

The Context of Methodist Missions: Global Evangelicalism in the Nineteenth Century

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On 19 October 1812 Napoleon began his retreat from Moscow. The French emperor had overextended himself in an attempt to bring Russia under his sway. Prussia and Austria soon moved towards joining Russia in a grand coalition to put down the troubler of Europe. Britain, meanwhile, had long been fighting Napoleon by sea and land. In 1805 Nelson had won the battle of Trafalgar, consolidating British dominance on the oceans. On 21 June 1813 Wellington routed the French at the battle of Vittoria, bringing a triumphant conclusion to the Peninsular War, and early in October he first set foot in France. By that point it was clear that the emperor's days were numbered. A victorious Britain would soon be able to turn her energies into fresh channels. That was the mood in which the first local branch of the Methodist Missionary Society was formed in Leeds on 6 October. John Wood, a layman from Wakefield, declared at the inaugural meeting that 'missionary exertions may be regarded as a system of warfare, in which Christians are opposed to Paganism'. As their countrymen were fighting 'the Tyrant of the Continent', so Christians were enlisted against 'the Tyrant of the World'.¹ The impetus of the armed struggle against Napoleon's France would be carried over into the overseas missionary project of Methodism.

A second factor, however, swayed the first Methodist public meeting in support of missions. Earlier in 1813, parliament, urged on by William Wilberforce, the Evangelical Anglican who had led the long campaign against the slave trade, opened India to missionaries. The East India Company had prohibited missionaries from working in the vast swathes of the sub-continent it controlled for fear of religious disturbances, but when its

charter came up for renewal Wilberforce seized the opportunity to alter the document so as to allow evangelism to take place. Richard Watson, who was to become secretary of the Methodist Missionary Society from 1816 to 1827 and from 1832 to 1833, pointed out in his address to the public on behalf of the venture started in Leeds that the parliamentary decision ‘opened a more effectual door for the introduction of the Gospel among sixty millions of British subjects’.² The appeal of the sub-continent proved irresistible to Thomas Coke, already well into his sixties but long the zealous advocate of Methodist initiatives outside the United Kingdom. Coke had carefully nurtured missionary enterprise in the West Indies, but he had dearly hoped since the 1780s to see a Methodist presence in the East Indies. At the 1813 Conference, against stiff opposition from more cautious voices fearful of the expense of overseas work, Coke successfully pleaded to be sent out to establish Methodism in Sri Lanka. He was to depart with six younger colleagues before the end of the year, but died on board ship before reaching his destination. It was to support this new enterprise that the Leeds Missionary Society was founded. There was a vision of immense possibilities for the gospel among the inhabitants of the East.

A third reason for the meeting of 6 October 1813, however, is the one to which we should give most attention. Twelve months before, Coke had been collecting for missions in North Shields and had discovered to his dismay that the prosperous Methodists of the north-east were being formed into small committees to raise funds for missionary work by another agency.³ This was the grandly titled body ‘The Missionary Society’, soon to be called the London Missionary Society. It had been founded in 1795, three years after the creation of the first modern missionary society by the Baptists, to combine all other Christians in a single organisation for the spread of the gospel. Initially it drew support from all the Evangelical denominations, Churchmen as well as Dissenters, but after the launch of the Church Missionary Society in 1799, the broader body lost most of its support from the Church of

England. Nevertheless the Missionary Society still aspired to represent all sections of the Evangelical community, including Methodists. In 1813 its supporters preached in a Methodist chapel in Leeds in order to take a collection for its efforts abroad. A number of Methodists were alarmed: as in the north-east, Methodist money was being diverted to a society dominated by Calvinist Dissenters. Jabez Bunting, the young but immensely capable Methodist preacher who was to dominate Wesleyan counsels for much of the next forty years, then stationed in the Leeds circuit, was one of those who wanted to ensure that local resources were used for connexional purposes. It was Bunting who, though thirty-first in the list of speakers, planned the public meeting of 6 October.⁴ The meeting was interrupted at one point by the local secretary of the Missionary Society who urged that all Christians should see themselves as one body in missionary enterprise. It was Bunting who rose to reply that, although the cause was one, it was undertaken by different societies.⁵ The Methodist Missionary Society was set up in some sense as a rival of the existing interdenominational body with the same aim.

The rivalry, however should not blind us to the significance of the previous willingness of well-to-do Methodists to give generously to a body structured on pan-Evangelical lines. Although the Missionary Society's committee was dominated by Congregationalists, Methodists saw its aims as theirs. They were united in spreading the gospel. It was a juncture when denominational barriers were low, a period that Reg Ward labelled the age of 'Catholic christianity'.⁶ The Almighty, Evangelicals in general believed, designed the conversion of the whole world in preparation for the coming of the millennium. With so grand a vision on the horizon, denominational differences seemed trivial. That attitude had been the animating spirit of the Missionary Society in 1795.⁷ Even though denominations subsequently became better organised and their missionary ventures distinct, much of the same temper remained in succeeding years. Thus William Wilberforce, though a

loyal Churchman, was a speaker at four annual meetings of the Methodist Missionary Society between 1819 and 1829.⁸ From 1818 onwards the secretaries of the four main missionary agencies met regularly, at first quarterly and then monthly, to discuss matters of common concern.⁹ There was a strong sense that the missionary enterprise was one, a part of an international movement with an Evangelical identity. Similar sentiments were powerful in America, where missionary stirrings were evident from the same period. There too denominational particularity did not eclipse Evangelical unity. Despite the increasing importance of denominations in the era moulded by Jabez Bunting and his contemporaries, the reality of the nineteenth century was that Evangelicals formed a self-aware international force.

