

Part II

Evangelicalism

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Evangelicalism and Secularization in Britain and America from the Eighteenth Century to the Present

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Evangelicalism, it is widely agreed, has been the type of Christianity that lays particular emphasis on the Bible, the cross, conversion, and activism.¹ Arising in the eighteenth century, it spread throughout the English-speaking world and beyond during the following century. Although commentators in the United States have sometimes claimed that the phenomenon has been ‘unique to North America’,² in reality it extended over the whole earth and possessed a stronghold in Britain. When, in 1828, R. S. M’All, a distinguished Congregational minister in England, had a Presbyterian minister from America take his service, he commented that the visitor ‘had preached the same Gospel which they were accustomed to hear’.³ The evangelical message formed a lens through which society at large viewed the world in both Britain and America by the middle part of the nineteenth century. It was this major religious force that formed the core of what was undermined as secularization gathered impetus in subsequent years. A similar outcome might therefore have been expected in the two lands. The erosion of evangelical norms, a commentator might suppose, should have led to a comparable degree of religiosity on the two sides of the Atlantic. Yet that has not been the case. At the end of the twentieth century, a multinational survey asking whether people attended church, prayed, felt religion was important in their lives, and had been converted revealed that, whereas 35 per cent answered yes to all four questions

¹ D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), ch. 1.

² J. D. Hunter, *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 7.

³ William B. Sprague, *Visits to European Celebrities* (Boston, MA: Gould & Lincoln, 1855), 79.

in the United States, a mere 7 per cent responded in the same way in Great Britain.⁴ A host of similar indicators shows that Britain had become a more secular nation than America. The number of Bibles bought annually, for example, was more than twice as high per capita in America as in Britain.⁵ The part played by evangelicalism in the process of secularization is therefore worth exploring. Did it assume the same form on the two sides of the Atlantic? Or was it sufficiently different to contribute to the contrasting fortunes of religion in Britain and America?

Historians in the United States, as a recent American Historical Association booklet on *American Religion* points out, have normally insisted on American religious exceptionalism, the idea that the country is a special case in the spiritual history of humanity. They have stressed the success of religion, ‘especially evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity’.⁶ This long-standing historiographical tradition can claim the august authority of Alexis de Tocqueville, who, as an observer of the country in the 1830s, was struck by the blend between ‘the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom’, an expression of the temper of popular evangelicalism.⁷ The fusion of religiosity with a love of liberty, according to de Tocqueville, made America different from Europe. The first great church historian of the United States, the Swiss-American Philip Schaff, was more balanced. Schaff believed that American religion was distinctive because, unlike European Christianity, it emerged from a Protestant rather than a Catholic background, and because it operated in an environment where church and state had been separated, but he also held that since its roots were in Europe, especially in England, it retained much in common with its ‘bodily and spiritual mother’.⁸ England and Scotland displayed a denominational diversity comparable to that in the United States, and many in both lands shared the American assumption that conversion was ‘the whole work of the church’.⁹ Subsequent historians, looking back to Schaff, have preferred his comments on what made the United States unique to his discussions of the affinity of American religion with the Protestantism of Britain.¹⁰ In the twentieth century, the American William Warren Sweet, drawing on the frontier thesis of Frederick Jackson Turner, found additional reasons for maintaining

⁴ ‘Faith in the Modern World’, *Angus Reid World Monitor*, 1 (1998), 33–42.

⁵ Robert Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America’s Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals and Secularism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 50.

⁶ John T. McGreevy, *American Religion*, *American History Now* (Washington, DC: American Historical Association, 2012), 3–4.

⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Harvey Claflin Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 282.

⁸ Philip Schaff, *America: A Sketch of the Political, Social, and Religious Character of the United States of America* (New York: C. Scribner, 1855), 86, 87, 98 (quoted).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 121, 117 (quoted).

¹⁰ There are exceptions, notably Thomas A. Howard, *God and the Atlantic: America, Europe, and the Religious Divide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 156.

the distinctiveness of the religious experience of his nation.¹¹ Sweet's successor in the chair of American Christianity at Chicago Divinity School, Sidney E. Mead, repudiated much of the frontier thesis but, following the exceptionalist side of Schaff, created the paradigm of America as pursuing something novel, a 'lively experiment' in religion.¹² The many graduate students of Sweet and Mead have dominated the writing of church history in the United States, largely assuming that American religion possessed unique qualities. Even Winthrop S. Hudson, the student of Sweet who diverged most drastically from his master by dwelling on the continuing affiliation of American Christianity to its British counterpart, wanted to focus on 'the distinctive ethos and character of religion in America'.¹³ The more democratic, more populist tone of American religion, as embodied in revivalist evangelicalism, has become axiomatic.

