Before New Liberalism: The Continuity of Radical Dissent, 1867-1914

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<tr>
<td>ASSL</td>
<td>Arts and Social Science Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASCA</td>
<td>Anti-State Church Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIL</td>
<td>Bishopsgate Institute Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BU</td>
<td>Birmingham University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSU</td>
<td>Christian Social Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>Cadbury Research Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>JRL</td>
<td>John Rylands Library</td>
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<tr>
<td>LWMA</td>
<td>Liverpool Working Men’s Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>NEL</td>
<td>National Education League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLF</td>
<td>National Liberal Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODNB</td>
<td>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</td>
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<tr>
<td>PHM</td>
<td>People’s History Museum</td>
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<tr>
<td>TUC</td>
<td>Trade Union Congress</td>
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<td>UoB</td>
<td>University of Bristol</td>
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Abstract:

The central aim of this thesis is to examine the role played by the radical traditions of provincial nonconformity in the emergence of New Liberalism between the 1860s and 1914. While New Liberalism is usually characterised as a secular movement that broke away from nonconformist traditions, this thesis demonstrates that it was in many respects a continuation of provincial nonconformity. The thesis charts its long-term impact at a local level, the formation of national organizations and then its direct legislative role after 1906. The main approach, in the earlier chapters, is to examine the use of religious rhetoric in overcoming sectionalism and divisions of class, in building co-operative relations between Liberals and labour movements, as well as long-term platforms such as the NLF. From this foundation, it examines the significance of nonconformist campaigns for compulsory education and prohibition in the Liberal Party’s ideological adjustment to the demands for domestic social reform in the penultimate chapter, concluding with a thorough qualitative and quantitative analysis of the role of nonconformist MPs in the Liberal administrations of 1906 and 1910 at the end. In so doing, the thesis mainly draws on sources from the press, including pamphlets, periodicals and newspapers, supplemented by other official documentation to examine how Liberal nonconformists developed radical initiatives through appeals to shared religious cultural mentalities, values and identities, before also utilizing parliamentary papers in the final chapter for the quantitative analysis of voting patterns. The thesis makes an important revision to our understanding of the complicated relationship between nonconformity and the Liberal Party during this difficult period of transition when the party’s identity was challenged, by reconnecting the provincial world of nonconformity directly with the politics of New Liberalism.
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Introduction:

Research Objectives: A Revision in Politico-Religious History

After the Liberal landslide of 1906 there were an estimated 210 nonconformist MPs in the House of Commons, over 190 of whom were Liberals.\(^1\) For the first time, nonconformists made up a numerical majority in the Liberal Party after centuries of political exclusion. Also, late nineteenth and early twentieth century nonconformity was marked by a ‘vibrant counter-culture’ emphasising the importance of community responsibility, as demonstrated by organizations such as the Christian Socialist Society.\(^2\)

Considering the increasing vitality of nonconformity in terms of theological social doctrines and parliamentary membership, there is a call for a thorough study into the extent that New Liberalism can truly be attributed to provincial nonconformity.

By examining the changing relationship of provincial nonconformity with the Liberal Party, from local studies to their role in Parliament between 1867 and 1914, this thesis presents an important revision in our understanding of nonconformity and how New Liberalism emerged. The chronology spans the period of popular Liberalism of the 1860s, which coincided with the growth of radical nonconformist local politics in Birmingham, to the onset of the First World War. While the main object is to show that Edwardian Liberalism was significantly indebted to provincial nonconformity it does not claim that Edwardian Liberalism was simply a nonconformist movement, or that the work of secular intellectuals was not important. Fundamentally, this thesis questions the theory that late Victorian society underwent a decline in religious culture and shows that Edwardian Liberalism was largely rooted in provincial nonconformity which grew to reshape the Liberal Party.

This thesis deals with the intersection of two significant changes that occurred within the Liberal Party which coincided, namely the growth of nonconformity in Parliament and the major ideological shift towards government socio-economic interventionism that challenged so-called Liberal orthodoxy. Linked more broadly with the rise of parliamentary nonconformity was the changing evangelical emphasis on communitarian values. Throughout the late Victorian and early Edwardian period, among others there were two significant ideological changes in British culture: the growth of the

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social Christianity of conscience, characterised by community and corporate responsibility, and the increasing emphasis in the Liberal Party on social and labour reforms popularly referred to as ‘New Liberalism’. The former is best described as a heterogeneous movement that spanned various diverse sects and politico-religious groups advocating a more active engagement with social issues, whether this was Christian socialism or the social gospels of nonconformity. Religious movements stressing the importance of social conscience, poverty amelioration and the Christian imperative became pervasive. The late nineteenth century witnessed the growth of such organizations as the Christian Socialist League, the Christian Social Union and the Socialist Quaker Society. While the kernel of Christian socialism was more dogmatic and clear as its theology developed along sacramental lines, nonconformist forms of socialism were more diverse but there were many common threads in the theological argument. Although there were denominational differences, Christian socialism and nonconformist social doctrines shared various common theological traits, including an increasing emphasis on social conscience and doctrines of divine immanence.