Yet the phenomenon of global Evangelicalism is neglected in much of the historical literature. The very success of the movement in so many countries, largely through the missionary venture, has led historians to concentrate on its individual national slices to the exclusion of the grander whole. Evangelicalism made a significant impact in at least five sectors of the world. It flourished in the British Isles, though much less in Catholic southern Ireland than elsewhere in the islands. Evangelicals moulded the United States, as much on its advancing western frontier as on its populated eastern seaboard. Other lands of extensive British settlement – Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Cape being the chief – were home to sizeable Evangelical communities. Although Evangelicalism found the European continent much less congenial soil, there was some penetration into many lands, with an enduring legacy in, for example, Sweden. And there was the missionary enterprise itself that carried the gospel to other parts of the world, enjoying astonishing success in places such as the Polynesian islands and reaching unexpected regions such as the borders of Siberia and Mongolia. There is a natural tendency for historians, who cannot achieve omniscience, to concentrate on only one of these five dimensions of the Evangelical world, and often on only

a single national unit within it. Thus a recently translated book by R. Tudur Jones, in many ways a profoundly illuminating analysis of Welsh Christianity at the end of the century, suffers from treating the nation's 'Evangelical Accord' in an exclusively Welsh context. Most of the features of the Welsh experience could be paralleled in other lands, but Tudur Jones commonly attributes developments in the principality to unique features of national life rather than to factors that were also impinging on Evangelicals elsewhere.¹⁰ The religious history of England, America and other countries has often suffered from a similar failure to locate Evangelical bodies within the broader international perspective in which they saw themselves. By concentrating on particular territories for investigation, the historiography has done a disservice to the common features of the global Evangelical movement.

An equally distorting effect has been produced by the tendency of historians to write solely about individual denominations. Institutional histories inevitably concentrate on particular confessional groups; and personal allegiance very reasonably leads many church historians to research only their own ecclesiastical body. The nineteenth-century Evangelical mosaic, however, contained a bewildering variety of denominational families. Again they may be divided into a number of main categories. First there was an Evangelical presence within the Anglican communion, which, though it was also home to High and Broad Churchmen, contained many whose loyalty was to the preaching of the gospel that they shared with other denominations. Then there were the Reformed Churches, most of them Presbyterian, which dominated Scotland and had strong representation in other parts of the world. The Congregationalists were like the Presbyterians in inheriting Calvinist teachings but unlike them in asserting the independence of the local church from any external authority. Baptists were similar to Congregationalists, though often more populist and practising believer's baptism by immersion. Methodists, Arminian in theology like their founder John Wesley, were undoubtedly the most enterprising of nineteenth-century Evangelical

groupings, growing immensely during its hundred years. There were also Moravians, Quakers with an Evangelical standpoint, Brethren and many others on the sectarian fringe of Evangelicalism. Faced with this immense diversity, historians may be excused for preferring to write about a single confessional grouping. Again, however, there can be detrimental consequences for our understanding of the past. Much of the writing on Scotland, for example, has dwelt on the Presbyterian experience to the exclusion of other denominations. Since over 80% of churchgoers held some Presbyterian allegiance, the concentration is understandable, but it has had the effect of artificially insulating Scottish Christianity from its Evangelical context. Interactions with thought and practice from other sectors of the Evangelical world have been neglected.¹¹ The denominational differences, real and fascinating though they are, must not blind us to the centrality in nineteenth-century experience of Evangelical identity.

This paper seeks to redress the balance by drawing attention to the common features of Evangelical religion that transcended the internal fissures within the global movement, whether national or denominational. It explores the context of Methodist missions. It may begin with the characteristics that together formed the defining marks of Evangelicalism, the first being devotion to the Bible. Elizabeth Rose, the wife of an American Methodist minister of the Troy Conference, who died in 1862 at the age of thirty-one in Lebanon, New York, showed this quality while in the last stages of pulmonary consumption. ‘She was a great lover of the Bible’, according to her obituarist, ‘making it her constant companion and reading it in family worship, either sitting or lying in bed, even when unable to speak above a whisper.’¹² Another Methodist woman, though this time writing in England eleven years later, explained her conviction that ‘it cannot be amiss to refer to the Bible as the highest authority on all subjects on which it professes to speak authoritatively, to seek its thoughts as the basis of our own, and to endeavour to appropriate its teaching for the guidance of our

lives'.¹³ The same sense that the Bible was the decisive authority in matters of faith and practice became widespread even among the Quakers, who had traditionally downplayed the role of the scriptures relative to the inward light, when they were affected by the rise of Evangelicalism in their ranks. 'We reverently lay our hand on the Testaments, Old and New', ran a leading article in the *Friend*, the British journal of Evangelical Quakerism in 1852; 'and by them we stand'.¹⁴ When, towards the end of the century, the Evangelical Alliance organised a series of meetings in and around London to bear witness to the 'cardinal truths of the Gospel', the first was on scripture, covering its inspiration, its authority and its sufficiency.¹⁵ The family Bible on the parlour table was the most obvious outward symbol of Christian allegiance in Evangelical homes in every continent. The scriptures formed one of the bonds that held the global Evangelical movement together.