It is undoubtedly true that the pattern of Christianity in the United States has differed in several major respects from what prevailed in Britain. The separation of church and state at federal level meant that the principle of establishment, an entrenched element in the society of England and Scotland, was banished. 'In America', declared Newman Hall, a Congregational visitor from London, in 1870, 'there are no Dissenters'.¹⁴ The fundamental division between those who enjoyed the prestige of denominational association with public authority and those who did not disappeared. The ramifications were considerable. Thus, for example, the Presbyterians, at their first American General Assembly in 1789, took the drastic step of altering their statement of faith, the seventeenth-century Westminster Confession, so as to eliminate the responsibility of the civil magistrate for the welfare of the church.¹⁵ The introduction of Republican self-government in the secular sphere, moreover, was copied in the spiritual sphere. A breakaway from the authoritarian Methodist Episcopal Church, for instance, initially called itself the 'Republican Methodist Church'.¹⁶ Observers from both sides of the Atlantic subsequently noticed with some consistency that public meetings of Christian organizations were, in America, arenas of formal debate designed to thrash out substantive issues, but in Britain occasions for entertainment since questions had been settled beforehand in private discussion.¹⁷ The denominations, furthermore,

¹¹ Sidney E. Mead, 'Professor Sweet's Religion and Culture in America: A Review Article', *Church History*, 22 (1953), 33–49.

¹² *Ibid.*, 40–1. Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

¹³ Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 5.

¹⁴ Newman Hall, *From Liverpool to St. Louis* (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1870), 187.

¹⁵ Anson Phelps Stokes, *Church and State in the United States*, 3 vols (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950), vol. 1, 728–9.

¹⁶ Robert T. Handy, *A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 160.

¹⁷ Stephen H. Tyng, *Recollections of England* (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1847), 38; Ebenezer Davies, *American Scenes and Christian Slavery* (London: John Snow, 1849), 306; Joseph

were not identical on the two sides of the Atlantic. Anglicans travelling across the ocean in either direction felt themselves at home in the worship of their sister church, but Stephen H. Tyng, a prominent evangelical Episcopalian exploring England in 1842, found there was a regrettable constraint about his brethren in the ministry. ‘The general fear of religious excitement, jealousy of appearing fanatical, or having any appearance of Methodism’, reported Tyng, ‘is a very strong principle among the English clergy.’¹⁸ Even the English Methodists themselves suffered from similar inhibitions, for the Wesleyan authorities tried to rein in emotional revivalism.¹⁹ The obligation of decency and order, the ‘ecclesiastical proprieties’, seemed altogether stronger in Britain than in America.²⁰ The result of the contrast between a land of established churches, monarchical rule, and entrenched social decorum, and one of voluntary religion, Republican government, and freer manners inevitably affected the face of religion.

Yet these dissimilarities are less striking than what the evangelical communities east and west of the Atlantic shared with each other. For one thing, their intellectual formation took place in a common mould. The thinking of the evangelicals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was largely shaped by the Enlightenment. Although they repudiated the rationalism of the French Enlightenment, they believed in the power of reason and the spirit of enquiry. There was no gulf between Christianity and either science or commerce. In Scotland, Thomas Chalmers, the leader of the Free Church, advocated a synthesis of science with divinity; and, in America, Francis Wayland, the Baptist president of Brown University, wrote a compendium of political economy based on Christian premises.²¹ The theology of the Reformed tradition was deeply affected by Enlightenment influences, emerging as a moderate form of Calvinism expounded supremely by Jonathan Edwards. The American theologian enjoyed great respect in Britain. Rowland Hill, a well-known Anglican evangelist in the early years of the nineteenth century, believed Edwards had ‘rendered more important service to the cause of evangelical truth than almost any other man the world had seen’.²² The equivalent of the Enlightenment idea of progress among evangelicals was their postmillennial

Cross, *The American Pastor in Europe* (London: Richard Bentley, 1860), 363; *British Weekly* (London), 19 May 1898, 85.

¹⁸ Tyng, *Recollections*, 218.

¹⁹ Louis Billington, ‘British and American Methodisms Grow Apart’, in R. A. Burchell (ed.), *The End of Anglo-America: Historical Essays in the Study of Cultural Divergence* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 116.

²⁰ John Cumming, ‘Introduction’, in Cross, *American Pastor*, xix.

