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Evangelical Social Thought

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In response to Boyd Hilton's claim that premillenarian or adventist Evangelicalism was diametrically opposed to the postmillennial or moderate Evangelicalism of the 'Claphamites', I maintain that the views of the Evangelicals that I discussed in my recent article cannot easily be fitted into Hilton's spectrum of a theological 'left' and 'right', or 'Recordite' and 'Claphamite', wings of Evangelicalism. Mid nineteenth-century Evangelicalism also defies simple categorisation in terms of the common spectrum often used to divide nineteenth-century writers and thinkers into either 'liberals' or 'conservatives'. These schemes of interpretation are inadequate because, as Claude Welch has pointed out, it is always a distortion to assume that theological debate 'can be reduced to a direct and unambiguous collision on a one-track line'.[1]

In my article I argued that although the strident political rhetoric and anti-Roman Catholic polemic of a growing number of Anglican Evangelical clergymen appear to accord with Hilton's characterisation of the 'extremism' of 'Recordite' Evangelicals, a wider consideration of their outlook demonstrates that the premillennial adventism of Anglican churchmen in the generation of T. R. Birks (1810–33) had rapidly developed its own character, distinct from the 'extreme' Irvingism that had been largely discredited by the 1830s. This broader Irvingite legacy continued to be a powerful influence well into the later nineteenth century.[2]

Premillennialists, as Grayson Carter has observed, 'did not all think alike'.[3] Many leading Anglican Evangelicals, including Hugh McNeile

[1] Claude Welch, 'The problem of a history of nineteenth-century theology', *Journal of Religion* lii (1972), 14.

[2] Ralph S. Brown, 'Victorian Anglican Evangelicalism: the radical legacy of Edward Irving', this JOURNAL lviii (2007), 675–704.

[3] Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant secessions from the via media*, c. *1800–1850*, Oxford 2001, 152.

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(1795–1879) and Edward Bickersteth (1786–1850), were 'highly fluid in their thinking on the subject' and soon distanced themselves from what were regarded as the excesses of Irvingite pentecostalism and the extreme premillennialist position.[4]

In drawing this distinction, it is also important to recognise the continuing influence of 'moderate Calvinism', an enduring legacy of the Enlightenment, upon Anglican Evangelicalism.[5] The majority of the premillennialists who remained strongly loyal to the established Church were 'moderate Calvinists',[6] while only a very small minority of 'extreme' Calvinists seceded into the Irvingite Catholic Apostolic Church.[7] Hilton's label of 'extreme' Evangelicals would be more appropriately applied to those hard-line Calvinists who seceded. Their form of Calvinism predisposed them to develop a more fatalistic interpretation of both prophecy and society. Those Anglicans who shared the Enlightenment inheritance of 'moderate Calvinism' with J. B. Sumner (1780–1862) and Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847) accommodated premillennialism to a markedly different outlook from members of the 'extreme' Catholic Apostolic Church like Henry Drummond (1786–1860).[8]

Premillennialism was adopted within differing theological frameworks and this process manifested different ways of looking at the world, at society and at the role and responsibility of both individuals and of Churches. Edward Irving (1792–1834) and the Catholic Apostolic Church could be described as what some historians and theologians studying millennialist movements have categorised as 'introversionists'. They abandoned the current world order because their premillennialism was combined with a high Calvinist emphasis on double predestination and consequent tendency towards a separatist theory of the 'gathered' Church of the elect. This issued in a more fatalistic outlook, a view that the world was degenerating and that social reforms were futile, that was reflected in the extreme anti-modernist political conservatism of Henry Drummond.[9]

[4] Ibid. 155.

[5] David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s*, London 1989, 63–5.

[6] T. R. Birks recalled that he had been 'a moderate Calvinist, by early training and association' and subsequently never 'ceased to be, like most of the Evangelical clergy, moderately Calvinistic, or, to speak more correctly, temperately Augustinian' in his 'views of theology': *The atonement and the judgement*, London 1870, 11.

[7] Only six clergymen left the Church of England to join the Catholic Apostolic Church: Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals*, 191.

[8] Drummond 'was dismissed by most Evangelicals as a wealthy extremist with bizarre political and social views, and a dubious doctrinal past linking him to the odd heterodoxy of the Western Schism': ibid. 192.