The doctrine of the cross was another. For an agent of the American Missionary Association, an abolitionist Congregational body, who was working in Illinois in 1858, the 'great vital points' of the faith included 'that Christ has made an all-sufficient atonement'.¹⁶ The emphasis on the death of Christ as the source of salvation was universal in the Evangelical movement. The reputed words on his deathbed of an English Wesleyan, William Johnston, in the previous year showed a comparable doctrinal stress, clearly appropriated as the basis of a personal faith. 'I look to the Crucified', he declared, ' – I rest in the atonement – Glory be to Jesus!'¹⁷ Phrases associated with the death of Christ became Evangelical shibboleths. Thus a Methodist soldier who was on guard at Gibraltar, when challenged by an officer for the watchword, came out with the phrase most prominent in his mind, 'The precious blood of Christ'. What the officer thought is not recorded, but a fellow-soldier is said to have found the Saviour as a result of overhearing the words.¹⁸ In an editorial on 'The Cleansing Blood', the leading American Methodist newspaper the *Christian Advocate* pointed out in 1872 that the cross was central to behaviour as well as to teaching. 'As the

sacrifice of Christ lies at the foundation of all Christian doctrine', it contended, 'so is its application essential to all Christian purity and life.'¹⁹ The atonement brought peace to the saved and a challenge to the sinner. First and foremost, the immensely influential English Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon told his students, they should preach 'Christ and him crucified'.²⁰ It was a priority every Evangelical shared.

A further common feature of Evangelicalism was a belief in conversion. It was a fundamental premise of Evangelicals that many who went by the name of Christian were not true believers. Thus William Oakley, who long served with the Church Missionary Society in Sri Lanka, found many English families in the island who showed no regard for religion. They needed to have a change of direction that set them for the first time on the highroad of salvation. Oakley therefore 'sought the conversion of nominal Christians'.²¹ A commonly used synonym for conversion was being born again or regenerated. Thus a correspondent of the *Friend* insisted that the right of children of Quakers to membership of the Society of Friends must not be allowed to obscure their personal need of grace. 'May we, then, individually be willing to examine', it urged, '...whether we know for ourselves, what it is to be regenerated'.²² Another theological term associated with the experience was justification, often limited to the divine forgiveness of a sinner on his first trusting Jesus for salvation. For William Taylor, a globe-trotting American Methodist evangelist who was eventually appointed Bishop of Africa, when God sees individuals surrender, he acquits them. 'That part of the transaction', according to Taylor, 'is called justification by faith'.²³ The nature of conversion, however, might be formulated in different ways. For many, especially the more respectable worshippers, it might be understood as a gradual process of which the subject might be unconscious until it was complete; but for others, especially the more red-hot evangelists, it was necessarily experienced as a sudden event. Thus Reginald Radcliffe, a leading English revivalist, insisted in 1860 'that conversion is an instantaneous work'.²⁴ Yet

what the movement did agree on was that conversion, whether slow or fast, conscious or unconscious, was the essential opening of the spiritual life. Without it, a person was not a Christian at all.

A final characteristic of all Evangelicals was activism. Those who had read in their Bibles about the urgency of salvation, who felt gratitude for the work of Christ on the cross and who believed that they themselves had been converted were highly motivated for the task of conveying the gospel to others. The result was a whirl of evangelistic efforts. ‘Piety in these days’, announced the *Presbyterian Home Missionary* of New York in 1884, ‘shows itself more in work than in reflection and meditation.’²⁵ Ministers were particularly devoted to activity: ‘work, work, work’, said William Morley Punshon, a prominent mid-century Wesleyan minister who served in Canada as well as Britain, ‘is the *lex vitae* of a Methodist preacher in either hemisphere’.²⁶ Even retirement did not put an end to the pertinacity of ministers in proclaiming the good news. Samuel Howe, an American Methodist who was superannuated from the ministry in 1830, nevertheless continued to preach, turning railroad cars into his pulpit. ‘He would arise and occupy the two or three minutes of stopping, so as often to move the passengers to tears on the subject of their souls’ salvation.’²⁷ Local evangelism spilled over into both world mission and social concern, with the same impetus to incessant endeavour driving a William Carey in India and a Lord Shaftesbury in England. Friedrich Tholuck, perhaps the leading scholar identified with the German *Erweckungsbewegung*, or awakening, was a passionate supporter of missions. In 1847, on returning from the founding of the Evangelical Alliance in England, he commended the example of what he had witnessed to his German co-religionists, urging them ‘to give to their Christianity a more practical form, a more vigorous impulse, and to enter on a course of more active usefulness’.²⁸ It was a recognition that Evangelicalism had no time for idleness.

Bible, cross, conversion and activism – these were the key features of the movement, whatever the religious body, whatever the national allegiance.

