

## **British Evangelicals and the United States of America, c. 1775-c. 1820**

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William Wilberforce told the the eighteenth anniversary meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society on 1 May 1822:

I know... that so long as the infirmities and bad passions of men remain, there will be differences, arising from ambition, or the jealousies one country may entertain of another; but here we have a principle in operation, which tends all the while gradually and imperceptibly, but surely, to unite the good of both communities, and make them love one another as brethren, and to concur in endeavouring to promote peace and concord among men. As the differences we have had with that country have been peculiarly painful to me, so, I doubt not, there is now a principle at work, which will promote the most lasting agreement.<sup>1</sup>

Just as those who have studied the political aspect of the transatlantic association have largely tended either to concentrate on the eighteenth-century colonial nexus, on the war of separation, or on the nineteenth-century post-colonial relationship, so historians of the transatlantic Evangelical connection have not generally scrutinised it at the hinge, at the moment of transition, that is, in the decades following American independence.<sup>2</sup> This essay examines what British Evangelicals thought of the new American republic in the decades following its separation from the British empire. It also explores what they may have contributed to the wider British understanding of America at that time.

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<sup>1</sup> *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 1 (Aug. 1822), p. 526.

<sup>2</sup> Comparison and contrast has more often been the focus than relationship. But see Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: the Evangelical united front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1960); Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (London: Paternoster Press, 2006 [1978]); Louis Billington, 'British and American Methodisms grow apart', in R.A. Burchell (ed.), *The End of Anglo-America* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 113-36; George A. Rawlyk and Mark A. Noll (eds), *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); 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: Oxford University Press, 1994).

It is argued here that British Evangelicals did not respond much more uniformly to the American Revolution, on the basis of theology or ecclesiology, than British political commentators did on the basis of political ideology. Following David Bebbington's argument that Evangelicals were not only highly influential in shaping the wider culture in which they operated, but were substantially moulded *by* that culture,<sup>3</sup> this essay shows that, just as British political opinion on the formation of the new republic ranged broadly from great admiration, through sympathy and regret, to unqualified disapproval, so, too, did Evangelical opinion on the United States range from high regard to severe criticism. They were, like other British writers, divided over the new United States of America; and so, rather than inserting a united argument or position into the British conversation about America post-independence, they contributed particular concerns, or, we might say, a distinctive thread. This spectrum of Evangelical views also meant that the generally very positive nineteenth-century British Evangelical attitude towards its American counterpart was already becoming infused with a degree of caution that perhaps had not existed previously, and with a growing awareness that Evangelicalism on the other side of the Atlantic was similar in theology, but different in culture. As David Hempton has suggested, 'the history of the early republic is ... indissolubly linked with the spread of populist forms of evangelical religion'.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore not surprising that British Evangelical views of the United States were thoroughly bound up with their opinions of American Evangelicals.

Was national separation influential in sowing some of the seeds of divergence, or would they have emerged anyway? British Evangelicals may have been slower to identify Americans as different than other British writers, and they may have retained a sense of family longer, while

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<sup>3</sup> David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989); see also his 'Evangelicalism and British Culture', in Stewart J. Brown, Frances Knight and John Morgan-Guy (eds), *Religion, Identity and Conflict in Britain: From the Restoration to the Twentieth Century* (Farnham, Surrey / Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 105-19.

<sup>4</sup> David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 24.

other Britons acquired a clear perception of American difference and identity from the War of Independence.<sup>5</sup> Did the relationship between Evangelicals help to restrain the widening of the gap between Britain and the United States after 1783? David Bebbington has also argued convincingly that the impact of the transatlantic Evangelical relationship was far more influential for British Evangelical life and practice than was the American Revolution.<sup>6</sup> The transatlantic experience of revival earlier in the eighteenth century and its ramifications thereafter, and the mutual context of the Enlightenment, he contended, did more to shape the nature of British Evangelicalism than did the separation of the thirteen American colonies from the British empire. The relationship between Evangelicals in Britain and America continued, of course, to be enormously important for British Evangelical attitudes towards the new United States of America and American Evangelicals, irrespective of the Revolution. Yet the divergences between American and British Evangelicalism which developed over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – manifesting themselves as differences in denominations, in theological emphases, in cultural context and in education of ministerial candidates<sup>7</sup> – may already have been fostered by the rupture of the Revolution, despite the undoubtedly close association of Evangelical circles and their similar and strongly held convictions of the gospel imperatives.

This essay suggests that British Evangelicals *both* perceived Americans, increasingly, as different from themselves *and* retained a sense of family and of family likeness. It proposes that both sympathy and caution are evident in their views on the American Revolution itself, before arguing that they displayed a variety of attitudes to the new United States in the post-

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<sup>5</sup> P. J. Marshall, 'Presidential Address: Britain and the World in the Eighteenth Century: II, Britons and Americans', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6<sup>th</sup> series, 9 (1999), pp. 8-13; Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, p. 198.

<sup>6</sup> David W. Bebbington, 'The Democratization of British Christianity: the Baptist case', in Anthony R. Cross (ed.), *Ecumenism and History: Studies in Honour of John H.Y. Briggs* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), p. 279.

<sup>7</sup> 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: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), pp. 183-212, at pp. 196-99.

revolutionary period, ranging from defence, admiration and a desire to cooperate, to disappointment and criticism; and it suggests that this range of reactions can be explained at least partly by differences in the national contexts in which British and American Evangelicals operated as early as the post-revolutionary decades.

## I

The depth and breadth of the Anglo-American Evangelical relationship in the several decades preceding the American Revolution is well established. Rooted in seventeenth-century Puritan emigration and early eighteenth-century revival, by the mid-eighteenth century this relationship was manifested in close personal friendships, transatlantic evangelistic activity, correspondence networks, publishing connections and continuing emigration.<sup>8</sup> Already preachers were reading sermons from across the Atlantic, and adopting such features as extemporaneous preaching, itinerancy, and so on in imitation of each other.<sup>9</sup> Susan O'Brien pointed out that this did not mean that Evangelicals in Britain and America thought as one even before 1776, nor did they always understand or even take much interest in the internal disagreements and divisions of each other, although they were aware of them because of the volume of Evangelical publications that crossed the Atlantic in both directions. 'But what they most wanted from the publishing network was a sense of the shared', because 'the idea of a widespread work of God mattered greatly in

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<sup>8</sup> There is a huge literature on this area, but see, for instance, B.R. Wilson, 'American Religion: its impact on Britain', in *Contagious Conflict: the impact of American Dissent on European Life*, ed. A.N.J. Den Hollander (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 233-63; Colin Bonwick, 'English Dissenters and the American Revolution', in H.C. Allen and Roger Thompson (eds), *Contrast and Connection* (1976); Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*; Susan O'Brien, 'A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735-1755', *American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), 811-32; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*; Noll, Bebbington and Rawlyk (eds), *Evangelicalism: comparative studies*; H.M. Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren: Rev. Samuel Jones (1735-1814) and his Friends: Baptists in Wales, Pennsylvania and Beyond* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh UP, 1995); Jonathan M. Yeager, *Enlightened Evangelicalism: the life and thought of John Erskine* (NY: OUP, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> Joanna Cruickshank, 'The Sermon in the British Colonies', in Keith A. Francis and William Gibson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon 1689-1901* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 513-29, at pp. 516-17; Wilson, 'American Religion', p. 235.

itself”.<sup>10</sup> O’Brien’s thesis is that a common theology and active individuals such as George Whitefield were crucial to the sense of transatlantic Evangelical union before 1776, but that it was sustained by the emergence and expansion of advertising, publishing and distribution networks.