²¹ Thomas Chalmers, *The Evidence and Authority of the Christian Revelation* (Edinburgh: for William Blackwood, 1814); Francis Wayland, *Elements of Political Economy* (Boston, MA: Gould, Kendall & Lincoln, 1837).

²² Sprague, *Visits*, 24.

eschatology, the expectation that, before the second advent, the gospel would spread across the world, bringing peace and prosperity in its train. This hope gave them enormous confidence, expressed in the overseas missionary movement and the array of home missionary organizations. Equivalent bodies on the two sides of the Atlantic recognized their parallel roles. Thus in 1867 the American Bible Society in New York proudly displayed portraits of two aristocrats, Lord Bexley and Lord Shaftesbury, the past and present presidents of the British and Foreign Bible Society.²³ Such extra-ecclesiastical bodies also reflected the pragmatism of an age that was prepared to experiment with new methods. That, too, was a symptom of the Enlightenment temper that bound together evangelicals in Britain and America.

There was a common mentality because ideas and personnel found a ready passage across the Atlantic. Correspondence was more common than might be supposed. William B. Sprague, an American Presbyterian, exchanged letters with the Evangelical Anglican leader Charles Simeon as well as Thomas Chalmers, his Presbyterian equivalent, before meeting them face to face. Books were frequently published simultaneously in America and London or else were soon reprinted in the other country. Sprague was familiar with the *Village Sermons* of George Burder, an English Congregational minister, from his earliest childhood; conversely, William Wilberforce, the English campaigner against the slave trade, knew well the writings of the American theologians Timothy Dwight and John Mitchell Mason.²⁴ At the end of the century a New England Congregational minister never allowed a month to pass without buying the latest English theological books.²⁵ Periodicals circulated freely. The English Evangelical Anglican theologian William Goode received the American *Episcopal Reporter* in the 1840s, and the American Presbyterian B. B. Warfield took the *British Weekly* in the 1880s.²⁶ Hymn-books formed the popular taste in singing, with Charles Wesley being a noted American import and Ira D. Sankey a notable export. When a Strict Baptist from England visited America at the opening of the twentieth century he noticed that nearly all the hymns were of English composition.²⁷ The flow of visitors was ceaseless, especially of Americans to Britain, with frequency increasing as the century went on and travel became swifter and more comfortable. Already by 1866, George Hay Stewart, a Philadelphia merchant who was a leading layman in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, had journeyed nine times across the Atlantic.²⁸ Throughout the century emigrants

²³ Charles J. Guthrie, *Journal of a Tour in America, 1817*, ed. Edward Ranson (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen Centre for Scottish Studies, 2000), 19.

²⁴ Sprague, *Visits*, 195, 250, 34, 48. ²⁵ *British Weekly*, 19 May 1895, 85.

²⁶ Tyng, *Recollections*, 165; *British Weekly*, 5 November 1886, 16.

²⁷ C. J. Farncombe, *My Visit to Canada and the United States* (London: Farncombe & Son, 1907), 43.

²⁸ Guthrie, *Journal*, 14 n.22.

flooded from Britain to the United States, always the most popular destination until the first decade of the twentieth century.²⁹ Although economic reasons for migration were usually paramount, many brought with them their previous religious associations and preoccupations. Altogether, the circulation of the beliefs of the evangelicals made the North Atlantic world a largely common culture in the age of their dominance.

The resemblances between British and American evangelicals extended even to areas of apparently stark contrast. Notwithstanding the constitutional difference over relations of church and state, there were groups in Britain which preferred the American system to that prevailing in Britain. Shortly after the American Presbyterians altered their confession of faith to accord with their new church/state arrangements, two groups of Seceders from the established Church of Scotland followed them in permitting ministers to dissent from the Westminster Confession's assertion of the duties of civil magistrates in the church.³⁰ The two Scottish groups merged in 1820 and, as the United Secession Church, developed, in imitation of the American standpoint, a philosophy of voluntarism, the principle that all churches should be left to support themselves. The more spirited souls among the Nonconformists of England and Wales gradually adopted the same position and organized an Anti-State Church Association to campaign for disestablishment. By the middle years of the century, prevailing Nonconformist opinion endorsed the separation of church and state.³¹ A Welsh Congregational minister travelling through the United States in 1849, in listing what he most admired about America, put religious equality first and the consequent 'workings of the voluntary principle in the abundant supply of places of worship' second.³² So the American pattern was much favoured by many evangelicals in Britain. There, in practice, the privileges of the established churches were steadily eroded during the nineteenth century and, in particular, after the 1820s no public money was granted for church building. The task was left to initiatives within the national churches and so a form of voluntarism prevailed.³³ Conversely, the separation of church and state in America was by no means completed during the eighteenth century. Massachusetts retained an established church until 1833 and legacies of state confessionalism, such as federal

²⁹ Dudley Baines, *Migration in a Mature Economy: Emigration and Internal Migration in England and Wales, 1861–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 62–5.