The common Evangelical ethos, however, was also apparent in many other aspects of the movement. The trajectory of its theology, for example, illustrates the way in which Evangelicalism, though internally diverse, was being forged into a single entity. At the start of the period there was a considerable gulf between the Arminianism of the Methodists, together with a few others, and the Calvinism of most Evangelical groupings. Arminians believed that all might be saved by exercising their freewill; Calvinists held that God chose a particular number for salvation. The type of moderate Calvinism held by those who had been influenced by the Evangelical awakening, however, had abandoned ‘double predestination’, the high Calvinist view that the Almighty condemned individuals to perdition. Theologians such as the Congregationalists of the New England school and the English Baptist Andrew Fuller taught, on the contrary, that sinners were responsible for the loss of their own souls. The tendency to a lowered version of the Reformed tradition went further, with the American revivalist Charles Finney, for example, according a much larger role to human ability in conversion. The distance between Calvinists and Arminians steadily narrowed until, in the last third of the century, there were signs that it had virtually disappeared. Dwight L. Moody, the hugely popular American evangelist from the 1870s, was able to frame his gospel messages so that they were acceptable to both parties.²⁹ In 1890 a commentator in southern Africa, noting that ‘Christian Churches are now converging in doctrine’, saw no difference of substance between the teachings of Wesleyans and Presbyterians.³⁰ Nine years later the National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches in England and Wales issued a catechism that was equally endorsed by theologians from Methodism and from the denominations with a Reformed inheritance.³¹ The most obvious theological division in the ranks of the movement had been largely healed.

There was a similar convergence in the area of spirituality, which was moulded by the same doctrinal traditions. The American Methodist *Christian Advocate* set out in 1858 what it saw as a main contrast between the denominations. The Methodists, it claimed, taught feeling first, and thinking afterwards. ‘*Methodism addresses the heart*’ and so differed from ‘the more ratiocinative Congregationalism or Presbyterianism’.³² Methodists, furthermore, looked for entire sanctification, a sudden leap into holiness after conversion, whereas those with a Reformed background expected advances in the Christian life to be gradual, the result of sustained struggle. There was therefore a definite difference between denominational forms of spirituality that did not entirely disappear. As the century wore on, however, there was more interaction between them. In national organisations, leaders of the various bodies co-operated with each other; in remote places, union churches brought people upholding different approaches together in single congregations. Methodists started singing the hymns of the Congregationalist Isaac Watts and everybody else started singing the hymns of Charles Wesley. So the area of common ground in spirituality increased. Many Methodists became more reflective in matters of faith, so that they insisted more on thinking; and their distinctive quest for entire sanctification gradually faded, so that they emphasised the need for steady effort instead.³³ There was in any case a great deal of shared devotional practice. Prayer was a priority for all, whether in private or in public. The weekly prayer meeting, remarked an American handbook on the subject published in 1878, had been ceasing to be a ‘spiritual refrigerator’ as it steadily grew in importance ‘in the estimation of Christians of all denominations’.³⁴ Likewise anticipation of heaven was a remarkably prominent theme across the confessional boundaries. Especially as death approached, there was, at least down to the 1870s, an eagerness to talk openly about the glory land that was in prospect for the believer.³⁵ By the end of the century there was a high degree of union of soul among Evangelicals.

The unity extended beyond the soul to the mind. The intellectual orientation of most Evangelicals during the nineteenth century was moulded by the legacy of the Enlightenment. Reason, to a striking extent, was their lodestar. This characteristic has been obscured in some of older literature by a stress on the undoubted repudiation by nineteenth-century Evangelicals of rationalist thinking. Thus a leading article in the *Record*, the Evangelical Anglican newspaper, at the opening of 1863 roundly condemned ‘the vagaries of Prussian or German rationalism’. But what it was rejecting was the abuse of reason, not reason itself. It commended ‘the good sense of LOCKE’, so appealing to the mastermind of the English Enlightenment, and also ‘the “Common Sense” of REID’, the leading Christian philosopher of the Scottish Enlightenment.³⁶ Thomas Reid’s principle that there are matters, such as the existence of God, which, because they are beyond doubt, are the common property of all human minds was almost universally endorsed by nineteenth-century Evangelicals.³⁷ They also embraced other values derived from the Enlightenment. Happiness loomed large in their vocabulary, at least in the earlier part of the century. Thus in 1828 Adam Clarke, perhaps the most intellectual of Wesleyan ministers, published a sermon entitled ‘Genuine Happiness the Privilege of Every Real Christian’, once more citing Locke, amongst others.³⁸ Again, there was a fundamental conviction that the gospel was on the side of the civilisation that the Enlightenment aspired to diffuse throughout society. John Mackenzie, a prominent Congregational missionary in Botswana, declared at his ordination in 1858 that preachers of the gospel must teach ‘the arts of civilized life’.³⁹ Reason, happiness, civilisation – these Enlightenment principles were the secure property of Evangelicals.