British Evangelical reactions to the American Revolution also form familiar territory, but reviewing them with a fine grain raises interesting questions. James Bradley’s major study of English Dissenting politics at the time of the American Revolution concludes that, though not all of them were politically radical, the vast majority of them were clearly pro-American during the Revolution; that there was an impressive degree of Dissenting unity in England on the American Revolution; and that they led all the opposition petitions on America except perhaps in London. He acknowledges that ‘there was nothing uniquely “Nonconformist” about English pro-Americanism’, and he argues that in fact the majority of English pro-Americans were Anglican, including a relatively small number of Low Church clergy, but that Dissenting support for the colonists was more consistent than Anglican backing, and took the lead. He does not generally distinguish between the political behaviour of Evangelical and ‘rational’ Dissenters, except to note in conclusion that ‘the great majority of pro-American Dissenters were orthodox trinitarians’, a judgement he reinforces in a later study.<sup>11</sup> His argument is based on the political sympathies of English Dissenters for the position of the rebellious American colonists – opposition to hierarchy and church establishment, a belief in the right of consent, psychological (if not always actual) exclusion from public affairs, and the conviction, which suited them, that

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<sup>10</sup> Susan O’Brien, ‘Eighteenth-Century Publishing Networks in the First Years of Transatlantic Evangelicalism’, in Noll, Bebbington and Rawlyk (eds), *Evangelicalism: comparative studies*, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> James E. Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism: Nonconformity in Eighteenth-Century Politics and Society* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), pp. 121, 124, 410-11, 423; idem, ‘The Religious Origins of Radical Politics in England, Scotland, and Ireland, 1662-1800’, in James E. Bradley and Dale Van Kley (eds), *Religion and Politics in Enlightened Europe*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), pp. 187-253, at p. 192.

the Americans were, like themselves, ‘chiefly Dissenters and Whigs’<sup>12</sup> – and on their motivation to criticise the British government provided by their own socio-economic status. Various other studies demonstrated that there is a great deal of evidence of Dissenting and Established Church Evangelical pro-Americanism during the Revolution.<sup>13</sup>

On the one hand, however, Dissenting enthusiasm for the Revolution can be complicated. Colin Bonwick and Hywel Davies both argue that ‘at no point did Dissenters encourage American separatism’: rather, Dissenters deeply regretted the American seizure of independence and saw it as a last resort forced on the Americans by British government policy. Robert Hall, the Baptist pastor of Cambridge, wrote in 1793: ‘Had [the Dissenters’] remonstrances been regarded [by government], the calamities of that war had never been incurred’.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, as Bradley himself shows, Dissenting support for the Revolution was far from universal.<sup>15</sup> Davies even suggests that ‘the majority of Baptists in England and Wales did not actively support the American cause’ and that Baptist support for the Revolution was overstated after the war, probably from a desire to safeguard the transatlantic Baptist connection in the face of political separation.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, many British Evangelicals were constrained in what may have been deep affection for their American Evangelical brethren by their desire either not to appear to be

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Priestley, *An Address to Protestant Dissenters of all Denominations on the Approaching Election of Members of Parliament with Respect to the State of Public Liberty in General and American Affairs in Particular* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1774), p. 3. Cf. the importance of the ‘Madoc myth’ for Welsh Baptists: Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren*, pp. 171-72.

<sup>13</sup> E.g. Bonwick, ‘English Dissenters and the American Revolution’; Colin Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1977); Henry Ippel, ‘Blow the Trumpet, Sanctify the Fast’, *Huntingdon Library Bulletin*, 44 (1980), pp. 43-60; idem, ‘British Sermons and the American Revolution’, *Journal of Religious History*, 12 (1982-3), pp. 191-205; Paul Langford, ‘The English Clergy and the American Revolution’, in Eckhart Hellmuth (ed.), *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 275-307; Rena Denton, ‘Enlightened Thought Devised from Biblical Principles’, in Robert D. Cornwall and William Gibson, *Religion, Politics and Dissent, 1660-1832* (Farnham, Surrey / Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 51-63, at pp. 52-53.

<sup>14</sup> Bonwick, ‘English Dissenters and the American Revolution’, pp. 103-107 (p. 104); Robert Hall, *Apology for the Freedom of the Press* (1793), in O. Gregory (ed.), *The Works of Robert Hall* (6 vols; London, 1831-32), III, pp. 153-54.

<sup>15</sup> Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, pp. 398-99.

<sup>16</sup> Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren*, pp. 119-25, quotation at pp. 119-20.

disloyal to the British government or, indeed, not to be disloyal to it. John Rogers of London, for instance, was one of the many Dissenters who was willing to criticise the government's policy on America, but not to support American independence.<sup>17</sup>

And indeed, Bonwick asserts that 'a good many' Dissenters actually condemned rebellion in the colonies, and that there was 'no solid cohort of Dissent' on the issue.<sup>18</sup> In 1775 Caleb Evans, the leading Baptist minister in Bristol and himself a convinced pro-American, rejected the accusation that Baptists were disposed to defend rebellion by stating with regret that there were 'too many Calvinists and Baptists' on both sides of the Atlantic who supported the British government.<sup>19</sup> Bradley notes that Evangelical pastors such as L.L. Peters of Newport, Gloucestershire, John Martin, the Calvinistic Baptist pastor in Grafton Street, Soho, Henry Hunter, of Little St Helens, London, John Rippon of Southwark, Job Orton of Kidderminster, and John Handasyds of Newcastle, as well as the pamphleteer, Israel Mauduit, and the MPs Joseph and Thomas Lockyer of Ilchester, and Sir Henry Hoghton, all preached or published in defence of the government's cause.<sup>20</sup> And, since the concern here is with Evangelicals in the round and not just Dissenters, most Methodists can be added to these Dissenters in opposition to the American separation: famously, John Wesley published two pamphlets in support of the government and against the colonists, even if his private opinion was less certain.<sup>21</sup> These argued that republicanism was a despotic form of government destined to cause unhappiness among its citizens. Furthermore, many British Evangelicals took a quietist line during the Revolution and did not take political sides – for example, the Baptist Joseph Jenkins of Wrexham, and the

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<sup>17</sup> Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, p. 123.

