconformist minister Thomas Binney, calling the work "contemptible," and full of "folly and ignorance." Binney's own words had been inflammatory:

It is with me, I confess, a matter of deep, serious, religious conviction, that the Established Church is a great national evil; that it is an obstacle to the progress of truth and godliness in the land; that IT DESTROYS MORE SOULS THAN IT SAVES; and that, therefore, its end is most devoutly to be wished by every LOVER OF GOD AND MAN. Right or wrong, this is my belief; and I should not feel the slightest offence if a Churchman were to express himself to me in precisely the same words with respect to Dissent.

The Remembrancer observed that "ravings like these would deserve no notice, did not the professed organs of Dissent echo the cry, and repeat, 'This is the truth, whatever some half-hearted Dissenters may say.'³⁵

The battle was joined, and the Remembrancer said that neutrality was no longer an option. The enemies of the Church of England should stand forth openly. The Remembrancer wished to distinguish the "religious and

³⁴"Simeon's Horae Homileticae," Christian Remembrancer 16 (January 1834): 7.

³⁵"Mr. Binney's Address," Christian Remembrancer 16 (February 1834): 69-70. Bebbington (98-99) observed that Binney's statements were taken out of their intended context and distorted.

conscientious dissenters," such as the Wesleyan Methodists, from the "enemies of the church," such as the Dissenters aligned with radical politics, so that they might together resist those who would destroy "Gospel truth and Gospel morals."³⁶

A particular embarrassment to the Church of England, often cited by its enemies, was the division within its camp caused by the reforming zeal of the Evangelical party. Accordingly, the British Critic took exception to what it characterized as "acrimony" and exclusivity in the evangelical sermons of the Rev. Henry Gipps, in which he accused non-evangelical clergy of being "false ministers." The Critic, no doubt correctly, noted the predilection of the Evangelical newspaper, the Record, though "yet within the pale of the establishment," for judgment against High Church practices. They claimed that the Record, freely employing such epithets as "'abominable and destructive,'" was more censorious against the High Church than against any Dissenters, except the Unitarians.³⁷ The Critic feared that such party strife was betraying the established church to its enemies, "the watchful sectarian" and the "scornful unbeliever." Through the pages of the Record, many of the

³⁶"Bishop of Exeter's Charge," Christian Remembrancer, 24.

³⁷"Gipps's Sermons, Internal State of the Church," British Critic, 4th ser., 15 (January 1834): 272-74.

Establishment's own Evangelical ministers were accusing other Anglican clergy of not performing their duties either in public or in private life. Furthermore, some Evangelical clergy were showing favor to the voluntary principle. Utilitarians and Infidels readily echoed the Record's charges.³⁸

The Critic also bemoaned the tendency of evangelicals within and without the establishment to cooperate in benevolent and missionary societies and even to fill each other's pulpits, while the "Evangelical Episcopalians . . . will not admit their brethren in the church to the pulpits which they occupy, from a dread of "unsound discourses." The British Critic feared that it was the Dissenters' strategy to divide and weaken "the two parties in the establishment" by openly attacking one and "enticing" the other.³⁹

To those who would compromise with Dissenters, the High Church periodicals presented once again the claims of the Establishment that its priests' commissions were "from Christ himself through an apostolical succession." Further defense of this apostolic succession, as proof that the Anglican was the "true" church, was offered to those whose confidence might be waning. The Remembrancer favorably

³⁸"Simeon's Horae Homileticae," Christian Remembrancer, 5.

³⁹Ibid.

reviewed a book tracing "ancient records" to prove "that Bishops have existed in the island from the earliest dawn of Christianity," and citing "agreement of the ancient with the modern British Church."⁴⁰ The British Critic blamed the church crisis on the cosmopolitanism of an "intellectual and theoretical age," which tempted men to forsake the time honored British ways for untried paths. It pleaded for patience with human weakness in the Establishment and fairness in looking at its advantages.⁴¹ However, just as the Whig and Benthamite had difficulty perceiving the honest religious scruples of true believers and saw only cant, so many in the High Church party were blind to the sincere critics of the establishment and tended to see only "false friends" or "enemies." So the Church of England was a persecuted church, but not forsaken by a loyal "silent majority," and even by laymen who were "everywhere forming committees of an 'Association of the Friends of the Church.'" Both The Christian Remembrancer and the British Critic looked for the hand of Providence in the situation, the Remembrancer referring to a "wholesome chastisement," and the Critic seeing in the "united" onslaught of "popery, infidelity, and schism," the grounds for Anglican unity:

⁴⁰"The Church and the Methodists," Christian Remembrancer 15 (December 1833): 705, 713-14; "Literary Report," Christian Remembrancer 16 (August 1834): 487.