[9] Markku Ruotsila, 'The Catholic Apostolic Church in British politics', this JOURNAL lvi (2005), 75–81.

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Premillennialist Anglicans were, by contrast, closer to 'reformists', millennialists who hold that believers should attempt to change the world order,[10] because their adventism was adapted to their 'moderate Calvinism'. This 'reformist' type of premillennialism was the worldview that was predominant among Anglican Evangelical clergy, was represented in the episcopate from the 1850s,[11] and in the political views and campaigns of the earl of Shaftesbury (1801–85) and Charlotte Elizabeth (Tonna) (1790–1846).

This 'reformist' premillennialism and the mindset of the majority of Anglican Evangelicals had far more in common with the outlook of Thomas Chalmers than Hilton suggests and this, in turn, has implications for Hilton's overall theory, because the contrast between 'moderate' and 'extreme' Evangelicals is central to his argument.

In my article, I described how what David Bebbington has identified as characteristically Romantic sensibilities, which were influencing Evangelicalism from the 1820s, were accommodated with some enduring aspects of an older framework of enduring Enlightenment attitudes and modes of thought.[12] Mainstream adventist Anglican Evangelicals still continued to emphasise the importance of biblical evidences, popularised in the eighteenth century, as well as the natural theology of Paley, which the 'Albury school' and the Irvingites had abandoned in favour of a simple trust in divine revelation.

T. R. Birks, for example, continued to focus a good deal of his attention on natural and evidential theology during the 1850s.[13] The influence of Enlightenment patterns of thought is also reflected in his rationalistic defence of the supernatural and its place in Scripture. The 'inductive principles of the philosophy of Bacon and Newton' were the basis of his response to Darwinism.[14] Similarly, most mainstream Evangelicals in the mid-nineteenth century continued to be confident in the 'Enlightenment appeal to evidences, scientific method and an orderly universe governed by cause and effect'.[15] In 1863 the *Record* affirmed that 'the good sense of LOCKE, the analogies of BUTLER, and the "Common Sense" of REID' would 'preserve us' from the 'vagaries' of German theology.[16]

[10] Crawford Gribben and Timothy C. F. Stunt, 'Introduction', to *Prisoners of hope? Aspects of Evangelical millennialism in Britain and Ireland, 1800–1880*, Bletchley 2004, 4.

[11] Bishops Robert Bickersteth (Ripon), H. M. Villiers (Carlisle) and J. C. Ryle (Liverpool) were premillennialists who had participated in the annual series of advent lectures organised by the Prophecy Investigation Society.

[12] Brown, 'Victorian Anglican Evangelicalism', 683.

[13] William Paley, *A view of the evidences of Christianity with introduction, notes, and supplement, by T. R. Birks*, London 1848, and *Horae Paulinae: or, the truth of the scripture history of St Paul evinced, by a comparison of the epistles which bear his name with the Acts of the Apostles, and with one another/with notes and a supplementary treatise entitled Horae apostolicae by the Rev. T. R. Birks*, London 1850.

[14] Thomas R. Birks, *Supernatural revelation, or, First principles of moral theology*, London 1879, p. vi.

[15] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain*, 143.

[16] Ibid.

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Birks, as a premillennial adventist, did believe in special providences, but he also had no difficulty in reconciling this belief with an enduring personal interest in science and an acceptance of the 'constancy and unshaken firmness' of the 'laws of nature'. Providence worked through 'unchangeable and eternal' divine laws, although an awesome divine power was capable of 'suspending, reversing or altering' those laws, especially in passing judgements upon sinful nations, which had in the past included the fall of Rome and Napoleon's Moscow campaign.[17] Science, he claimed, besides gradual change, had to account for falling stars, sudden electrical storms and violent volcanic eruptions. These occurrences were 'not infractions of natural laws', but the 'exceptional results of a combination of those laws beyond the range of human foresight, but foreseen and prearranged by the great Governor of the universe'.[18]