³⁰ S. Isbell, 'New Light', in Nigel M. de S. Cameron, David F. Wright, David C. Lachman, and Donald E. Meek (eds), *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993), 625.

³¹ Timothy Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality: Nonconformist Politics in Mid-Victorian England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1999).

³² Davies, *American Scenes*, 310.

³³ Stewart J. Brown, *The National Churches of England, Ireland and Scotland, 1801–46* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 68–74.

grants to Indian missions, survived long afterwards. Edward Norman has persuasively contended that the measures of practical disestablishment were adopted slowly and erratically in the United States, Canada, and Britain throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.³⁴ The process therefore showed many parallels between the nations rather than simple divergence.

The same is largely true in the area of revivalism. Schaff considered the religious revivals of America in which churches were augmented by large numbers of converts ‘peculiar to that country’.³⁵ That judgement, however, cannot stand. It is true that the Church of England experienced few revivals in its congregations, with even the sympathetic evangelical leader Edward Bickersteth regretting that so many American awakenings appeared spurious.³⁶ Nevertheless, in other denominations revivals were common in Britain. There was a deep-seated tradition of revivals in Scotland, with a notable instance at Kilsyth in 1839 and many community-based revivals well into the twentieth century.³⁷ Wales was similarly prone to such phases of religious excitement and enjoyed a nationwide revival in 1904–5.³⁸ In England for a while many Congregationalists and Baptists were active in promoting copies of American awakenings.³⁹ English Methodists maintained a vigorous style of popular revivalism. The authorities in Wesleyan Methodism might look askance at undue excitement, but that was an attitude to styles of revival, not a condemnation of revivals in themselves.⁴⁰ There were particularly exhilarating outbreaks in Cornwall. As late as 1882, a Methodist minister recalled, ‘the people were roused as though a bomb had fallen. Moans & groans, lamentations & strong crying & tears burst on every side.’⁴¹ By that date, as in America, revivals were often interdenominational and led by popular evangelists. The American Dwight L. Moody found a ready welcome for his urban idiom when he visited Britain in the 1870s.⁴² Revival proved an enduring ideal in Britain even when, as in much of the United States, local community-based episodes

³⁴ E. R. Norman, *The Conscience of the State in North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), esp. 44–5, 85.

³⁵ Schaff, *America*, 167. ³⁶ Sprague, *Visits*, 231.

³⁷ Tom Lennie, *Glory in the Glen: A History of Evangelical Revivals in Scotland, 1880–1940* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2009).

³⁸ Noel Gibbard, *Fire on the Altar: A History and Evaluation of the 1904–05 Welsh Revival* (Bridgend: Bryntirion Press, 2005).

³⁹ Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790–1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), ch. 2.

⁴⁰ David Bebbington, *Victorian Religious Revivals: Culture and Piety in Local and Global Contexts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 95–8.

⁴¹ Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, and Gordon Rupp (eds), *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, vol. 4 (London: Epworth Press, 1988), 559.

⁴² James F. Findlay, Jr, *Dwight L. Moody: American Evangelist, 1837–1899* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), ch. 5.

were becoming rarer.⁴³ Awakenings were therefore far from absent from British life. On the contrary, the trajectory of revivalism was roughly parallel on the two sides of the Atlantic.

A further dimension of apparent contrast between the two countries lies in the suggested democratization of religion. The influential thesis of Nathan Hatch established that the young American Republic generated a powerful challenge to the traditional guidance of the clergy in religious matters, replacing it with initiatives by untrained individuals. This anti-elitism determined the populist character of American Christianity over subsequent centuries. The thesis claims explicitly that no such developments took place in Britain.⁴⁴ That, however, was not the case. Although the Church of England frowned on lay-led activities and the Wesleyan Methodist authorities around Jabez Bunting made efforts to control the dynamic of popular enthusiasm, the diverse evangelical movement frequently displayed the qualities that, according to Hatch, were unique to America. Over six decades after the death of John Wesley in 1791 there was a constant haemorrhaging of Methodists out of Wesleyanism into breakaway denominations. The New Connexion under Alexander Kilham, inspired by the democratic ideology of the French Revolution, asserted the rights of laypeople in religious organizations; the Primitive Methodists began as a strange group, much given to visions and deeply influenced by Lorenzo Dow, one of the idiosyncratic American preachers about whom Hatch writes; and Wesleyan Reformers combined revivalism with a passion for liberty.⁴⁵ Many layfolk who stayed within Wesleyanism shared anxieties about bureaucratic controls with those who seceded. Likewise, the Baptists produced a whole distinct denomination, the New Connexion of General Baptists, led by an individual, Dan Taylor, who showed much of the self-reliance of his American counterparts.⁴⁶ A range of small sects arose in Britain, often with strong personalities guiding their initial fortunes. They included the Cokelers of Sussex, with John Sirgood as their mentor; he blended evangelical orthodoxy with requiring agricultural workers' smocks to be worn