<sup>18</sup> Bonwick, 'English Dissenters and the American Revolution', pp. 90-91.

<sup>19</sup> Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren*, p. 119; Caleb Evans, *A Reply to the Rev. Mr. Fletcher's Vindication of Mr. Wesley's Calm Address* (Bristol: W. Pine, 1775), pp. 85-86.

<sup>20</sup> Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*, pp. 86-87; Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, pp. 123-124.

<sup>21</sup> David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1984), p. 45.

Anglican John Newton.<sup>22</sup> Neither were British Evangelicals often converted by the American example to political republicanism in the modern sense, or to social levelling. The political reformism of English Dissenters, as Bonwick put it, was more remarkable for its moderation than its subversiveness.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, Dissenting leadership of British pro-Americanism can also be queried. The Scottish Popular Party's sympathy for the American Revolution shows that, at least in Scotland, even momentum from Dissenters was not required. It also suggests that the transatlantic Evangelical network built up from the 1730s, supplemented by church politics at home, may have been as significant in British Evangelical support as the genuine political sympathy with the American rebels that Bradley identified, although conforming Evangelicals were often as suspicious as Dissenters that a government made up of sinful humans did not deserve implicit trust, and criticised the British government for its American policies.<sup>24</sup> John Erskine, minister of Old Greyfriars in Edinburgh, was one of the earliest to predict a war between Britain and America, and his trenchant criticism of British government policy on America even earned him an accusation of treason in the *Edinburgh Magazine and Review* in 1776. It is likely that his particularly strong transatlantic relationships, built up over three decades of correspondence and book circulation, were much more important than political considerations in his inability to oppose the Americans when they separated from the British empire.<sup>25</sup> Nor was Erskine a lone figure in Church of Scotland Popular party circles – other leading Evangelicals such as John Gillies and William Porteous in Glasgow, William Thom in

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<sup>22</sup> Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren*, pp. 122-23; Ippel, 'British Sermons and the American Revolution', pp. 201-202. Cf. Deryck Lovegrove, 'English Evangelical Dissent and the European Conflict 1789-1815', in W.J. Sheils (ed.), *The Church and War: papers read at the Twenty-First Summer Meeting and the Twenty-Second Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 263-76.

<sup>23</sup> Bonwick, 'English Dissenters and the American Revolution', p. 107.

<sup>24</sup> Yeager, *Enlightened Evangelicalism*, p. 156.

<sup>25</sup> Yeager, *Enlightened Evangelicalism*, p. 141; John R. McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland: the Popular Party, 1740-1800* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998), pp. 157-60.



Govan, Charles Nisbet in Montrose, and, most famously, John Witherspoon in Paisley (president of Princeton College, 1768-94), were all firm pro-Americans.

British Evangelicals therefore represented the political spectrum on the American Revolution, even if it was weighted in their case towards support for the Americans; and pro-Americanism was neither limited to nor dependent upon English Dissent, although English Dissenters were undoubtedly very active and very influential. Nor was British Evangelical pro-Americanism based only or even mainly on political sympathy, but it also stemmed from spiritual and ecclesiastical affection. The transatlantic Evangelical network constituted a community which transcended the ruptures of 1776 and 1783, but it would be surprising if, in Evangelical circles as in political, commercial and family networks, the disagreements caused by the crisis did not resonate in the post-revolutionary relationship.

## II

So far, so familiar. After 1783, there is certainly substantial evidence of British Evangelical sympathy with the new American republic as well as respect and affection for American Evangelicalism in particular. They admired American politicians, they respected the American experiment in government, they compared the American state favourably with the British polity, and they praised the relative egalitarianism of American society.<sup>26</sup> The Baptist preacher Robert Robinson, who had consistently criticised British policy in America, was delighted and a little star-struck when he entertained General Joseph Reed, Dr John Witherspoon and an American diplomat to tea in his Cambridge home on their fund-raising tour to support Princeton College in

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<sup>26</sup> Bonwick, 'English Dissenters and the American Revolution', pp. 92, 95-6; Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren*, pp. 181, 185-6.

June 1784.<sup>27</sup> British Evangelicals often associated the United States with liberty, and opposition to its foundation with illiberal ‘toryism’. Robert Hall, in 1793 contrasting Pitt the Younger unfavourably with his father, who had been ‘the vehement opposer of the American War’, counted the son ‘the rallying point of toryism, the type and symbol of whatever is most illiberal in principle, and intolerant in practice’.<sup>28</sup> All this was reinforced in the British context of the economic struggles and the political repression of the 1790s, when America featured frequently in ‘signs of the times’ literature as a fulfilment of optimistic biblical prophecy. According to the Monmouthshire Baptist Morgan John Rhys, America was now literally a ‘new world’, where ‘justice had been established by God ... and government was as good as any on earth’. The war against revolutionary France was part of God’s judgement of Britain for its many sins, and Rhys urged his readers to escape its immoral and illegitimate government by emigrating to the ‘vast, free and fruitful’ land of America, an asylum of liberty which was under God’s blessing as surely as Britain was under His wrath. Rhys himself emigrated to the United States in August 1794.<sup>29</sup>

The United States was particularly important to Evangelical Dissenters as well as ‘rational’ Dissenters in Britain, as this potential asylum from religious oppression at home, and as a model for the religious liberty that they did not possess in Britain and which was a central tenet of Dissent.<sup>30</sup> Theophilus Harris, another Welsh Baptist, composed a very detailed balance sheet when he was deciding to emigrate to America in 1793, in which he came to the following conclusion:

‘There the prospects are truly pleasing, her inhabitants are far remov’d out of the reach of tyranny and oppression, every one may sit under his own vine and his own fig tree in quiet, and the rational pleasures of the soul are enjoy’d in their purity.

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<sup>27</sup> Gina Luria Walker, “‘Brief Encounter’: Robert Robinson and the Right to Private Judgement”, *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 24 (2008), pp. 54-70, at pp. 55, 57-60.

<sup>28</sup> Hall, *Apology for the Freedom of the Press*, p. 82.

<sup>29</sup> Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren*, pp. 14, 181, 184-87 (pp. 185-6).

<sup>30</sup> Bradley, *Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism*, p. 139.