The legacy of Enlightenment thought can still be seen as late as the 1870s when, in response to John Tyndall's infamous challenge to the Victorian clerical establishment,[19] Birks explained the efficacy of prayer in terms of the operation of natural laws. In fact, Birks argued, the fixity of physical laws was 'vastly exceeded' by the 'variableness and unfixedness' of the circumstances and conditions in which these laws operated. These unfixed, indeterminate, elements demanded 'the intervention of a designer and Moral Governor' who was in 'ceaseless control' of 'the whole world of physics'.[20] These countless variable elements must have been chosen and ordered by God, Birks believed, in such a way as to 'secure any desired number of later results, of special providences, of answers to prayer' and 'acts of retribution'. They provided 'endless opportunities of pre-adjustment' by the 'daily arranging of special providential adaptions' to each prayer offered by men.[21]

Hence constant, miraculous, tinkering with creation was unnecessary. Given fixed physical laws, the answers to prayers stemmed from 'the whole scheme of Providence' and the divine foresight which 'made all the constants of nature different from what they might else have been, in a way that Infinite Wisdom alone could determine'.[22] In this way God's will had a power over outward nature as plain, sure and familiar 'as the plainest truths of science'.[23] For Birks, as for the 'moderate' Evangelicals Chalmers and David Brewster (1788–1859),[24] there was a fundamental continuity and consistency in the

[17] Thomas R. Birks, 'The unbelief of pretended science in the last days', in Thomas R. Birks (ed.), *Present times and future prospects*, London 1854, 63.

[18] Idem, *Supernatural revelation*, 98.

[19] Frank M. Turner, 'Rainfall, plagues, and the prince of Wales: a chapter in the conflict of religion and science', *Journal of British Studies* xiii (1974), 46–65.

[20] Thomas R. Birks, *Thoughts on the sacraments and on the relations of prayer and science*, London 1872, 63. [21] Ibid. 64. [22] Ibid. 66. [23] Ibid. 74.

[24] Cf. A. J. Boyd Hilton, *The age of atonement: the influence of Evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1785–1865*, Oxford 1988, 147–53.

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operations of divine providence that was evident in scientific laws and the geological history of the earth.

Birks's defence of plenary biblical inspiration is also in stark contrast to the narrow literalism that had rapidly been adopted by the Albury circle and other radical millennialists.[25] A further distinction was that the premillennialist Anglican Evangelicals spurned the pessimistic fatalism of the Irvingites[26] and were missionary supporters and activists.[27] They were committed to missionary causes and often to pan-Evangelical co-operation with a devotional zeal that was closely related to their personal advent hopes. There was 'no necessary connection between a pre-millennial stance and a loss of confidence in providence'.[28] More active promotion of the Gospel through overseas and home mission and pan-Evangelical collaboration were perceived 'as both a necessary response to the signs of the times and as a means whereby the second coming itself would be hastened'.[29]

For Birks, the advent hope was personally felt and served as an object of spiritual devotion. He denied that this doctrine 'destroys all hope' for missionary labours, paralysing the zeal of Church and all efforts for the conversion and salvation of the world; the claim that the 'more we expect from Divine miracles, the less strenuous shall we be, it is thought, in the use of present means' waiting 'for signs and wonders from heaven'.[30] On the contrary, he argued, 'no doctrine yields more powerful motives for devoted labour and Christian zeal'.[31] The 'near prospect' of the second advent represented a 'powerful call' to devotedness and renewed zeal. It gave a deeper feeling of majesty and holiness to the Church's work as its labours were seen to be 'linked in close and immediate union, with all the unutterable solemnity of that great day of the Lord's appearing'. It had thus enlarged and ennobled Christian hopes and was an engine of divine grace to free believers from superstitious delusion.[32]

While Drummond and the Catholic Apostolic Church claimed to be the restored apostolate gathering a small remnant out of the Church in

[25] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain*, 88–9.

[26] Brown, 'Victorian Anglican Evangelicalism', 685.

[27] Edward Bickersteth, although anxious about the progress of the Gospel and the political future, did not 'entirely abandon his sense of spiritual optimism or his long-standing interest in foreign missions. In this way, he was representative of most Evangelical pre-millennialists': Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals*, 184.

[28] Brian Stanley, 'British Evangelicals and overseas concerns, 1833–1970', in John R. Wolffe (ed.), *Evangelical faith and public zeal: Evangelicals and society, 1780–1980*, London 1995, 91.