⁴³ Janice Holmes, *Religious Revivals in Britain and Ireland, 1859–1905* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2000), ch. 6.

⁴⁴ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 7–8, 218–19.

⁴⁵ David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750–1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1984), 67–73; J. S. Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: Its Background and Early History* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 69–70, 45–7; D. A. Gowland, *Methodist Secessions: The Origins of Free Methodism in Three Lancashire Towns* (Manchester: for the Chetham Society, 1979).

⁴⁶ Frank W. Rinaldi, *The Tribe of Dan: The New Connexion of General Baptists, 1770–1891: A Study in the Transition from Revival Movement to Established Denomination* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2008).

and discouraging marriage as an inferior state of life.⁴⁷ Thus there were many individuals and bodies in Britain that fit the criteria of the Hatch thesis. The proportion of evangelicals identifying themselves with new trends initiated from below was no doubt greater in America than in Britain, but the difference was only a matter of degree. The United States had no monopoly of democratic enterprise in religion.

A marked shift in the later nineteenth century was a tendency to move away from the populist style celebrated by Hatch to greater propriety. The phenomenon was bound up with a rising standard of living and a greater taste for respectability. In America it was found more on the east coast and in the large cities; in Britain it was most evident in London and, again, in the larger towns and cities. The members of the main churches of these places preferred comfortable pews and polished sermons to the crudities of old-time religion. A visitor to a Milwaukee Methodist church in 1883 found 'a good congregation of genteel men and women' who 'bowed their heads very gracefully'. The unhappy visitor, determined to assert the superiority of popular ways, insisted on the old-style Methodist custom of kneeling to pray. He 'bent the knee, although alone'.⁴⁸ Architecture reflected the alteration of taste, with elaborate Gothic structures replacing humbler buildings. So did the style of services, with liturgical elements making their appearance in place of free worship. The similarity of these processes of change in Britain and America is clear in the work of Charles D. Cashdollar, who, unusually among historians, has analysed the interior life of congregations. A large number of sizeable English, Scottish, and American Congregational and Presbyterian churches in urban settings show such a striking resemblance to each other even to 1915 that their evolution towards greater respectability can be discussed by Cashdollar under common headings.⁴⁹ A taste for a broader theology often accompanied these developments. Biblical criticism was accepted, hell was called into question, and attention turned away from the cross to the example of Christ. Like so much in worship, the new trends were rooted in Romantic sensibility with its love of nature and emotion. Horace Bushnell, the American Congregationalist who was the pioneer of liberal thought in the evangelical ranks, introduced a vase of flowers into his pulpit in 1852, a symbol of reverence for nature.⁵⁰ He habitually pictured the Almighty not under the customary image of a governor administering justice but as a Father loving his children. Where Bushnell led, others followed, in Britain as well as in America. By the end of the century flowers were decking many churches in England, and God was

⁴⁷ Peter Jerrome, *The Story of the Loxwood Dependants: John Sirgood's Way* (Petworth: Window Press, 1998).

⁴⁸ C. H. Sage to editor, *Free Methodist* (Chicago, IL), 9 January 1884, 4.

⁴⁹ Charles D. Cashdollar, *A Spiritual Home: Life in British and American Reformed Congregations, 1830–1915* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

conceived as Father in the official catechism of the Evangelical Free Churches of England and Wales.⁵¹ The main directions of change around 1900, towards nobler worship and milder theology, were uniform on the two sides of the Atlantic.