Hence there were several ways in which Evangelicals were aligned with modernising facets of Enlightenment thought. They echoed the typical optimism of the later years of the age of reason in their version of the Christian hope. They confidently expected that, as a result of the advance of the missions of their day, the whole world would turn to Christ. The

church, according to John Angell James, the Congregational minister at Carr's Lane, Birmingham, was 'assured of increase, triumph, and universal dominion'.⁴⁰ This was the postmillennial understanding of the future, so called because it postulated that the second advent of Christ would not take place until after ('post'-) the arrival of the millennium predicted in the book of Revelation. In that coming era, Satan would be bound and so his malignant influence would be prevented from damaging the progress of the gospel and its values. 'When Christ shall reign spiritually on earth', rhapsodised an American co-religionist, W. H. Johnstone, in 1857, 'then covetousness shall cease, the wealth, and influence, and power, and glory of the Universe will be given to Zion, millions will be saved...and the kingdoms of this world [will] become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ'.⁴¹ This postmillennialism was the general stance of nineteenth-century Evangelicals, though over time the theological content of their beliefs about the future tended to become vaguer. Already in 1850 the idea of the coming millennium was being subordinated to a more this-worldly ideal in a book called *The Theory of Human Progression*.⁴² As the century went on, most Evangelicals continued to suppose that the world was getting better, but did not know very clearly why. As heirs of the Enlightenment, they were as much advocates of the idea of progress as their secular-minded contemporaries.

Equally, for much of the century, Evangelicals were as forward as any other school of thought in endorsing science. Their belief in reason underlay a devotion to what they called the 'Baconian rules of inductive reasoning', the principles of empirical investigation attributed to Francis Bacon whereby the natural world could be made to yield up its secrets.⁴³ Likewise postmillennialism encouraged Evangelicals to see the 'unimagined ways in which science has become auxiliary to the social improvement of mankind' as signs of the advance towards the glorious times to come.⁴⁴ Scientific notes regularly appeared in religious magazines, for there was a conviction that there was a harmony between God's revelation in

his word and in his work. 'It is truly', declared the Scottish theologian Thomas Chalmers in 1816, 'a most Christian exercise to extract a sentiment of piety from the works and appearances of nature.'⁴⁵ Chalmers, like many others, deployed scientific discoveries to defend the Christian religion, defining the field as natural theology. In particular, the adaptation of living things to their purpose seemed firm evidence of an intelligent Creator. Popular lecturers such as Thomas Cooper, once an infidel champion, dwelt on the theme of design in the universe.⁴⁶ Charles Darwin's case that evolution rather than design explained the adaptation did not end the discussion, for Evangelical apologists began to take broader ground, arguing that the Almighty used natural processes to achieve his ends.⁴⁷ After Darwin there was an awareness that science was not automatically an ally in the battle of belief, but as yet there were only the beginnings of the twentieth-century sense that science was likely to be ranged in the ranks of the enemy. The predominant attitude among nineteenth-century Evangelicals was that the records of scientific endeavour served as an invaluable apologetic armoury.

There was also an alliance between Evangelical religion and commercial enterprise. The rule-governed universe seemed to be one where the Almighty had arranged that trade would generate prosperity. The development of systems of exchange was another symptom of progress towards the millennium. Hence it was natural for spokesmen for missions to argue that they should go hand in hand not only with civilisation but also with trade. In the peroration of a celebrated speech at Cambridge in 1857, the Scottish explorer-missionary David Livingstone announced that he was returning to Africa to 'make an open path for commerce and Christianity'.⁴⁸ There was an undoubted congruence between the teaching of Evangelicals and the qualities needed in the burgeoning market economy – integrity, diligence, self-reliance. It should not, however, be supposed that Evangelical religion closed its eyes to a ruthless pursuit of profit. On the contrary, it developed elaborate bodies of

thinking about commercial ethics, condemning, as did the American New School Presbyterian Albert Barnes in 1841, 'the insatiable love of gain'.⁴⁹ When any of its adherents failed in business, it was a matter of shame and, in the case of gathered churches, of ecclesiastical discipline. Thus Sir Samuel Morton Peto, the immensely rich railway entrepreneur and founder of Bloomsbury Baptist Chapel in central London, was censured by his own church when, in 1867, he became bankrupt even though it was a result of a bank failure entirely beyond his control.⁵⁰ Nevertheless Evangelicals did not see economic affairs as a worldly intrusion into the spiritual sphere. Large churches increasingly operated as commercial ventures, organising systematic giving, listing donations and using proper bookkeeping methods. The deacons at the King's Weigh House, a Congregational church in London, discussed in 1860 the introduction of a regular 'statement of the Income and Expenditures of the various Societies in connexion with the Church'.⁵¹ Prosperity founded on efficiency seemed as natural a goal in the church as in business. Evangelical congregations of all lands and every denomination, at least in the big cities, seemed wholly identified with modernity in its economic dimension.

If Evangelicals were generally in favour of the cluster of forces usually associated with the modernising inheritance of the Enlightenment – reason, optimism, science and commerce – they also knew what they were against. The Bible taught them that their grand enemy was sin, conversion was away from sin and it was sin that had brought about the need for the atonement. So hostility to sin was rooted in their key characteristics. Accordingly they not only denounced wrongdoing from the pulpit but also took action against it in public. The typical way in which Evangelicals engaged with the ills of society was to organise campaigns against whatever they regarded as wickedness. The best method of rousing Evangelical audiences against British colonial slavery, the leading agitator in the cause discovered in the early 1830s, was to denounce it as 'criminal before God'.⁵² Already at the