[29] Andrew N. Porter, 'Late nineteenth-century Anglican missionary expansion: a consideration of some non-Anglican sources of inspiration', in Derek Baker (ed.), *The materials, sources and methods of ecclesiastical history* (Studies in Church History i, 1975), 357.

[30] Thomas R. Birks, 'The First Resurrection', in Edward Bickersteth (ed.), *The second coming, the judgement, and kingdom of Christ*, London 1843, 252. [31] Ibid. [32] Ibid. 258.

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preparation for premillennial rapture out of the world,[33] the concept of a covenanted nation and national religion, that was closely integrated with the historicist view of Revelation, actually strengthened the commitment of premillennial Anglicans to the vital social role of the established Church in improving the moral welfare of the population.[34] So while Hilton's claim that Evangelical adventists cared for social improvement, in spite of their belief in the world's imminent destruction, because they did not think of it as improving the world, but as 'merely' seeking to try to 'protect' their social inferiors 'from the stormy blasts'[35] may apply to the extreme views of Drummond and his circle, for mainstream Anglican adventists, their emphasis upon national sins, combined with the feeling that the second advent was near at hand, added a forceful sense of urgency to their campaigns against national immorality. The mainstay of Birks's position, and the central theme of his treatise *The Christian state* (1847), was that the doctrine of national responsibility was at the heart of divine prophecy and its relationship to historical events. Such attitudes underpinned the Evangelical commitment to the defence of the role and status of the established Church, helping to explain the unwillingness of churchmen like Birks to accept the pragmatic stance of leading contemporary politicians.[36]

Mainstream premillennialists like Bickersteth and Birks also largely shared a common view of providential theology with Chalmers. They all believed in an interventionist God, who could work through national judgements, and that providential intervention did not represent the fickle whims of a tyrannical divine despot – it could be clearly rationalised by reference to the scriptural plan for man's redemption.[37] Indeed, the leading Scottish Free Church premillennialist Andrew Bonar (1810–92) even claimed that Chalmers had, before his death, 'ranged himself with the Premillennialists'.[38] A reviewer in the *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy* had also earlier suggested that 'though his views were not matured' his 'leanings were all in favour of Premillennialism',[39] making reference to the correspondence between Chalmers and Bickersteth from which I quoted in my article.[40] This had been Bickersteth's own interpretation; that 'Dr. Chalmers, after reading my work on "Prophecy", is entering into the views there brought out'.[41] While Bickersteth's comments appear to underestimate Chalmers's reluctance to

[33] Ruotsila, 'Catholic Apostolic Church', 76–7.
[34] Brown, 'Victorian Anglican Evangelicalism', 687–9.
[35] Hilton, *Age of atonement*, 213.
[36] Brown, 'Victorian Anglican Evangelicalism', 688.
[37] Ibid. 686.
[38] This is quoted in Crawford Gribben, 'Andrew Bonar and the Scottish Presbyterian millennium', in Gribben and Stunt, *Prisoners of hope*, 201–2.
[39] *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy* iii (1851), 416. Similar claims were also made in *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy* iii (1872), 244–52.
[40] Brown, 'Victorian Anglican Evangelicalism', 686.
[41] Edward Bickersteth to his family, 24 Feb. 1836, in Thomas R. Birks, *Memoir of the Rev. Edward Bickersteth*, New York 1851, ii. 79.

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state directly whether the second advent would be a personal reign of Christ, the letter demonstrates a view of providence and mission that both men shared:

> But of this, on the general, I am well satisfied, that the next coming (whether in person or not, I forbear to say) will be a coming, not to the final judgement, but to precede and usher in the Millennium. I utterly despair of the universal prevalence of Christianity as the result of a specific missionary process, under the guidance of human wisdom, and principle. But without slackening in the least, our obligation to help forward this great cause, I look for its conclusive establishment through a widening passage of desolating judgements, with the utter demolition of our present civil and ecclesiastical structures.[42]

Similarly, Bickersteth eulogised the Church's 'mighty mission' to 'prepare the way for that happier state, near at hand, when the whole earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord', while he also felt that all his hopes were tinged with 'the humbling and sanctifying sorrow, that our country as a country, with Christian kingdoms in general, nationally rejecting the gospel, must previously undergo national judgements'.[43] Bickersteth and Chalmers interpreted the operation of providence and its relationship to mission in similar ways, in contrast to Hilton's suggestion that two conflicting and competing views of providence defined two types of Evangelicalism.