The Romantic impulse, however, also fostered conservative doctrinal trends. The postmillennialism of previous generations started to be challenged by the premillennial teaching, feeding on the Romantic sense of the dramatic, that the second advent could be expected imminently. And the understanding of holiness was transformed by replacing the Reformed idea that it could be attained only by persistent struggle with the notion that sin could be banished from a believer's life through simple trust.⁵² The exalting of faith bore the hallmark of Romanticism. These tendencies made progress in both Britain and America, but in rather different ways. Premillennialism in England was almost entirely limited to evangelicals in the Church of England and the (so-called Plymouth) Brethren, but in America, in the specific form of dispensationalism, it spread to a much wider audience through the Northfield Conferences promoted by Moody and then through the notes in the Bible published in 1909 by Moody's former pastor Cyrus I. Scofield.⁵³ Similarly, the novel teaching about holiness took distinct forms in the two lands. In England it emerged chiefly in the form of the Keswick movement, largely supported by Evangelical Anglicans and emphatically Romantic in tone,⁵⁴ whereas in America its chief constituency consisted of Methodists, less forcefully swayed by Romantic currents of thought, who wanted to resuscitate the traditional teaching of the denomination that sin could be eradicated.⁵⁵ Some of the American advocates of this view left to form separate holiness denominations; many of them consolidated in 1908 as the Church of the Nazarene. It was in this vigorous sector that pentecostalism, which was to become an immense force in America but only a minor piece in the British evangelical mosaic, had its origins.⁵⁶ The popularity of dispensationalism and the holiness/pentecostal movement among a mass public in the United States was not paralleled in Britain. It was at this stage, around the turn of the twentieth century, that patterns of evangelical life in the two lands began to diverge significantly.

⁵¹ *An Evangelical Free Church Catechism for Use in Home and School* (London: National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches, 1899), 7.

⁵² Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, chs 3, 5.

⁵³ Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism, 1875–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 67, 17.

⁵⁴ David Bebbington, *Holiness in Nineteenth-Century England* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), chs 3, 4.

⁵⁵ Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1980).

⁵⁶ Robert Mapes Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), ch. 2.

During the twentieth century as a whole the changes in the British denominational balance had a similar effect. Within the Church of England the general tendency for much of the century was for the parties representing broad and high churchmanship, the Modernists and the Anglo-Catholics, to make headway at the expense of the evangelicals. Those evangelicals who desired to keep up with the times by widening their theological horizons and adopting more elaborate ritual came to be known as 'Liberal Evangelicals'; they organized from 1906 and became the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement in 1923. Other evangelicals who wanted to resist both developments formed the Fellowship of Evangelical Churchmen in 1918. Actual schism followed between the Church Missionary Society (CMS), representing the bulk of evangelicals, and the Bible Churchmen's Missionary Society, standing for the conservative position.⁵⁷ The result was that the Evangelical party in the Church of England became weak and polarized. Nonconformity was afflicted even more severely. Among Methodists the same trend that affected Anglican Evangelicals was evident, with a more liberal organization, the Fellowship of the Kingdom, and a 'high church' grouping, the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship, arising between the wars. Methodism was ceasing to be wedded to its inherited conservative brand of evangelicalism.⁵⁸ As disabilities imposed on non-Anglicans had largely disappeared, at least in urban areas, all sections of Nonconformity saw less reason to dissent from the Church of England than in the past. Nonconformist numbers, though not collapsing until the 1960s, slowly dwindled.⁵⁹ Thus the section of the population that had been most thoroughly evangelical went into decline. Although comparable theological currents ran through American Protestantism, the mainline churches still had a place for evangelicals and continued to flourish.⁶⁰ British evangelicalism was more marginalized by twentieth-century trends than its American counterpart.

An even more significant factor was the relative size of Fundamentalism. During the 1920s the United States was rocked by Fundamentalist controversies that gave rise, in opposition to Modernism, to the enduring Fundamentalist movement, a more rigid variant of evangelicalism.⁶¹ Britain did experience similar debates and there were significant numbers of evangelicals, especially

⁵⁷ D. W. Bebbington, 'Missionary Controversy and the Polarising Tendency in Twentieth-Century British Protestantism', *Anvil*, 13 (1996), 141–57.

⁵⁸ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, 202, 205–6.

⁵⁹ Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870–1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), ch. 7.

⁶⁰ William R. Hutchison, 'Protestantism as Establishment', in William R. Hutchison (ed.), *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 14–15.