⁴¹"Ecclesiastical Record: Grievances of Dissenters," British Critic, 499.

As in a civil governance . . . nothing is more occasion of war than overmuch peace; so in the Church . . . nothing more ceaseth private contentions oftentimes rising among them than the public cross of persecution.⁴²

As noted above, The Christian Observer, in speaking for the Low Church party in the Establishment, regarded itself as the loyal opposition. Evangelicals believed in the established church, but they believed it should be made more fervent and more biblical. It had, in fact, been the Evangelicals who had infused the Church of England with fresh religious zeal and benevolence. Kenneth Hylson-Smith has noted of the benevolent work of the Anglican Evangelicals that "its volume and range were bewildering and impressive," and he claimed that it "was largely undertaken on an interdenominational or non-denominational basis."⁴³ However, the Christian Observer and the more aggressive Record, despite the common evangelical thread, remained critical of Dissent at the same time that they rebuked the High Church's latitudinarian tendencies.

As noted previously in this study, many historians have argued that the Clapham Sect had taken pains to demonstrate loyalty to the Establishment in the period following the

⁴²"Simeon's Horae Homileticae," Christian Remembrancer, 7; "Bishop of Exeter's Charge," Christian Remembrancer, 21.

⁴³Kenneth Hylson-Smith, Evangelicals in the Church of England: 1734-1984 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 203; Ian Bradley, The Call to Seriousness (New York: Macmillan Co., 1976), 37-44, 119-26, 135-44.

French Revolution, even though High Church hostility voiced by the British Critic and Christian Remembrancer had driven the Christian Observer toward sympathy with liberal causes, at least up until the crisis of 1834. I have also presented the argument that in the 1830s the more radical group of Evangelicals represented by the Record became notable as strong defenders of a purified Establishment. One of the reasons why Evangelicals were so eager to reform the church was so that it might be less vulnerable to its enemies. Thus the Record stated the need for legislative reforms which would permit Churchmen to build churches to accommodate the rapidly growing urban population with as little administrative encumbrance as the Dissenters. The Record further observed that much of the success of Dissenting ministers had come through the conducting of "cottage" meetings, and they asked that the Establishment "license temporary places of divine worship." They believed that such action would improve the image of the Church of England in the eyes of the people and quiet its critics.⁴⁴

The Eclectic Review, as a voice of Nonconforming Dissent, struggled in 1834 with its editorial policy of rarely dealing specifically with religious subjects; it dealt with religion in the political context of liberty. In

⁴⁴"Building of Churches," Record (20 January 1834): 3; "Church Home Missionary Society," Record (30 January 1834): 3.

discussing the difficulties the Whig government was facing in trying "to mediate between a people calling for Reform, and a Court and Church opposed to all liberal concessions," the Eclectic acknowledged the frustration Dissent was feeling: "Men of the independent party hoped more from it."⁴⁵ In reviewing several books relating to issues concerning established religion, the Eclectic emphasized the fundamental unfairness of compelling citizens to support through tithes and church-rates a church they did not want. Thus, though the particular civil grievances for which Dissenters were asking redress were vexing to them, the principle went much deeper. While it might seem that in the "church crisis," people were arguing about "pure abstractions, Orthodoxy, Episcopacy, Independence, Country, Church and State, the Voluntary Principle," the violation of religious conscience was a serious matter which might ultimately drive the people to rebellion.⁴⁶

The Eclectic then exhorted Dissenters to use their influence and franchise, their power as "the great middle class," to avoid being once again subject to "Tory misrule." Adhering to its reputation for broadmindedness, the Eclectic, acknowledged the hard work and respectability of

⁴⁵"The Crisis," Eclectic Review, 3d ser., 12 (December 1834): 509 and 516.