Defining New Liberalism is more problematic considering the complicated nature of Liberal Party politics. The term was coined by Llewellyn Atherley-Jones in 1889 and was in parlance among many radicals from the 1890s onwards. But what divided New Liberalism from earlier Liberal politics? The notion that New Liberalism was defined by its emphasis on the positive role of state does little to distinguish it from Victorian Liberalism. State interventionism had already existed in several spheres of Victorian politics. The Liberal Party had instigated many socio-economic measures which could be construed as welfarism before 1906 such as Asquith’s Factory Bill of 1895. Moreover, the whole language of collectivism and individualism has been considered largely polemical rather than an accurate representation of late Victorian and early Edwardian political arrangements.

There were new conditions such as the growth of organised labour and the growing threat of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and this was no doubt reflected in the formation of policy. The ILP was expanding as a party in its own right and the

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relationship with the Liberal Party was often tenuous. The Liberal Party’s identity was also threatened by the Tories, who became increasingly willing to adopt the mantle of classical economics in representing bourgeois interests. Working-class support for Toryism helped to bolster their cause between 1886 and 1906, through the local Tory ‘Urban Democracy’ movement in such towns as Manchester, Liverpool and Preston. However, these conditions were not unique specifically to the period of Edwardian Liberalism, but from the 1870s onwards.

However, there were still features to Edwardian Liberalism which distinguished it from earlier Liberal politics. There was a significant increase in welfare politics and legislation that dealt with labour issues such as minimum wages for workers after 1906. New Liberalism was distinct due to the extent of its legislation rather than the type of reforms instigated. The radical wing of the party was more pronounced than ever before. As New Liberalism was seen by party bosses as a milestone suggests that the agenda was to redefine Liberalism to broaden its electoral appeal and this is in itself significant.

Moreover, one major distinguishing feature of Edwardian Liberalism was the growth of parliamentary nonconformity. Hence, the first justification for the thesis lies in the importance of the relationship between nonconformity and New Liberalism. This thesis demonstrates that the heyday of nonconformity in terms of its relationship with the Liberal Party was the 1906-1914 government, more so than it had been in the Gladstonian period. No other period in history, before 1906, had seen as many nonconformists occupy seats in Parliament. They emerged from extra-parliamentary politics to become one of Parliament’s most prominent groups distinguished by the common nonconformist banner. In the period of Gladstone’s leadership, the number of nonconformist MPs was significantly less and in 1868 only 69 nonconformist MPs sat in the House of Commons.


Liberal Nonconformity changed from a scattered group of radicals more popular and active on the provincial level to possibly the most numerous and distinguished group in Parliament.

A Historiographical Review

The second justification is historiographical. Despite these glaring features of nonconformity before the First World War, its role in the origins and formulation of New Liberalism has not been fully explored. While New Liberalism was clearly enabled by the 198 nonconformist MPs that emerged from the radical fringes of the Party in cities such as Birmingham, the implications of this have not been fully addressed. There have only been tentative attempts to address the role of nonconformity in New Liberalism, which demonstrates the potential importance for historical knowledge of engaging in a more complete study. Even the most relevant and recent historical works that directly examine the role of religion in Edwardian Liberal politics by historians such as Ian Packer are somewhat piecemeal in addressing this question on any scale. The historiography of nonconformist-Liberal relations is scattered throughout various different studies that are often disconnected. This study engages in a more complete evaluation of the impact of provincial nonconformity on Liberal Party ideology than in previous studies, by charting its long-term impact at a local level to its more direct legislative role after 1906.

The most striking gap in the historiography lies specifically in the relationship between provincial nonconformist radicalism, that changed from grassroot to national level politics, and the legislation of Edwardian Liberalism. This project contributes to historical knowledge by connecting two areas of research that have not been fully integrated into one study. Nonconformity has been studied in relation to social reform in the late nineteenth century and the Liberal Party in the Edwardian period in some measure. But there are still omissions. The disconnection is not just chronological, but on what constituted New Liberalism. Existing historiography on the rise of New

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15 As early as the 1950s, work relating to social reform, included K. S. Inglis, ‘English Nonconformity and Social Reform, 1880-1900’, *Past Present* Vol. 13, Iss. 1 (April, 1958). On New Liberalism, the most recent work includes; Packer, ‘Religion and the New Liberalism’.
Liberalism either considers the legislative importance of nonconformity but is too narrow in focus, concerned with nonconformist preoccupations such as disestablishment or characterised by the more implicit assumption that there was a trend of secularisation in British politics. This thesis is not merely concerned with examining one particular study of provincial nonconformity disconnected by decades from the Edwardian Liberal administration, nor with exploring a narrow micro-study of a limited number of parliamentary nonconformists like Packer’s work focusing on the Rowntree family. Instead the thesis reconnects the world of provincial nonconformity with the social liberalism of the early twentieth century.