⁶¹ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

in the Church of England, who identified with the stance of the American Fundamentalists.⁶² The two denominations that in the United States were most disturbed by Fundamentalist wrangles, the Presbyterians and Baptists, however, were relatively unscathed in Britain.⁶³ Dispensational thought, often a spur to Fundamentalism, was much frailer there and the rallying cry of biblical inerrancy was rarely heard in Britain.⁶⁴ Consequently, the impetus towards departure from existing denominations was much weaker than in America. By 1961 only 38 per cent of American Protestants belonged to mainline churches as opposed to separatist bodies.⁶⁵ The separatism that was the core conviction of Fundamentalists in America was far less practised in Britain. An underlying factor was essentially geographical. Britain was a relatively small island but the United States was half a continent. Hence, there was much more space in the United States for local religious cultures to take root and flourish over time. Such bastions of old-time religion did exist in Britain—the Western Isles of Scotland being a striking example—but in general British evangelicals were exposed to a variety of cultural influences that moderated the strength of their allegiance. America provided a more favourable environment for Fundamentalism.⁶⁶ Consequently, in the United States Fundamentalism gave backbone to its adherents, making them resolute in their beliefs and energetic in spreading them.⁶⁷ The neo-evangelical movement that arose in the wake of the Second World War, though doing its best to shed the negative image of the Fundamentalists, emerged from the Fundamentalist womb and long shared the family traits.⁶⁸ Rarely sharing stiff Fundamentalist convictions, British evangelicals were far less likely to make growth their priority.

Partly in consequence, twentieth-century British evangelicalism was much more an elite affair than it was in America. The tone of its conservative variety was set by its Anglican strand, which was associated with the upper middle

⁶² Martin Wellings, 'Methodism and Fundamentalism before and after the First World War', and Andrew Atherstone, 'Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in the Inter-War Church of England', in David Bebbington and David Ceri Jones (eds), *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in the United Kingdom during the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 76–94, 55–75.

⁶³ Kenneth B. E. Roxburgh, 'Fundamentalism in Scotland', and David Bebbington, 'Baptists and Fundamentalism in Inter-War Britain', in Bebbington and Jones (eds), *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in the United Kingdom*, 273–88, 95–114.

⁶⁴ D. W. Bebbington, 'The Advent Hope in British Evangelicalism since 1800', *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies*, 9 (1988), 103–14; D. F. Wright, 'Soundings in the Doctrine of Scripture in British Evangelicalism in the First Half of the Twentieth Century', *Tyndale Bulletin*, 31 (1980), 87–106.

⁶⁵ Dennis N. Voskuil, 'Reaching Out: Mainline Protestants and the Media', in Hutchison (ed.), *Between the Times*, 100.

⁶⁶ Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 220–7.

⁶⁷ Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*.

⁶⁸ George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987).

classes. The aim of its more strategically minded thinkers was to penetrate the exclusive 'public schools' that catered for that section of society in order to recruit those who would become future leaders.⁶⁹ The pilot organization among conservative evangelicals for much of the century was the Inter-Varsity Fellowship that set up Christian Unions in the nation's universities.⁷⁰ At a time when only a handful of the population enjoyed a higher education (a mere 14 per cent of the relevant age cohort as late as the 1980s),⁷¹ the result was to entrust the direction of the movement to a small elite. All the denominations, furthermore, did the bulk of their theological training in association with the universities. The separate Bible schools that proliferated in the United States did exist, but were few in number and small in output. Academic credentials were required of ministers of the gospel, not popular appeal alone. As late as the 1970s, on the other hand, 18 per cent of pastors in churches affiliated to the Southern Baptist Convention had received no education beyond high school.⁷² Many leaders of American churches were thoroughly integrated with lowbrow culture, but their British counterparts rarely enjoyed the same advantage. This contrast was reinforced by a crucial difference between the countries during the twentieth century. American preachers eagerly seized the opportunity of using the radio and subsequently the television for the transmission of their message. By 1984 the National Religious Broadcasters, an evangelical organization, embraced 922 radio stations, 65 television stations, 535 radio producers, and 280 television/film producers.⁷³ This communications empire had no British counterpart whatsoever. It is true that a Methodist layman, J. Arthur Rank, was a pioneer of film in Britain,⁷⁴ but the early monopoly of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) over radio and television, apart from a brief period of radio co-operation with the churches in 1952–4, effectively excluded evangelical penetration of these media.⁷⁵ Even after the arrival of independent television in 1955, tight regulation prevented significant presentation of gospel themes. The result of these

⁶⁹ Alister Chapman, *Godly Ambition: John Stott and the Evangelical Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17.

⁷⁰ Douglas Johnson, *Contending for the Faith: A History of the Evangelical Movement in the Universities and Colleges* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979).

⁷¹ Martin Trow, 'American Higher Education: "Exceptional" or Just "Different"?', in Byron E. Shafer (ed.), *Is America Different? A New Look at American Exceptionalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 138–86.

⁷² David W. Bebbington, 'Evangelicalism in Modern Britain and America: A Comparison', in George A. Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll (eds), *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada, and the United States* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 183–212, at 203–5.