beginning of the century William Wilberforce had led efforts to reform manners by enforcing laws against blasphemy and sabbath-breaking and to induce parliament to prohibit the slave trade, a measure achieved in 1807. Subsequently other issues were taken up when the Evangelical public decided a wrong could be put down. The temperance movement was transformed into a Christian campaign when it was concluded that strong drink was the cause of personal ruin for thousands. Because alcohol was so dangerous, some Evangelicals decided that its sale was an outright sin. Thus A.C. Dixon, an energetic Baptist minister, was horrified to discover on moving to Baltimore, NJ, in 1882, that liquor dealers were listed on the membership roll.⁵³ Broader campaigning against public evils that was to issue in the social gospel movement towards the end of the century was at first less a diversion from Evangelical priorities than an addition to them. The social gospel, too, should be understood primarily as an effort to combat what sensitive Christian consciences had diagnosed as the sinful features of the urban-industrial society that was spreading round the world. At a Methodist ordination service in Melbourne in 1891, for instance, the ex-president of Conference charged the candidates that the work of the ministry should include not only preaching, pastoral work and administration, but also social philanthropy. 'You will...take a leading part', he told the young men before him, 'in movements for checking intemperance, gambling and impurity'.⁵⁴ Such mass mobilisations against sin were another standard feature that united nineteenth-century Evangelicals.

They also agreed, however, that there was another enemy to be resisted. The Roman Catholic Church was a redoubtable rival for the souls of the world, with Irish folk carrying their faith to the uttermost parts of the earth. A young Free Church of Scotland minister named Robert Taylor sent from Edinburgh to Sydney in 1845 was dismayed to find himself on board the outward vessel with a party of priests. Having unsuccessfully tried to start a disputation with them in Latin, he noticed with a critical eye that they were devoting a very

large proportion of the Lord's Day to playing chess. 'The Pope', he concluded, 'has evidently marked Australia as his own'.⁵⁵ Rome appeared to grow sterner as the century wore on. The Syllabus of Errors of 1864, anathematising modern trends, alarmed Protestants because it seemed to assert even higher papal claims over the temporal allegiance of Catholics than in the past. In the following year the leading Baptist newspaper in the United States commented that 'the moral pestilence of Romanism' was 'directly at variance with the spirit of our political institutions'.⁵⁶ What was more, Catholic teaching appeared to have infiltrated into the Anglican communion. The Oxford Movement of the 1830s was perceived by Evangelicals as an attempt to reverse the Reformation and so to 'unprotestantise' the Church of England. The ritualists who were inspired by the ideals of John Henry Newman, Edward Pusey and John Keble to introduce elaborate ceremonial into their services constituted a Trojan horse. 'Ritualism', declared one of their most eloquent opponents, J. C. Ryle, subsequently bishop of Liverpool, 'is nothing but Romanism in the bud, and Romanism is Ritualism in flower'.⁵⁷ The efforts of likeminded Anglicans, enjoying the sympathy of the whole range of Evangelical opinion, to resist the rising tide of ritualism occupied a great deal of their energies during the later nineteenth century. Evangelicals throughout the world were resolute opponents of the Roman Catholic Church and of those who imitated its practice.

How did such a high degree of consensus emerge about what Evangelicals endorsed and what they rejected? There were chiefly three mechanisms at work. First, there was the printed word. Evangelicals used the press, in the words of the report of the Church Missionary Society in 1801, 'as a most powerful auxiliary in their grand design'.⁵⁸ The Bible itself was naturally the book most printed. The interdenominational British and Foreign Bible Society, founded in 1804, calculated that already, only thirteen years later, it had issued 1,808,261 Bibles, Testaments and scripture portions. In that period the society had printed copies in as many as nineteen languages.⁵⁹ The cause was immensely popular, with humble

folk devising imaginative money-raising schemes. Thus at Witchampton, Dorset, £2 came in 1867 from ‘the parrot of a worthy woman, who had taught it to ask for Contributions with a tin Collecting-box attached to its cage’.⁶⁰ The society had many imitators abroad. A book called *Bible Stories*, originally published in 1832 for educational use by the German and Foreign School Society of Calw, Württemberg, was translated from German into English, Danish, Bohemian, Hungarian, Wendish, Polish, Canarese, Tamil, Bengali, Hindustani and Chinese.⁶¹ Small tracts circulated in enormous numbers. The Religious Tract Society, established in 1799, even before the British and Foreign Bible Society, and equally representative of Evangelicalism as a whole, specialised in issuing these telling leaflets. By the middle of the century it was publishing in 110 languages and 4,363 titles appeared on its list.⁶² By that time, however, the Religious Tract Society had ventured beyond tracts themselves to publish books, many of them reissued by the American Sunday School Union, that related faith to every sphere of knowledge. Geography, agriculture, political economy, natural science and many other subjects were covered in its ‘monthly series’ of volumes, which always touched on the atonement. Here was a publishing venture that aimed to create a Christian mind amongst a mass audience. The Religious Tract Society was also responsible for publishing weekly periodicals, *Leisure Hour* and *Sunday at Home*, and later *The Boys’ Own Paper* and *The Girls’ Own Paper*, which reached a huge readership.⁶³ Its transatlantic sister organisation, the American Tract Society, proudly claimed that in the year 1849-50 its publications, which, in order to maximise the statistical impact, it calculated in pages, amounted to 280,697,500.⁶⁴ Similar publishing ventures were set up in other lands, with China, for example, having thirty Christian presses by the early years of the twentieth century.⁶⁵ The vast resulting body of literature helped ensure that Evangelicals thought alike across national and denominational boundaries.