... In most, if not all of the States, there is no established religion[;] religion, as it ought to do, stands upon its own basis unconnected with the state, and the greatest encouragement is given to freedom of enquiry and the propagation of truth. ... Who then would continue to wade in filth and corruption in such a depriv'd Country as Britain? Who would not wish to go and taste those sweets of liberty and peace freely offer'd to every honest character in America?'<sup>31</sup>

British Dissenters were delighted by Jefferson's Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom in 1786 and by similar statutes in other American states. As James Bicheno, the radical Baptist pastor of Newbury put it in 1794, the United States had shown the fallacy of the insistence on the need for an established religion.<sup>32</sup> And yet, the Popular Party of the (Established) Church of Scotland had also felt some identity with the American campaign for political and religious liberty, since they supported the freedom of congregations to call their own ministers, and since MPs who were members of the Church of Scotland, as non-Anglicans still had to take communion in the Church of England annually to be allowed to take up their seats in Westminster.<sup>33</sup> The American example showed that religious liberty did not lead inexorably to anarchy; in fact, it could even improve human behaviour. The Methodist, John Kingston, recorded in his travel journal, published in 1799, that he had noticed that,

as the Legislature knows no man better or worse for his religious creed; so the idea prevails, that all good men are equal, and according to their respective abilities, qualified to discharge the duties of civil society. This principle has a happy tendency to suppress the natural tyranny of the human heart.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> John Hammond Moore, 'Theophilus Harris's Thoughts on Emigrating to America in 1793', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> series, 36:4 (Oct. 1979), pp. 602-14, at p. 613.

<sup>32</sup> James Bicheno, *The Signs of the Times: or, The overthrow of the papal tyranny in France, the prelude of destruction to popery and despotism; but of peace to mankind* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition; London: Parsons, Paternoster Row, 1794), p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> McIntosh, *Church and Theology in Enlightenment Scotland*, p.8; Robert Kent Donovan, 'The Popular Party of the Church of Scotland and the American Revolution', in *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment*, eds Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten (Princeton UP, 1990), pp. 81-99.

<sup>34</sup> Extract from 'Memoirs of the Life of Mr John Kingston, Preacher of the Gospel', published in the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 22 (1799), pp. 264-5.

These British perceptions of the extent of religious liberty in America were not always absolutely accurate, but they did show what their writers wished to believe was true of the United States, a model in this respect of what they hoped to see come to pass in Britain.<sup>35</sup> Under the influence of the Enlightenment, religious freedom was coming to be seen as a natural right of man; and, inspired by the American example, some politically radical Dissenters began to believe that political representation was required to safeguard religious freedom.<sup>36</sup> It is true that often the politically radical Dissenters were liberal theologically (in England and Wales, frequently Unitarians, or heterodox Presbyterians on the way towards Unitarianism). But orthodox Baptists with radical politics included Robert Robinson and Robert Hall of Cambridge, Thomas Davis of Reading, Mark Wilks and Rees David of Norwich, Caleb Evans of Bristol, James Hinton of Oxford, and William Winterbotham of Plymouth, and James Murray of Newcastle was an orthodox Presbyterian of clearly radical politics.<sup>37</sup>

On the other hand, some British Evangelicals were warier of American politics and applauded them on the grounds of their moderation rather than because of their progressive nature. The Anglican Evangelical periodical, the *Christian Observer*, was happy to record ‘a degree of soundness in the public sentiment of Americans’ indicated by evidence that sympathy for the politics of William Godwin was a charge to be repudiated.<sup>38</sup> It was confident, too, that

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<sup>35</sup> Bonwick, ‘English Dissenters and the American Revolution’, pp. 101-102.

<sup>36</sup> H.T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: political ideology in eighteenth-century Britain* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1977), pp. 202-3.

<sup>37</sup> Walker, “‘Brief Encounter’”; C.B. Jewson, *Jacobin City: a portrait of Norwich in its reaction to the French Revolution* (Blackie: Glasgow, 1975), esp. pp.26-7, 29, 52, 63-4, 68-70, 79-80, 138; Timothy Whelan, *Politics, Religion and Romance: the Letters of Benjamin Flower and Eliza Gould Flower, 1794-1808* (National Library of Wales: Aberystwyth, 2008); Michael Durey, ‘William Winterbotham’s Trumpet of Sedition: Religious Dissent and Political Radicalism in the 1790s’, *Journal of Religious History*, 19:2 (1995), pp. 141-57; Emma Macleod, ‘Civil Liberties and Baptists: William Winterbotham of Plymouth in Prison and Thinking of America’, *Baptist Quarterly*, 44 (Oct. 2011), pp. 196-222; John Robert Parnell, ‘Baptists and Britons: Particular Baptist Ministers in England and British Identity in the 1790s’ (PhD thesis, University of North Texas, 2005), pp. 68-172; Denton, ‘Enlightened Thought Devised from Biblical Principles’.

<sup>38</sup> *Christian Observer*, 1 (1802), p. 127.

America would be 'sound' in international politics, and would resist Bonaparte's pressure to cave into his demands after his purchase of Louisiana from the Spanish in 1802.<sup>39</sup>

British Evangelicals widely admired American church vitality and growth. The *Christian Observer* commended the example of the Connecticut legislature in circulating Bibles throughout its state, and its promotion of school and family worship.<sup>40</sup> It was widely believed among British Methodists that 'in the "fine and improving" United States the Methodist Church was "likely to become the most extensive and pure in the Universe"'.<sup>41</sup> Accounts of American evangelistic tours, camp meetings and revivals were published in Britain from the 1790s, with exhortations to emulate them in Britain,<sup>42</sup> as the Rev. W. Ward said, reporting to the annual meeting of the Auxiliary Society for the London (Methodist) District in 1821 on 'a great outpouring of the HOLY SPIRIT' in 'the Continent of America': 'If these things be done in America, why may not we seek and expect similar visitations in other countries?'<sup>43</sup> Even before steamship travel made transatlantic crossings easier from the late 1820s, American ministers visited Britain and Ireland, most famously John McGee in 1797-1803, and 'Crazy' Lorenzo Dow in 1798-1807, whose tour in Britain encouraged native revivalistic Methodism, and prompted the foundation of Primitive Methodism.<sup>44</sup>

There is some evidence of the continuation of a long-held British sense of responsibility for those who had previously been their colonists, and perhaps a desire to maintain British Christian influence over the new United States. It has been suggested that this was a particularly

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<sup>39</sup> *Christian Observer*, 2 (1803), p. 117.

<sup>40</sup> *Christian Observer*, 3 (1804), p. 445.