There was also not necessarily a direct connection between providential theology and specific social attitudes. To illustrate this, in my previous article, I summarised some brief examples from the debates over poor law reform and the corn laws to demonstrate that eschatological views were not a critical motivating factor. The *Record* supported Chalmers's tough stand on poor law reform and though the 'Claphamite' Anglican Evangelical periodical the *Christian Observer* generally supported Chalmers's tough moralism, it disagreed with his view on the poor laws.[44] Lord Ashley (the future earl of Shaftesbury) came to support corn law repeal on pragmatic grounds.[45] During the 1840s the premillennialist *Churchman's Monthly Review* was also involved in a controversy with the *Record* over political economy during which the *Record* used much of the 'natural law' rhetoric of political economy in discussing social questions.[46] Both the *Christian Observer* and *The Record*

[42] Thomas Chalmers to Bickersteth, 17 Feb. 1836, ibid. ii. 80. A reviewer of Birks's memoir of Bickersteth, in the *Quarterly Journal of Prophecy* (iii [1851], 408–14), quoted Chalmers's letter to show that 'substantially he is at one with Bickersteth', highlighting in italics the assertion that 'the next coming … will be a coming, not to the final judgement, but to precede and usher in the Millennium'.

[43] Bickersteth to Lord Shaftesbury, 11 Aug. 1847, in Birks, *Memoir of Bickersteth*, 331.

[44] Donald M. Lewis, *Lighten their darkness: the evangelical mission to working-class London, 1828–1860*, London–New York, 1986, 152.

[45] Brown, 'Victorian Anglican Evangelicalism', 687.

[46] Lewis, *Lighten their darkness*, 154–5.

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defended the corn law and new poor law and neither questioned the separation of husband and wife in the workhouse.[47]

These apparent complexities become clearer if, rather than emphasising eschatological perspectives, more fundamental characteristics of nineteenth-century Evangelicalism are considered. The central element in determining Evangelical attitudes was their emphasis on saving individual souls, which involved a primary focus on individual responsibility rather than corporate identity in Church or State. Individual responsibility for the soul's fate and a pervading sense of sin underpinned their whole world view; as Bebbington has observed, 'The dynamic of the Evangelical approach to politics was hostility to sin.'[48] The sense of sin drove the moral absolutism of Evangelical political campaigns, was reflected in the methods they adopted, in their unwillingness to compromise and sense of urgency.

The Church was duty-bound to aim to reform the moral and spiritual character of the poor and this, in turn, would encourage them to a frugal self-reliance that was the key to improving their material well being. It was, of course, this moral reformation of society that would ultimately render state provision unnecessary: for Chalmers poverty was the result of individual moral weakness and could only be remedied by 'sustained evangelical tuition'.[49]

Chalmers's emphasis upon the moral reform of individuals was, in essence, the traditional, and characteristic, Evangelical position. It was also generally shared by most premillennialists, whose views were closer to the Evangelical mainstream and often more flexible than Hilton's account suggests. Hilton argues that postmillennialists were more paternalistic in wishing to control the morals of the nation, supporting *laissez-faire* economic and social policies because these would best nurture morality. This moral paternalism issued in their support for Bible and mission societies. Premillennialists, according to Hilton, 'despised them for it', seeing such societies as attempting to do God's work for him. They believed that successful ministry consisted in providing faithful witness to the truth of an imminent millennium.[50] Here again, we need to distinguish the views of the tiny minority of extreme premillennialists, whose views are represented in the *Morning Watch*, from the outlook of the mainstream premillennialists in the Church of England and Scottish Presbyterian Churches. My article demonstrated that mainstream premillennialists supported and worked for mission societies.[51] They also shared with men like Chalmers the same moral paternalism and activism.