⁴⁶"Claims and Opinions of the Dissenters," Eclectic Review, 43-44.

the poorly paid Anglican "working curate," but deplored the ecclesiastical hierarchy that gave pluralistic and non-resident preferments to the upper clergy, calling such practices "an insult to Christianity."⁴⁷

The Monthly Repository joined the Eclectic Review in citing the injustice of an established church, but as the maverick organ of a heterodox Dissent, the Repository carried the appeal for liberty further. It hoped that the subject of church reform would not merely be a battle "between the established sect and the non-established sects." While upholding the right of Dissenters, in their "various denominations," to "vindicate their civil rights," the Repository hoped that they would seek such liberties, not for themselves alone, but for all those who were bound by the Establishment's "compulsory conformity." The Repository cited "Freethinking Christians" and the "many thousands of unbelievers in the country" who also yearned for religious liberty, and further heretically suggested, not only freedom from the prescribed Anglican marriage ceremony, but the liberalization of divorce laws. The Monthly Repository celebrated "true religion" which "is not

⁴⁷"The Crisis," Eclectic Review, 516; "Claims and Opinions of the Dissenters," Eclectic Review, 45-46.

exclusively attached to any sect or system," but a blend of religion and philosophy."⁴⁸

In the "church crisis" of 1834, the Repository feared the half-way measures that the Whig government would offer to conciliate the Dissenters, and it feared a compromise between the Establishment and Dissenters that would overlook the broader principles of liberty. The Repository believed in "the People, -- the peaceful, forbearing, trusting, generous, determined people," and that freedom lay in politically educating and empowering them through a broader franchise.⁴⁹ The panacea for the national ills was, to the Repository, the secular education of the people. It demanded of Parliament whether "that huge mass of property, which is now unworthily held by the [Anglican] hierarchy, continue to be so perverted, or be applied to its legitimate purpose, the intellectual and moral culture of the entire population?" The Repository employed particularly scathing words to condemn the religious establishment's insistence on keeping universities closed to Dissenters:

This exclusion is a notable specimen of the manner in which the Established Church has discharged its trust, and employed the funds which were forfeited by the Catholic hierarchy. . . . See what a sink

⁴⁸"Critical Notices: An Essay on the Moral Constitution and History of Man," Monthly Repository, n.s., 8 (June 1834): 383; "The Case of the Dissenters," Monthly Repository, n.s. 8 (January 1834): 63.

⁴⁹"Forwards or Backwards?" Monthly Repository, n. s., 8 (January 1834): 3-4.

of iniquity has been made of a fountain of knowledge, by the filthy trampling therein of clerical hoofs. . . . The minor offence against Dissenters is made a kindness by the major offence against the public.⁵⁰

The Monthly Repository proposed the dissemination of "useful knowledge" to the lower classes through a system of "National School-Rooms," which might even utilize church facilities were it not for the objections of those who exercise "a zealous watchfulness over the interests of the Church." The Repository charged that such reforms would be defeated by political foot-dragging:

But the Aristocracy has a great sympathy with the drones [of the Church]. And the Government has a great sympathy with the Aristocracy. Therefore it is that the hum of the Bishop of London's orthodoxy, and the buz of the Bishop of Exeter's piety, will be listened to with an edifying reverence, --- not to call it a holy awe.

The writer hoped that "such humbuz, alias humbug" could be overcome and expressed optimism regarding the educability and virtue of the people. He stated that religionists had failed to educate, and that in fact "pious frauds," employing "superstition and fanaticism" "had atheized and demoralized the public mind," rather than opening it up to the "purer truth" of reason.⁵¹

⁵⁰"The Case of the Dissenters," Monthly Repository, 63, 66.

⁵¹"The Diffusion of Knowledge amongst the People," Monthly Repository, n. s., 8 (January 1834): 14-19.

The Monthly Repository presented reasons why, contrary to the defenses made by Bishop Blomfield and the periodicals favorable to the Establishment, the Church of England could not effectively educate the people. It charged that the priests do not apply the Scripture to "the real morality of life," but to sectarian interests, and the churches are too divisively sectarian and too politically connected. In fact, the religious establishment's endorsement of the "taxes on knowledge" belied its desire to be the educator of the people. Furthermore, "with a people universally and well taught in their youth can there be a doubt that religion and morality would thrive, even though the support of places of worship should be left solely to voluntary contribution?"⁵²

E. R. Norman, in defending the Establishment's intentions toward educating the people, stated that "popular education was proclaimed in almost every episcopal Charge in the first half of the nineteenth century." In answer to those who have pejoratively portrayed social control as the Establishment's goal in education, he replied that preserving attitudes of deference reflected the social values of everyone in society except the most radical. He maintained that such schools also provided "elementary

⁵²"On the Bishop of London's Defence of the Church Establishment," Monthly Repository, n. s., 8 (April 1834): 250-58.

vocational training" and stated that "this sort of instruction was very much a preparation for the world as it was. Norman further stated that the Establishment's educational agenda aimed, above and beyond social control, at inculcating virtue for, not just the present, but the eternal welfare of the people." He observed that while Establishment and Dissent could not agree on the appropriate content of education for the poor, "few outside the circle of the philosophical radicals could envisage an educational scheme not associated with religious instruction."⁵³ My study revealed much heated rhetoric on the part of both secularists and religionists regarding the education issue. Certainly, the orthodox Christian groups feared a public loss of spiritual values, but their quarreling over the type of religious instruction that should be offered obstructed needed progress and thus gave ground to the secularists' charges against them.