<sup>41</sup> Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, p. 103, quoting J. Hawtrey to J. Emory, 4 Aug. 1820, and A. Clarke to J. Emory and others, 6 Feb. 1832, Ms Collection, Rose Memorial Library, Drew University, Madison, NJ.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. in the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, *passim*.

<sup>43</sup> *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 44 (1821), p. 475.

<sup>44</sup> Raymond L. Cohn, 'Transatlantic U.S. Passenger Travel at the Dawn of the Steamship Era', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 4:1 (1992), pp. 43-64; Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, pp. xiii-xiv; Wilson, 'American Religion', p. 237; Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*, p. 94.

Anglican impulse, emerging naturally from groups such as the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, which had been founded by the Church of England in 1701 to help minister to the American colonists, though it had swiftly expanded its remit to British colonies worldwide.<sup>45</sup> It was, though, also present in the Welsh ‘Madoc’ fever which gripped the imagination of William Richards, and which sent John Evans out in the 1790s as a missionary to the ‘Welsh Indians’, or the Padouca tribe, based near the head of the Missouri.<sup>46</sup> It was tactful of Mr Armstrong of Boston, speaking to London Methodists in 1821, to remark, ‘it may please you to know, that British Christians are there considered as our elder brethren, and we are treading in your steps ...’.<sup>47</sup>

A stronger theme, however, was the British Evangelical desire to cooperate with American Evangelicals in the post-independence era. Evangelicals in both places shared a sense of election as peoples; and ‘the idea of a widespread work of God’ still ‘mattered greatly in itself’ to them.<sup>48</sup> Many Evangelicals continued to think of themselves as members of a transatlantic community, which was manifested in transatlantic correspondence, publication, migration and mission, both denominational and interdenominational, and in the recognition of shared challenges.<sup>49</sup> A great deal of informal transatlantic correspondence was carried on between Evangelicals, but John Rippon’s *Baptist Annual Register* was founded in 1790 in a deliberate effort to restore, enlarge and formalise transatlantic Baptist correspondence interrupted

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<sup>45</sup> Robert G. Ingram, ‘From Barbarism to Civility, from Darkness to Light: Preaching Empire as Sacred History’, in Francis and Gibson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon 1689-1901*, pp. 481-96, at pp. 484, 489-92; Rowan Strong, ‘Eighteenth-Century Mission Sermons’, in Francis and Gibson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon 1689-1801*, pp. 497-512.

<sup>46</sup> Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren*, pp. 254-8.

<sup>47</sup> *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 44 (1821), p. 475.

<sup>48</sup> Kathleen Wilson, ‘The island race’, in Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (eds), *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland c.1650-c.1850* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), pp. 265-90, at pp. 284-85; O’Brien, ‘Eighteenth-Century Publishing Networks’, p. 52.

<sup>49</sup> J.F. Maclear, ‘The Idea of “American Protestantism” and British Conformity, 1829-1840’, *JBS*, 21:1 (Fall, 1981), pp. 68-89, at p. 75; Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, p. xiv; Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren*, p. 278.

by the war, and it published circular letters by regional Baptist associations on both sides of the Atlantic, as the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* did for its own denominational constituency.<sup>50</sup> American Methodist membership statistics were included in the *WMM* immediately after the British figures; American delegates were regularly reported therein as having attended the annual meeting of the Auxiliary Society for the London District. The extent of reporting on American affairs in these periodicals testifies to the continued British Evangelical appetite for it. British Evangelicals referred regularly in their writings to American Evangelical authors, published American essays in their collections, and published British editions of American Evangelical works.<sup>51</sup>

Richard Carwardine noted a growing confidence among American Evangelicals, and a concomitant lessening sense of dependence in their partnership with their British counterparts; and it is also true that their British counterparts treated the Americans as equals, if not leaders in mission and evangelism.<sup>52</sup> Richard Watson, one of the Secretaries of the British Wesleyan Missionary Society, told its annual meeting that ‘The American Christians are coming forward in a most astonishing manner; they make the most surprising calculations; their designs are gigantic and overwhelming.’<sup>53</sup> The *Christian Observer* admired the evangelistic missions and medical advances offered to the American Indian tribes, as well as the missions to the uncouth back settlements which were currently being cleared and settled in the states of New York, Vermont, Pennsylvania and Connecticut.<sup>54</sup> Evangelical impetus towards mission and, in the post-French Revolutionary world, overseas mission, was able to mitigate American insularity and give

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<sup>50</sup> Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren*, pp. 125-31, 141-60.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Hall, *Modern Infidelity Considered* (1799), in Olinthus Gregory (ed.), *The Works of Robert Hall* (6 vols; London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1831-1832), vol. 1, pp. 13-80, at pp. 58-60, on Jonathan Edwards; Henry Moncrieff Wellwood (ed.), *Account of the life and writings of John Erskine* (Constable: Edinburgh, 1818), pp. 321, 328, 484-5.

<sup>52</sup> Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, pp. 29, 56.

<sup>53</sup> *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 43 (1820), p. 550.

<sup>54</sup> *Christian Observer*, 1 (1802), pp. 533, 536, 809-10.

transatlantic Evangelicals a common purpose in mission to the non-European and non-Anglophone world. Methodists – whose organisation was ‘built for mobility’ – were particularly deliberate in cultivating partnership and a sense of common purpose in mission.<sup>55</sup> In Newcastle in 1814 a Methodist Missionary Society was formed, directly inspired by Methodist successes in the United States as well as in the West Indies.<sup>56</sup> But there was also the cooperation of the nondenominational British and Foreign Bible Society (established in 1804 by the Clapham Sect) with nascent and rapidly multiplying Bible Societies in America from 1809, a cooperation which continued through the War of 1812 without serious interruption:

While the destructive sword was unsheathed, and the sound of the trumpet and the din of war were heard abroad, Christians of various denominations at home, were employed in making unprecedented exertions, to illuminate mankind with the word of God.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* regularly reprinted BFBS reports with pleasure and admiration, so that the cooperation was interdenominational as well as transatlantic. Hence its quotation of Wilberforce, mentioned at the start of this chapter, in 1822, asserting his confidence that, despite painful differences between Britain and America in the past, in overseas mission there was now ‘a principle at work, which [would] promote the most lasting agreement’ between Evangelicals in both America and Britain.<sup>58</sup>

There was, therefore, a great deal of British Evangelical respect and affection for American Evangelicalism, as well as sympathy with the new American republic. Yet this transatlantic Evangelical admiration was not uniform. British Evangelicals were not averse to

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<sup>55</sup> Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, p. 21.

<sup>56</sup> *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 37 (1814), pp. 555-6; Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, pp. 29, 32-3, 38-40.

<sup>57</sup> *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 37 (1814), p. 699; Foster, *An Errand of Mercy*, pp. 105-14. The American Bible Society was formed to organise them in 1816, but British grants to American Bible Societies were continued throughout the war years of 1812-15.