Institutions were a second agency by which Evangelical solidarity was fostered. The nineteenth century was the age of the rise of benevolent associations. In America the chief bodies existing by mid-century, apart from the publishing societies, were the missionary organisations, of which the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, founded in 1810, was most prominent, the home missions, the Sunday School Union, the Education Society and the Seaman's Friend Society.⁶⁶ The British equivalents had their headquarters in the Exeter Hall in London's Strand, where each year the May Meetings, the annual rallies of each organisation, were held. Many of them, including all the leading missionary societies, belonged to particular denominations, but the co-ordination of their annual meetings and the regular exchange of speakers between them remained signs throughout the century that they were a part of a unitary Evangelical venture. Furthermore, they were aware of being integrated in an international network that bound them together. Seamen's missions, for example, regularly exchanged news, copied methods and lent personnel.⁶⁷ In Wellington, New Zealand, it was agreed in 1848 to establish a Bible Society, a Tract and Book Society and a monthly periodical on British models.⁶⁸ A handbook on Sunday school techniques published in London in 1871 recommended an American plan for issuing library books, even urging readers to 'Use *Geist's* adhesive *tags* for backs of books'.⁶⁹ An eagerness to meet the needs of young people was responsible for a large number of international ventures. The Young Men's Christian Association, launched in London in 1844, soon became a flourishing body on other shores. When a visiting Canadian Maritimer attended its annual meeting in the Exeter Hall in 1850, he was impressed that it aimed 'to carry the religion of the Bible into the counting house'. 'An Institution of this kind', he remarked, 'is wanted in Halifax and St. John exceedingly.'⁷⁰ In the following year a YMCA was founded in Montreal and another in Boston. Likewise the Christian Endeavor Society, founded in Portland, Maine, in 1881, and the Boys' Brigade, established in Glasgow two years later, rapidly turned into global movements. Parachurch agencies of various kinds

transmitted ideas and enthusiasms from one side of the world to another, welding the movement they served into a single entity.

The third form of linkage between the branches of the Evangelical movement, and the most important one, was through personnel. The nineteenth century was an age of migration, when large numbers moved from the British Isles to other parts of the world. The chief destination was always the United States, with more than half the emigrants from England and Wales choosing America as their promised land in nearly every decade down to the end of the century.⁷¹ Others, however, travelled to the various settler territories within the British Empire, whether Canada, the Cape, Australia or New Zealand. In 1846 the periodical of the Free Church of Scotland found their behaviour perverse. It noted that it had heard from ‘the vast colony of New South Wales, where so many of our dear countrymen have been led to resort, in search of the bread that perisheth, leaving behind them the rich stores of Gospel privileges that they enjoyed in their native land’.⁷² Since they had gone out, however, it must send ministers after them. Of the roughly 320 Presbyterian ministers in Australasia in 1871, the Free Church claimed to be ‘intimately connected’ with at least 300.⁷³ These links maintained a sense of common purpose across the globe. Furthermore, the correspondence of emigrants with relations and friends, often kept up for many years, passed on religious news as well as more secular information. Much of it found its way into Christian periodicals, with journals such as the *Baptist Magazine* peppering its pages with news from abroad. Every issue from September to December 1850, for example, carried the latest information from America.⁷⁴ Christian leaders found their way to other parts of the world, whether on evangelistic tours, official business or rest cures. Thus the extraordinary career of James Thomson, a Scottish promoter of popular education and agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Latin America from 1818 to 1830, led to the creation of pockets of Protestant presence in several Hispanic countries.⁷⁵ Later in the century the American

Methodist William Taylor criss-crossed the globe from California to the Cape in a sustained preaching ministry.⁷⁶ Missionaries to particular regions, who were able to return home for advocacy work more frequently as the century wore on, formed another bond between various parts of the world. The Evangelical movement was united by people as well as by literature and institutions.

The picture of the solidarity of the movement, however, needs to be qualified in a significant way. Towards the end of the century there was a growing theological tension between the more liberal and the more conservative wings. The predominant trend in Evangelical thought from around the middle of the century was in the direction of greater liberalism. Partly this development was a consequence of the legacy of the Enlightenment, with its stress on freedom of enquiry. Many Evangelical bodies were increasingly reluctant to impose tests of orthodoxy on their members. Thus subscription to the Westminster Confession, the traditional standard of Presbyterian belief, was relaxed by the United Presbyterians in 1879 and the other main Scottish denominations in subsequent years.⁷⁷ A larger part of the change, however, derived from an alteration of assumptions. A Romantic idiom increasingly supplanted the inheritance of the Enlightenment. The transformation is evident in altering conceptions of God. There was a shift from the ideal of the Almighty as a ruler presiding over a justly administered government, endorsed by enlightened thought, to that of him as a Father at the head of a kindly managed family favoured by Romantic taste. Many Congregationalists, who were most affected by this development, began to entertain wider hopes about human destiny and, as an American Baptist newspaper complained in 1878, to 'discard the recognized evangelical idea of the atonement'.⁷⁸ At the same time there was a growing acceptance, at least in intellectual circles, of the biblical criticism emerging from Germany and so commonly bound up with the Romantic worldview entrenched in the psyche of that land. The *cause célèbre* was the controversy in the Free Church of Scotland

between 1876 and 1881 over the acceptability of German critical methods in the writings of the young scholar William Robertson Smith.⁷⁹ Although the protracted proceedings were eventually resolved by Robertson Smith's dismissal, his views gained ground because of their identification with scholarship. The tendency of the times was towards broader views in accordance with the canons of Romantic feeling and German thought.