Self-reliant morality and the importance of the soul's salvation were the basis of the Evangelical belief system and the Evangelical approach to

[47] David F. Roberts *The social conscience of the early Victorians*, Stanford 2002, 256.

[48] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain*, 135.

[49] Thomas Chalmers, 'The political economy of the Bible', quoted in Hilton, *Age of atonement*, 85.

[50] Hilton, *Age of atonement*, 17.

[51] Brown, 'Victorian Anglican Evangelicalism', 690–2.

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philanthropy. This was the foundation of Evangelical social attitudes, the connection which Evangelicals understood between their faith and changes in society. Changes could only come through individual personal conversion, as Chalmers made clear. He believed that the 'elevated parts of our social fabric' should be left 'untouched' because 'It is our belief that through the medium not of a political change in the State, but of a moral and personal change upon themselves, there is not one desirable amelioration which they [the poor] might not mount their way to.'[52]

This outlook explains why the approach of nineteenth-century Evangelicals differed greatly from that of other social reformers, including other Christians, who aimed to improve society by reforming national institutions. It also explains why Evangelicals devoted so much time and effort to battles against what were regarded as the 'soul destroying' influences of Roman Catholicism and ritualism – campaigns which appeared other-worldly to their critics but which were driven by their shared belief system. Visiting societies and urban missions also saw charity in terms of preventing evil; the remedy to social problems could only be found in reforming individuals.[53] Anthony Ashley Cooper wrote of the evils of child labour in a way which typifies this Evangelical mindset:

> When called upon to suggest our remedy of the evil, we reply by an exhibition of the causes of it; the very statement involves an argument, and contains its own answer within itself. Let your laws, we say to the Parliament, assume the proper functions of law, protect those for whom neither wealth nor station, nor age, have raised a bulwark against tyranny; but, above all, open your treasury, erect churches, send forth the ministers of religion; reverse the conduct of the enemy of mankind, and sow wheat among the tares – all hopes are groundless, all legislation weak, all conservatism nonsense, without this alpha and omega of policy; it will give content instead of bitterness, engraft obedience on rebellion, raise purity from corruption, and 'life from the dead' – but there is no time to be lost.[54]

Victorian Evangelicals 'wanted to save souls, not bodies'. As a result, their morality, including Chalmers's Malthusian approach, could appear harsh, and there was 'little difference' between the campaigns of 'moderates' to suppress vice, wishing to see Sabbath-breakers prosecuted, and 'the hard evangelical John Cumming, who believed that it was better to leave poor children untaught than to teach them in Roman Catholic schools'.[55] As David Roberts has argued, this 'is not the stuff of which social Christianity is

[52] Henry Hunter (ed.), *Problems of poverty: selections from the economic and social writings of Thomas Chalmers*, London 1912, 169.

[53] Roberts, *Social conscience*, 257.

[54] Anon., 'Infant labour', *Quarterly Review* lxvii (Dec. 1840), 98. This article is attributed to Ashley Cooper in Geoffrey B. A. M. Finlayson, *The seventh earl of Shaftesbury, 1801–1885*, London 1981, 126.

[55] Denis G. Paz, *Popular anti-Catholicism in mid-Victorian England*, Stanford 1992, 143.

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made, and Evangelical philanthropists such as the Earl of Shaftesbury may at most be labelled conservative social Christians'.[56]

State legislation was viewed as a temporary remedial measure to allow for the spread of the Gospel and conversion to raise the level of personal morality to a point at which it became unnecessary. The publisher and author R. B. Seeley (1798–1886), for example, advocated legislation to enforce 'what the sense of individual responsibility fails to accomplish'.[57] Such legislation tended to be prohibitive and to be concerned with matters of morality rather than with economic and social conditions. As Evangelicals were wary of legislation that might erode personal moral responsibility, their commitment to state intervention was often 'partial, reluctant and hesitating'; statutory measures were considered exceptional and their main emphasis remained on the need for voluntary action by individuals.[58] As Shaftesbury observed in his *Nineteenth Century* article on 'The mischief of state aid', discussing housing provision for the poor, 'The State is bound, in such a case as this, to give every facility by law and enabling statutes; but the work itself should be founded, and proceed, on voluntary effort, for which there is in the country an adequate amount of wealth, zeal and intelligence.'[59]