<sup>58</sup> See note 1.



criticising Americans. They were highly critical of the American institution of slavery, which we might expect, but also of American religious practices.

It is perhaps possible to distinguish between Evangelicals in Britain and the rational Dissenters whom Anthony Page has helpfully examined, trying to answer the question why, as convinced abolitionists, they were so sensitive about criticising the new republic in America on this issue.<sup>59</sup> By contrast, British Evangelicals were blunt and inflexible in their criticisms. ‘It is impossible to be temperate and to pursue this subject through the various considerations of policy, of morals, of history, natural and civil’, wrote William Winterbotham in 1795.<sup>60</sup> ‘Slavery’, wrote a correspondent to the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* in 1819, ‘is justly styled “the leprosy of the United States” – a foul blotch which more or less contaminates the entire system, in publick and private, from the President’s chair to the cabin of the hunter.’<sup>61</sup> In their own campaign to have the institution of slavery made illegal in the British West Indies and all British dominions, they were perplexed by Evangelical toleration of American slavery, and they showed considerably less understanding of the difficulties that their American counterparts had in trying to maintain church unity, than the rational Dissenters did of the difficulties that liberal American politicians did in trying to establish national unity, in the face of deep divisions over slavery.<sup>62</sup> Dr Olinthus Gregory, the editor of Robert Hall’s collected *Works*, added a note to

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<sup>59</sup> Anthony Page, “‘A Species of Slavery’: Richard Price’s Rational Dissent and Antislavery”, *Slavery and Abolition*, 32:1 (2011), pp. 53-73; Anthony Page, ‘Rational Dissent, Enlightenment and Abolition of the Slave Trade’, *Historical Journal*, 54: 3 (2011), pp. 741-772.

<sup>60</sup> William Winterbotham, *An Historical, Geographical, Commercial, and Philosophical View of the American United States, and of the European Settlements in America and the West-Indies*, (4 vols; London: Ridgway, Symonds and Holt, 1795), vol. 3, p. 110.

<sup>61</sup> *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 42 (1819), p. 859.

<sup>62</sup> Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, p. 43; Billington, ‘British and American Methodisms grow apart’, pp. 122-3; Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren*, pp. 216-31. Slavery continued to be a major cause of Nonconformist disillusionment with American religion into the 1840s: Maclear, ‘The Idea of “American Protestantism” and British Conformity, 1829-1840’, pp. 88-89.

Hall's *Address on the State of Slavery in the West India Islands, from the committee of the Leicester Auxiliary Anti-Slavery Society* (1824):

The Slave population of the United States in America, in 1830, amounted to 2,010,436; being increased threefold since the year 1790! This is an anomalous result, with which those in Great Britain who admire America, her free institutions, and her missionary spirit, are exceedingly perplexed.<sup>63</sup>

The Anglican *Christian Observer* went so far as to suggest that a black rebellion in the South in 1802 had been incited by white Americans.<sup>64</sup> Yet it distinguished between the slave states and individuals on the one hand, and the federal government and constitution on the other: it praised the federal constitution for opposing slavery, and the progress made by the American government towards the abolition of the slave trade.<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps more surprising is British Evangelical criticism of American Evangelicalism itself so early in the relationship between Britain and the United States. Anglicans, and Church of Scotland clergymen, did not approve of disestablishment in the United States. Charles Nisbet, minister in Montrose till 1785 when he emigrated to become President of Dickson College in Pennsylvania, was widely critical of the religion that he found in America; one of his most persistent claims was that the poor state of religion in Pennsylvania arose from the lack of constitutional support for it, so that ministers depended on the voluntary contributions of their people, which tended not to be a reliable source of support. And the lack of a state supported church allowed the multiplication of many sects, which he dubbed 'anythingarians' and 'nothingarians'.<sup>66</sup> In fact, British Evangelicals of all denominations professed anxiety regarding

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<sup>63</sup> Robert Hall, *Address on the State of Slavery in the West India Islands, from the committee of the Leicester Auxiliary Anti-Slavery Society* (1824), in Gregory (ed.), *Works*, vol. 3, pp. 298-326, at p. 306.

<sup>64</sup> *Christian Observer*, 1 (1802), p. 543.

<sup>65</sup> *Christian Observer*, 3 (1804), pp. 184, 678-9.

<sup>66</sup> James H. Smylie, 'Charles Nisbet: Second Thoughts on a Revolutionary Generation', *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 98 (April 1974), pp. 189-205, at pp. 200-202; cf. S.J. Brown, 'Chalmers, Thomas (1780-1847)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2004), and Thomas Chalmers,

the growth of irreligion in America, attributing it to growing prosperity and to the influx of irreligious immigrants as well as to the lack of an established Church.<sup>67</sup>

The separation of American from British Methodism was bound to encounter some bumps in the road, though in fact there was much continuity and cooperation, as we have seen.<sup>68</sup> Even British Methodists were divided over American revivalism and did not universally admire it; there were those who thought its emotionalism was ‘theologically unsound and socially distasteful’.<sup>69</sup> The Anglican *Christian Observer* also objected to the nature of the Kentucky revival of 1801 and the Presbyterian revival in Pennsylvania in 1803, and it took issue with the editors of the *Evangelical Magazine* for their uncritical admiration of these revivals. Large crowds of up to 20,000 people, it said, had necessitated the attendance of several preachers, so that people could wander from one to the other, ‘creating an appearance of confusion and disorder’, an appearance which was reinforced by the phenomenon of people falling down both in services and afterwards; the length of services of worship, often extending to several days, also puzzled the periodical’s writers. They doubted whether it was legitimate to ascribe to ‘the God of order and wisdom, such wild and disorderly effects’ as these, and suggested that such phenomena were more likely to have been stimulated by the devil, otherwise known in Scripture as ‘the Deceiver’ of the world. It was relieved to be persuaded that ‘these disorders are considered in much the same light by the discerning part of the religious world in America’.<sup>70</sup>

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*On the Use and Abuse of Literary and Ecclesiastical Endowments* (1827), in *Works of Thomas Chalmers* (25 vols; Glasgow: Collins, 1836-42), vol. 17, pp. 112-15, 180-80, for a later but similar diagnosis.

<sup>67</sup> E.g. *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 22 (1799), p. 313.

<sup>68</sup> E.g. *Strictures on the Substance of a Sermon preached at Baltimore in the State of Maryland, before the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December 1784: at the ordination of the Rev. Francis Asbury, to the Office of Superintendant, by Thomas Coke LLD, Superintendant of the said Church. By a Methodist of the Church of England* (London: G. Herdsfield, 1785).