The orthodox religious periodicals I surveyed generally concurred in connecting the discussion of a needed reform in the administration of the poor laws to the effective education of the people. They agreed in favoring the more rigorous approach of the New Poor Law in order to do away with fraud and promote virtue among the poor. While the

⁵³E. R. Norman, Church and Society in England, 1770-1970: A Historical Study (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976): 56 and 59-61.

Monthly Repository exalted secular education as the ultimate answer to the problem of poverty, the British Critic insisted on the necessity of education dispensed by the legally established church.⁵⁴ Noting that for many years they had opposed the Old Poor Law as "a most serious evil to the nation," the Christian Observer praised its amendment as an "admirable measure."⁵⁵ The pages of the Record in 1834 spoke primarily of their zeal for Sabbatarian laws and their opposition to the admission of Dissenters to universities. There was little mention of the reform of the poor laws in the Record until late July, and then the discussion centered on the morality of the controversial bastardy clause.⁵⁶ As noted previously in this study, Hilton has argued for the Recordites' opposition to the political economy principles of the New Poor Law based on their beliefs regarding the workings of Providence.

Religious beliefs thus interacted with political and social policies in 1834. The concepts of religious and political liberty and the needs of the people interrelated with various images of the "true" church. Despite their

⁵⁴"Poor Laws and Paupers," Monthly Repository, n.s., 7 (January 1833): 361-381; "Projections of Instruction by the State," British Critic, 434-57; "The New Poor Law Act," Eclectic Review, 3d ser., 11 (May 1834): 412-24.

⁵⁵"View of Public Affairs," The Christian Observer, 34 (March and June 1834): 188, 388.

⁵⁶"Parliamentary Intelligence," Record (31 July 1834): 2.

ecclesiastical disagreements, both High Church and Low Church, or Evangelical, periodicals defended the Establishment against the Dissenters' and secularists' charges of discrimination and ineffectiveness. Even those journals that normally eschewed religious discussion could not avoid partisan rhetoric as religious issues directly affected public concerns. The High Church periodicals envisioned a traditional and legally established church as the safe and stable course for the people. They feared that encroachments on the Establishment portended encroachments on the Christian faith itself. Tractarian reformers envisioned a "true" church with powers based on its apostolic succession, separate from those of the state. The Evangelical periodicals supported the Anglican Establishment, but they wanted a purified Establishment, one that was based on scriptural truth and infused with heartfelt grace and enthusiasm for good works. Nonconformists defended their genuine commitment to evangelicalism, but also sought, within the context of liberalizing political reforms, greater religious freedom. To them, the "true" church was zealous and biblical in evangelical terms, and it was also the voluntarily chosen church of the people. Radical Unitarians and Freethinkers envisaged a heterodox philosophical faith that would have as its goal the welfare of the people achieved through secular education. All the journals examined believed that

education would help the poor to help themselves, but the orthodox religious press, with an eye to eternity, insisted on religious instruction, and here, once again sectarian controversy arose. Most of these religious periodicals, whether orthodox or heterodox, supported the New Poor Law as a means of making the poor more responsible. The extreme Evangelical Record differed, however, with such moral paternalism, and demonstrated more interest in purely religious ideas. It wanted to retreat from the social and political upheaval of the 1830s.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

In this study I have attempted to demonstrate a pervasive interest in "true" Christian faith in British society in 1834. I have also examined the interplay of this concept in its various applications with the urgent political and social concerns of that year. I have agreed with Elie Halévy that 1834 was a year of crisis, particularly with regard to the privileges of the established church. Parliament's meddling in the affairs of the Irish establishment and the clamor of politically aligned Dissent appeared very threatening to the Church of England; by the end of the year, however, the ascendancy of Peelite conservatism promised safer passage to reform for the church. The effect of the crisis had been such that the radical reform impulse of the Oxford, or Tractarian, Movement had gained momentum during the year, since its rise in 1833. The continued pressure exerted by the unstamped, free workingmen's press, underscored by the legal victory of the Poor Man's Guardian in 1834, enhanced the mood of crisis surrounding the religious establishment.