⁷³ R. N. Ostling, 'Evangelical Publishing and Broadcasting', in George Marsden (ed.), *Evangelicalism and Modern America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 49.

⁷⁴ Michael Wakelin, *J. Arthur Rank: The Man behind the Gong* (Oxford: Lion, 1996).

⁷⁵ Kenneth M. Wolfe, *The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation, 1922–1956: The Politics of Broadcast Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1984), 460–7.

circumstances was an evangelical movement that, in America, had the ear of the masses and in Britain was largely distanced from them.

Allowance has to be made for significant change from the 1960s and 1970s. These decades created a new counter-culture among the young that rapidly entered the mainstream but helped provoke a 'religious crisis'. The new affluence, the availability of contraception, and the shift in public policy on moral questions such as abortion meant that the churches were faced with even greater challenges in reaching younger generations. In America the airwaves could be used by the Jesus People of the 1970s to reconcile evangelicalism to the music of youth culture,⁷⁶ but the same opportunity was not available in Britain. Charismatic religion, attuned to the expressive dimension of the fresh cultural trends and so encouraging such practices as raising hands in worship, spread in both countries, but much more widely in the United States. America, as the charismatic fountainhead from the 1950s,⁷⁷ generated many varieties of the movement, sending successive waves of influence, such as John Wimber's Signs and Wonders in the 1980s, over the Atlantic. Likewise, black-led Christian bodies, a novelty in Britain after post-war immigration from the Commonwealth, were often willing to adjust to the new fashions, but there were far more black churches in the United States than in Britain, where they formed only 7.2 per cent of church attenders by 1998.⁷⁸ There were parallel developments on the two sides of the Atlantic in the late twentieth century, but the numbers in the most rapidly growing sectors of the evangelical world were much higher in America.

The overall conclusion must be that evangelicalism, originally an identical phenomenon in Britain and America, remained to a remarkable extent homogeneous during the nineteenth century. Although the separation of church and state, the adoption of Republican values, and the more relaxed social customs of America did have ramifications for the churches, the shared mentality stemming from the Enlightenment, reinforced by the many exchanges of literature and personnel, meant that there was a great deal of common ground. The degree of difference created by American disestablishment has been exaggerated, the revivalism of the age was far more similar in the two lands than has been supposed, and a process of democratization took place in many quarters in Britain as well as in America. Shifts towards higher and broader churchmanship were in evidence in both lands. The evangelical movements on the two sides of the Atlantic were still much the same around the opening of the twentieth

⁷⁶ Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), ch. 8.

⁷⁷ D. Edwin Harrell, *All Things are Possible: The Healing and Charismatic Revivals in Modern America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1975).

⁷⁸ David Bebbington, 'Evangelism and Spirituality in Twentieth-Century Protestant Nonconformity', in Alan P. F. Sell and Anthony R. Cross (eds), *Protestant Nonconformity in the Twentieth Century* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003), 184–215, at 211–14, 208.

century. It is significant that the *Fundamentals* (1910–15), the pamphlets designed to rouse evangelicals from complacency about contemporary trends, were written by and distributed to ministers and Christian workers in Britain as well as in America.⁷⁹ But from around that point onwards divergence set in. Dispensationalism and the holiness/pentecostal sector became much stronger in America and the balance of denominational bodies moved against evangelicalism in Britain. Fundamentalism was far more powerful in the United States than in Britain and a gap emerged between British evangelicals and popular culture that was only minimally bridged in the last years of the century. All these factors tended to make evangelicalism in America more successful in capturing the allegiance of the public. The proportion of evangelicals in the American population was estimated in 1984 at 22 per cent; the proportion in England in the same decade was roughly 2.8 per cent.⁸⁰ That huge disparity goes a long way towards explaining the difference between wider churchgoing statistics in the two lands. The British version of evangelicalism that was undermined by secularization was a much feebler force during the twentieth century. Hence, it is not surprising that the secular made much greater strides in Britain than in America.

⁷⁹ Geoffrey Treloar, 'The British Contribution to *The Fundamentals*', in Bebbington and Jones (eds), *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in the United Kingdom*, 15–34.

⁸⁰ David Bebbington, 'British and American Evangelicalism since 1940', in Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk (eds), *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles and Beyond, 1700–1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 377. The English figure rests on the proportion of congregations that professed to be Evangelical, and so includes individuals who might not uphold Evangelical beliefs and excludes non-churchgoers with those beliefs. Nevertheless, it is sufficient to show the enormous difference between the two lands.