<sup>69</sup> Billington, ‘British and American Methodisms grow apart’, pp. 114-20, quotation at p. 117.

<sup>70</sup> *Christian Observer*, 1 (1802), pp. 667-70; *Christian Observer*, 3 (1804), 55-6, 187-8, 371-3, 640-3. Quotations from 1 (1802), pp. 667, 670; 3 (1804), p. 641.

Some more politically conservative British Evangelicals, such as David and Joseph Kinghorn, father and son, Baptist preachers in Newcastle and Norwich, disapproved of the American constitutional system. David Kinghorn wrote to his son in 1794 that ‘England is almost infinitely preferable to [A]merica’, since in America there were ‘too many restless spirits, and jarring interests ... to permitt them to live long in peace’. Joseph was of the opinion that when George Washington died, state disputes and litigation would increase and result in political turmoil. Although he was prepared to admire the freedom of political expression in America, he concluded: ‘I am however quite of your opinion [of] the future prospect of America – not the most pleasing.’<sup>71</sup>

Evangelicals in Britain were sometimes critical, however, less from fundamental disapproval of the United States and its institutions and more as a result of the disappointment of their high hopes for it. Just as radical political reformers in Britain needed the United States to succeed as a model republic, so many British Evangelicals very much wanted America to embody their image of piety and freedom from political corruption, and so they were all the more sharply critical when it fell short of these idealised standards.<sup>72</sup> Nisbet had agreed to emigrate to Pennsylvania because of his admiration for America’s resistance to British ‘tyranny’, but he did not think that the United States had lived up to its initial promise. He came to believe that it was corrupt, anarchic and much less admirable than he had supposed. It lacked of men of learning, leisure, talent for government and public spirit; instead, it was rife with party spirit and factional interests; it placed too much emphasis on popular sovereignty; it had been radicalised by way of the French Revolution, which it had itself been partly responsible for fomenting; and it

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<sup>71</sup> David Kinghorn to Joseph Kinghorn, 18 October 1794; Joseph Kinghorn to David Kinghorn, 7 October 1794; Joseph Kinghorn to David Kinghorn, 4 November 1794. Kinghorn correspondence in Box 4/3/1, Angus Library, Regents Park College, Oxford, and quoted in Parnell, ‘Baptists and Britons’, pp. 201-2.

<sup>72</sup> Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren*, pp. 187-88.

was plagued by constant revolts (by students, or over whisky, or by slaves).<sup>73</sup> He became cynical about the American experiment and accused its people of ‘an over-weaning Conceit of themselves, or an extravagant opinion of their own wisdom’, to the extent that they construed the Bible heretically thus: ‘In the Beginning the Sovereign People created Heaven & the Earth’.<sup>74</sup> Less forcefully, but more sententiously, the *Christian Observer* thought that the American government had displayed ‘very low ideas of morality’ in its swift acquisition of Louisiana from France in 1803 without regard, in its opinion, for due process and justice. It was also shocked that Alexander Hamilton had been seconded in his illegal duel with Aaron Burr by Judge Nathaniel Pendleton.<sup>75</sup>

Evangelicals were distressed by the rupture of the War of 1812, which caused some mutual irritation. British Methodists were described as arrogant anti-republicans most often during these years and, in turn, they expressed fear that the conflict was distracting Americans from spiritual priorities. Joshua Marsden, a Methodist missionary detained by the war in New York on his way home to England from Bermuda, wrote to the Methodist Missionary Committee in October 1813:

The present war is not favourable to religion in this country. Political discussions swallow up every other kind of conversation, and are the whole gospel and study of thousands, both in and out of the church of Christ. Alas! ... In this city ... [a] great part of the community are professing people, but the present unhappy contest throws every thing into confusion. My earnest prayer is, that the Lord may speedily send peace to the two nations.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> David W. Robson, ‘Anticipating the Brethren: the Reverend Charles Nisbet critiques the French Revolution’, *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 121:4 (Oct. 1997), 303-28, at p. 305.

<sup>74</sup> Smylie, ‘Charles Nisbet: Second Thoughts on a Revolutionary Generation’, pp. 195, 200; Mark A. Noll, ‘Revival, Enlightenment, Civic Humanism, and the Evolution of Calvinism in Scotland and America, 1735-1843’, in Rawlyk and Noll (eds), *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States*, pp. 73-107, at pp. 99-100.

<sup>75</sup> *Christian Observer*, 3 (1804), pp. 62, 570.

<sup>76</sup> Joshua Marsden to the Methodist Missionary Committee, 26 Oct. 1813, published in the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 37 (1814), pp. 315-17, at p. 316; Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, pp. 30, 32. Cf. also Richard Pope in the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 41 (1818), p. 788 on the effects of the war on religious vitality between Montreal and the American border.

The Anglicans at the *Christian Observer* were more politically partial. They were happy to have been convinced, ‘not that our enemies are in the wrong, but that we are in the right’ and that ‘we have acted throughout with ... moderation’. They claimed that American complaints regarding British navigation practices were a mere smokescreen for what was really an American ‘lust of conquest, joined to an envy of British greatness’.<sup>77</sup> And they were offended by what they identified as readiness on the part of the United States to forget what it owed to Britain, and to cast its lot on the side of Britain’s enemy, Napoleonic France:

It is impossible to turn to the United States of America, without feelings of poignant regret, and even of deep disgust. To think that a nation sprung from our own loins, inheriting, in its boast at least, our love of liberty; speaking the language, and transcribing into its code, the institutions of freedom; should have selfishly refused to take any part in vindicating the general cause of the civilized world, would have been of itself no light subject of disappointment. But could it have been believed, prior to the ignominious fact; – will posterity believe, that such a nation, so descended, and so constituted – before the generation had quite passed away by whom her own independence had been gallantly achieved – should have become so absorbed by the one mean, sordid, selfish passion of commercial cupidity, as not only to throw her hopes and wishes into the scale which carried the fortunes of the grand enemy of the freedom, and independence, and happiness of the world; but to place her sword also on the same side, with the avowed purpose of weighing down to the ground that very power whose gallant bearing alone had hitherto furnished a rallying point for the hopes and prayers of the oppressed nations of the earth?<sup>78</sup>

British Evangelical responses to the United States were, naturally, shaped by their own political identities, whether conservative or liberal, as well as by their Evangelical identity.

### III

While there was, therefore, a great deal of respect for and desire to collaborate with their American Evangelical brothers and sisters, this did not mean uncritical or universal approval of

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<sup>77</sup> *Christian Observer*, 12 (1813), pp. 63, 127.