A further indication of the disquieting restiveness of the lower classes was the debate surrounding passage of the

New Poor Law. The political and religious periodicals associated with the High Church paternalistically defended the right of the poor for relief, but they yielded to the obvious need for amendment of the poor law system. Both moderate evangelicals and Utilitarians supported the stringent, morally paternalistic principles of political economy in the New Poor Law. Extreme Evangelicals, however, took a less optimistic attitude toward involvement in secular affairs and the idea of progress.

I found that concern for the poor was, indeed, esteemed one of the criteria of "true" religion, but that estimation was paramount on the pages of the less religiously orthodox papers. The periodicals that represented the High Church, the Evangelicals, and Dissenters seemed absorbed with religious infighting. On the other hand, the periodicals representing Unitarians, Benthamite Utilitarians, and working class radicals defined "true" religion as that which ministers to the earthly needs of the people. It is important to note the distinction between temporal and spiritual welfare. E. R. Norman has observed the "tendency for some contemporary writers to judge the Churches solely in terms of their social concern." He maintained that "the pursuit of eternity remained the first and absorbing preoccupation of organized religion" and that despite contemporary defenses made as to the efficacy of the church's role in social control, the church often stressed

the primacy of eternal concerns.¹ While the attitudes of democracy and social concern are more winsome to the modern reader, it is important to hear these voices in their own context. One may question the sincerity of either the religionists or the secularists. Each side charged the other with the employment of calculated rhetoric. In the charged atmosphere, each group had difficulty acknowledging the religious or political scruples of the other; it was a time given to controversy.

In the process of surveying the periodical discussion in 1834 of "true" religion, the church crisis, and concern for the poor, I have examined several historiographical issues. I agreed with Gerald Parsons' description of a sustained working class interest in diffuse Christianity and with the synthesis of A. D. Gilbert and W. R. Ward regarding the leavening influence of the Evangelical religious ethic in British society. My study supported the permeating influence of the evangelical religious ethic, which was in keeping with Boyd Hilton's possibly overstated portrayal of its ubiquitous presence. E. R. Norman's presentation of a Church of England that was already experiencing a "renaissance" by 1834 was intriguing although his

¹E. R. Norman, Church and Society in England, 1770-1970: A Historical Study (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 4-5.

steadfastly apologetic stance seemed to place him on somewhat lonely ground.

My attention to religious, political, and social issues does not imply unawareness of highly significant economic forces at work in 1834. Joanna Innes, in criticizing such a focus in J. C. D. Clark's English Society, 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice During the Ancien Regime, did acknowledge, however, that through the "religious prism," he was able to convey "something of the viewpoint of some contemporaries."² While I have attempted to establish something of the background and the relative influence of the periodicals surveyed, still there are dangers in assuming too much in consulting the press for public opinion. Yet, as noted in chapter 6 above, Josef Altholz has demonstrated the value of religious periodicals as primary sources.³

Finally, I found the issues of 1834 to have relevance to the present day. Concerns with the influence of a liberal press, the provision of welfare programs, and the debate over the role of religious values in a secular society rage anew. Secularity is now ascendant. There is

²Joanna Innes, "Review Article: Jonathan Clark, Social History and England's 'Ancien Regime,'" Past and Present 115 (May 1987), 165, 193.

³Walter F. Cannon, "Obstacles to the Use of Victorian Periodicals," Victorian Periodicals Newsletter 1 (January 1968), 32; Josef L. Altholz, The Religious Press in Britain, 1760-1900 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 1.

less volume of religious rhetoric; there is also less belief. In 1834 the well known Dissenting preacher Thomas Binney deplored the "sectarian partialities," which "demand[ed] that every church upon earth, to be worthy of the name should be moulded and fashioned according to his notions," which worked counter to Christ's prayer for the loving unity of believers so that "the world may believe that thou hast sent me."⁴ The defenders of the Christian fortress were correct in esteeming liberalism as a great foe. However, their dialogue in the periodicals of the troubled year 1834, revealed an absorption with internal concerns and defensive measures that had within it the seeds of self-defeat.

⁴"Separation of Church and State," Eclectic Review, 3d ser., 11 (May 1834): 405-06.

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