Growing Evangelical support for state intervention in the area of social welfare, in the second half of the nineteenth century, owed less to theological shifts than to greater knowledge and pastoral involvement, personal contact and the work and evidence produced by organisations such as the London City Mission, which helped to broaden the understanding of the structural and environmental causes of poverty.[60] This is reflected in the changing attitudes to cholera outbreaks. In 1832 mass suffering had been easily accepted as a divine visitation, including by the *Christian Observer*. By the time of the 1848 outbreak, environmental causes were more understood. Similarly, the work of government commissions – Chadwick's on public health, Sadler's on factories and Ashley's on mines also helped to educate a wider Evangelical public about the factors which impinged on individual morality and restricted opportunities for self-help.

Similarly, the possible connections between economics and theology in the mid- and later nineteenth century do not seem to be clearly established. Hilton takes the enactment of limited liability legislation in 1856 as an important indicator of changing Evangelical attitudes, a transition from a retributive spiritual capitalism to an age when the liability of sin was limited and the 'blood of bankrupts' was to be 'sprinkled only, and not spilt'.[61] Many

[56] Roberts, *Social conscience*, 144.

[57] This is quoted in J. Douglas Holladay, '19th century Evangelical activism: from private charity to state intervention, 1830–1850', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* li (1982), 53–79 at p. 65.

[58] Ibid. 66.

[59] Lord Shaftesbury, 'The mischief of state aid', *The Nineteenth Century* xiv (1883).

[60] Lewis, *Lighten their darkness*, 167–9.

[61] Hilton, *Age of atonement*, 297.

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Evangelicals welcomed limited liability legislation on practical grounds, believing that it would enable enterprise from small investors. The link between legal limitation of liability and sin was not generally made by Evangelicals.[62] The *Record* at mid-century maintained a tough line on eternal punishment but did not reject limited liability, though the paper was critical of some of the ways in which the law operated and emphasised that a heightened sense of individual responsibility was needed for the law to be operated effectively.[63]

While Hilton describes a significant change in the theological temperament of 'Recordite' Evangelicals, associated with the 'softening of Evangelical Christianity' from the middle years of the nineteenth century,[64] there is, however, significant evidence of a hardening of convictions among many Evangelicals during this same period, which has been described as the development of 'proto-fundamentalism'. As I suggested in my article,[65] such conflicting interpretations reflect the difficulties that have arisen when twentieth-century conceptual categories have been applied to the religious culture of the nineteenth century. Hilton suggests, for example, that Birks's *First principles of moral science* (1873), with its emphasis on divine law and providence, represents the static approach of early nineteenth-century Evangelicalism, 'adapted to the sentimental optimism' of a 'later age',[66] yet also notes his premillennialism and his hostile reaction to Gladstone's election in 1880.[67]

In discussing the development of Evangelicalism in the Church of England and Scottish Presbyterian Churches, a clear distinction needs to be made between the Irvingite premillennialism of the *Morning Watch* and Catholic Apostolic Church and the premillennialism of mainstream Evangelicals. Mainstream premillennialists had much in common with other Evangelicals, particularly the Enlightenment inheritance of moderate Calvinism and a confidence in the natural and evidential theology of the Enlightenment. The harmony of natural and revealed truth continued to be vigorously defended against the exclusive claims of the materialist empiricism propounded by scientists like Huxley and Tyndall.

In contrast with the fatalistic asceticism and pessimism of the Irvingites, their version of premillennialism enhanced an optimistic sense of missionary activism and an openness to pan-Evangelical cooperation. The mainstream premillennialists also shared a similar view of providential theology with postmillennialists, though with differences of emphasis and interpretation, and there was no necessary connection between providence and social attitudes. The social attitudes of mainstream premillennialist and postmillennialists also had much in common.

[62] Cf. ibid. 276–97.

[63] Jane Garnett, 'Evangelicalism and business in mid-Victorian Britain', in Wolffe, *Evangelical faith*, 78.

[64] Hilton, *Age of atonement*, 273.

[65] Brown, 'Victorian Anglican Evangelicalism', 702–3.

[66] Hilton, *Age of atonement*, 366.

[67] Ibid. 365.

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