<sup>78</sup> *Christian Observer*, 12 (1813), pp. 749-50.

the new republic or of Evangelicalism within it by British Evangelicals. When Joshua Marsden was finally released to sail home, he was full of gratitude for the kindness of New York Methodists to him during his enforced stay; and yet at the same time (in the same paragraph!) pretty sharp in his criticisms:

Thank God I am at last delivered from bondage; I have passed through a *democratic wilderness* of briars and thorns, but I am escaped ‘as a bird from the fowler’s snare’. Never did party spirit so embitter the sweets of life, and poison the streams of social happiness, as in the United States of America.

I am now at sea, and my ears are no longer stunned with crabbed discussions.<sup>79</sup>

Clearly, it was possible for Evangelicals to disagree profoundly with American politics and yet to treasure the spiritual link. But there was also a developing awareness that Evangelicalism on the other side of the Atlantic was perhaps similar in theology, but different in culture. While this recognition of variation had much to do with British Evangelicals’ own political environment and their individual political dispositions, it may also be at least partly explained by the contexts of the separate development of national identity, and of separate spiritual development, on either side of the Atlantic.

America, in this pre-steam era, was still seen by Joshua Marsden and others as ‘the ends of the earth’, and the physical distance mattered.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, it was developing fast as a nation in its own right, with its own national character, and the sense of special destiny that marked it out from the corruptions of the Old World, just as British national identity was being indelibly marked by the experience of resisting the French Revolution and Napoleon Bonaparte over twenty-two years and thereby having its conviction reinforced that it was ‘the true Israel of God’

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<sup>79</sup> *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 38 (1815), p. 302.

<sup>80</sup> *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 38 (1815), 308.

for the times.<sup>81</sup> These national settings marked Evangelicals in Britain and the United States and affected British views of America and of their counterparts there. The Scottish Evangelical leader, Henry Moncrieff Wellwood, put it this way:

The final decision of the question has ... demonstrated to the conviction of all impartial men ... that the immediate and the remote consequences of the American war have gone equally beyond the anticipations of those who defended, and of those who condemned it, as well as of those who laboured to mediate between them, or to moderate their hostility.<sup>82</sup>

Ted Campbell's proposal that a broader examination of what Evangelical literature made it across the Atlantic would reveal a great deal, is convincing; for one thing, it would help to demonstrate more substantially the nature of much of what was actually known in Britain about American Evangelicalism at this time.<sup>83</sup>

Secondly, the development of Evangelical religion in both countries was separate. While it had been common for defeat in the War of American Independence to have been explained in sermons as divine chastening as a result of Britain's imperial greed and oppression, or of the British people's self-indulgence in luxury and corruption, this did not lead preachers to urge imitation of the religion of the vindicated Americans.<sup>84</sup> The advance in America of voluntarism rather than parish religion, and of popular religion over church membership and discipline and clerical authority, was not diametrically opposed to British Evangelicalism, which was, as David Bebbington and others have argued, not universally authoritarian and staid, *pace* Nathan Hatch,

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<sup>81</sup> Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren*, p. 14; Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism*, p. 3; Marshall, 'Presidential Address: Britain and the World in the Eighteenth Century: II, Britons and Americans'; Eliga H. Gould, 'A virtual nation: Greater Britain and the imperial legacy of the American Revolution', *American Historical Review*, 104:2 (1999), pp. 476-89; Dror Wahrman, 'The English Problem of Identity in the American Revolution', *American Historical Review*, 106 (2001), pp. 1236-62; Wilson, 'The island race'.

<sup>82</sup> Moncrieff Wellwood (ed.), *Account of the Life and Writings of John Erskine*, p. 281.

<sup>83</sup> Ted. A. Campbell, 'Evangelical Institutionalization and Evangelical Sectarianism in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain and America', in Rawlyk and Noll (eds), *Amazing Grace: Evangelicalism in Australia, Britain, Canada and the United States*, pp. 108-123, at pp. 121-2.

<sup>84</sup> Warren Johnston, 'Preaching, National Salvation, Victories, and Thanksgivings: 1689-1800', in Francis and Gibson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon 1689-1901*, pp. 261-74, at p. 270; G.M. Ditchfield, 'Sermons in the Age of the American and French Revolutions', in Francis and Gibson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon 1689-1901*, pp. 275-88, at p. 280.



while many American Evangelicals were similarly troubled by uncontrolled religion.<sup>85</sup> But British Evangelicalism was, normally, *relatively* more organised, more subject to the clergy, more staid and socially conservative; and its increasing momentum and energy in the decades after the American Revolution mounted relatively gradually by contrast with the periods of extraordinary revival experienced in the United States. It was much harder for British Primitive Methodists to operate, amidst social criticism and harassment, than it was for their American counterparts, who did not have a strong Anglican establishment with which to contend.

It would have been remarkable if transatlantic differences had not influenced British Evangelical attitudes towards their American counterparts. Just as British political attitudes towards the United States of America combined an ambivalent mix of admiration and mystification, so British Evangelical attitudes combined respect and a deep desire to associate and cooperate with American Evangelicals, with criticisms of American toleration of slavery, and some discomfort with the levels of religious and political diversity and disorder apparent in the new republic. Evangelicals were therefore to be found adding their voices to the conservative, liberal and radical positions in the British debate on the new United States of America.<sup>86</sup> Yet their most distinctive contribution was their enthusiasm for cooperation with Americans in missionary enterprises inside and outside the United States. In this they added weight to the stance of those liberal politicians who viewed the United States as a force for good in the world and a natural ally for Britain, and who favoured a close Anglo-American

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<sup>85</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Bebbington, 'The Democratization of British Christianity: the Baptist case'; Bebbington, 'Evangelicalism in Modern Britain and America: A Comparison'; Campbell, 'Evangelical Institutionalization and Evangelical Sectarianism in Early Nineteenth-Century Britain and America'. See also Valerie Honeyman, "'That ye may judge for yourselves": The contribution of Scottish Presbyterianism towards the emergence of political awareness amongst ordinary people in Scotland between 1746 and 1792', (PhD thesis, University of Stirling, 2012).

<sup>86</sup> Emma Macleod, *British Visions of America, 1775-1820: Republican Realities* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013).

relationship on the basis of shared values, despite their differences.<sup>87</sup> While the national and spiritual cultures in which British and American Evangelicals operated were different, the theological and spiritual ties which bound them were substantial; and British Evangelicals looked forward to the time when the transatlantic separation would be removed and when, ‘as there was but one Shepherd, there would be only one sheepfold’.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Macleod, *British Visions of America, 1775-1820*, pp. 124-5.

<sup>88</sup> Earl of Harrowby, Lord President of Council, at the fourteenth anniversary meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society, 6 May 1818, reported in the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 41 (1818), p. 547.