There was nevertheless a countervailing trend, equally associated with Romantic opinion, in a theologically conservative direction. A close friend of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the chief fount of the Romantic philosophy of religion in English-speaking lands, was Edward Irving, minister of the Church of Scotland serving in London during the 1820s. Drawing inspiration from Coleridge, Irving struck out on new theological paths. He condemned the mechanistic and commercial methods of the benevolent societies as savouring of the Enlightenment, urged a more spiritual approach to spreading the gospel and recommended that missionaries should go out, like the first apostles, 'destitute of all visible sustenance, and of all human help'.⁸⁰ They would then be compelled to rely on the Almighty for all their needs. This was the faith principle, soon taken up by George Müller, who ran a great orphanage at Bristol on the basis that the Lord would provide for all its needs in answer to prayer, and eventually by Hudson Taylor, the founder of the China Inland Mission in 1865. The ideal became the inspiration of a whole set of undenominational faith missions that imitated it. Another of Edward Irving's innovations, however, was to prove equally fraught with consequences. Disgusted with what he saw as the groundless optimism of the postmillennial school, Irving worked out the elements of a premillennial scheme, holding that the personal second coming of Christ was imminent. His longer-lived contemporary John Nelson Darby, the leader of the exclusive branch of the Brethren movement, elaborated the same teaching in the form of dispensationalism. Although dispensational doctrine was to make far greater headway in later years, it was already being propagated at Moody's

Northfield conferences before the end of the nineteenth century. A third novel body of thought that similarly invoked the heightened supernaturalism typical of Romanticism was the holiness revival. Originating in the Methodist doctrine of entire sanctification, the new holiness teaching, as expounded by Phoebe Palmer of New York, differed by stressing the immediate availability of a higher life. Taken up from 1875 by the Keswick Convention, the message was embraced by many Evangelicals around the world, especially within the Anglican communion. Each of these nineteenth-century novelties helped lay the foundations for the Fundamentalism that was to emerge in the following century. Because they stiffened the conservative resistance to the general liberal drift, they contributed to a growing theological polarisation within Evangelicalism. These developments heralded the break-up of the earlier solidarity of the movement.

Down to 1900, however, it was the unity of the movement rather than its divisions that were most striking. Its defining characteristics of Bible, cross, conversion and activism bound it together in every land. Its theology and spirituality showed a bridging of the earlier divide between Calvinist and Arminian. The close identification of Evangelicalism as a whole with the temper of the Enlightenment was evident in its appeal to reason, its postmillennial hope and its engagement with science. The association of the movement with commerce confirmed that it was, in its day, the epitome of modernity. Evangelicals were agreed, too, in what they opposed, seeing sin in society and Romanism in the church as their grand foes. Their common platform across the world was reinforced by a shared literature, linked institutions and an exchange of personnel. Although there was a tendency at the end of the century for a new kind of theological division to emerge along conservative/liberal lines, fragmentation was deferred until later years. It is true that national variations were part of the reality of Evangelical world, for divergent circumstances still ensured differences. Yet, as the Australasian Wesleyans reported to the British Conference in 1858, the differences

between them were merely in ‘minor details’.⁸¹ Denominational dissimilarities were probably greater than national contrasts, but in this age it was the co-ordinated efforts and common mind of Evangelicals that were most striking. This was the ethos of the Methodist Missionary Society. A Congregational missionary to south Illinois reported in 1857 that he was working in concert with three Old School Presbyterian churches, as many Cumberland Presbyterian churches, a Freewill Baptist church and a few Methodists. ‘These’, he commented, ‘are all the evangelical denominations now attempting to make inroads on the great host of the common enemy.’⁸² It was the unity of the nineteenth-century global Evangelical movement that was of world historical significance.

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³ G. G. Findlay and W. W. Holdsworth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, 5 vols (London: Epworth Press, 1921-24), Vol. 1, pp. 37-8.

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⁶ W. R. Ward, ‘The Baptists and the Transformation of the Church, 1780-1830’, *Baptist Quarterly*, new series, 25 (1973-74), p. 171. Its nature is expounded in W. R. Ward, *Religion and Society in England, 1790-1850* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1972), chap. 1.

⁷ Roger H. Martin, *Evangelicals United: Ecumenical Stirrings in Pre-Victorian Britain, 1795-1830* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1983), chap. 3.

⁸ Semmel, *Methodist Revolution*, p. 168.

⁹ N. Allen Birtwhistle, ‘Methodist Missions’, in Rupert Davies *et al.* (eds), *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, 4 vols (London: Epworth Press, 1965-88), Vol. 3, p. 42.

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¹⁴ *Friend* (London), 2nd month 1852, p. 29.

¹⁵ *Freeman* (London), 6 January 1888, p. 13.

¹⁶ *American Missionary* (New York), July 1858, p. 159.

¹⁷ *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* (London), March 1860, p. 283.

¹⁸ *Christian Advocate and Journal*, 4 March 1858, p. 33.

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