Discussion on both individual fields has been extensive. There has been much historical literature on nonconformity in the nineteenth century, focusing on the struggle for religious equality. Also, the relationship of nonconformity to the issue of social reform has been addressed by historians, such as K. S. Inglis, as early as the 1950s. He examined nonconformist attitudes to pressing social questions demonstrating that many were strongly incentivised towards encouraging legislative reforms, but his work was limited to the late nineteenth century. He also focused largely on religious campaigners and there is no mention of the ‘Liberal Party’ throughout his whole article. In accounting for Edwardian Liberalism other explanations were considered, stressing political and economic imperatives. Studies focused more broadly on social reform and welfarism, than Edwardian Liberalism itself. The most notable in the 1960s were Maurice Bruce’s *The Coming of the Welfare State* and Gaston Rimlinger’s many works including *Welfare Policy and Industrialisation in Europe, America and Russia*. Bruce traced the origins of welfarism to the socio-economic demands for state intervention in response to industrialisation, growing urbanization and mass poverty over the course of the nineteenth century. Rimlinger’s broad study into welfare politics attributes the social policy after 1906 to the growth of organised labour.

The need for further revision, on nonconformity and the Liberal Party, reflects the need to redress the legacy of secularisation theories. The political history of the Liberal

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20 Inglis, ‘English Nonconformity and Social Reform’, pp. 73-88.
22 Bruce, *The Coming of the Welfare State*.
Party has still not fully come to terms with secularisation scepticism and changes in religious history. Over time the chasm between provincial nonconformity and Edwardian Liberalism has narrowed, but there still remains a gap. The conclusions of the secularisation sceptics have not been fully considered in terms of their implications for many spheres of political history. By the 1960s, a prevailing view amongst sociologists and historians was that religion faded with urbanization by the end of the nineteenth century. Since the 1970s, there was increasing scepticism of the validity of such secularisation theories based on limited church attendance figures. Theories of declining faith were challenged by revisionist interpretations stressing the importance of a religious cultural mentality. A leading representative from this group was Callum Brown who emphasised that religious life in Britain continued to prosper until the 1960s, whereupon it began an inexorable decline. The main problem is that the implications of the secularisation debate have affected so many areas of related historiography. There is much truth in Ian Packer’s statement that ‘the view of historians… is inevitably coloured by the overarching debate in religious history about whether and to what extent there was a process of secularisation’.

This debate has coloured our view of nonconformity and Edwardian Liberalism in some measure. Nonconformity was a religious movement therefore a model of declining religious faith was invariably bound to inform the work of historians over several decades. While some historians dedicated little space to the subject of religion and nonconformity, others were more explicit in advocating the shift away from nonconformist traditions. A prominent view was that nonconformity was on the decline towards the close of the nineteenth century. Before the secularisation model was challenged, this was epitomised by historians such as John Glaser who maintained that

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24 Helmstadter, ‘The Nonconformist Conscience’, pp. 61-95. Packer maintains that ‘the implications of this conclusion have not been fully worked out in approaches to politics in this period’. Packer, ‘Religion and the New Liberalism’, p. 236.
26 Ibid.
once nonconformists had achieved their campaigns for civic and religious equality, they faded in political significance. Glaser emphasised that dissent was limited in its vision to the Liberal individualism of the past, and was hostile to socialist doctrines and the interests of labour.\textsuperscript{30} Perhaps the most notable was Richard Helmstadter who characterised nonconformity as a dying movement from the 1880s, thereafter losing its vitality with the emergence of new social attitudes.\textsuperscript{31} The degree to which assumptions of secularisation influence Helmstadter’s model is unclear, but his argument about the inexorable decline of nonconformity constitutes his main thesis.\textsuperscript{32}

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s leading historians of New Liberalism did not consider nonconformity as important, focusing on other explanations. New Liberalism entered the historiographical vocabulary at the time when secularisation theories were ascendant. One of the most seminal works of historical literature was Michael Freeden’s book, which characterised New Liberalism as a vital movement leading to the resurgence in the party’s ideology in adjusting to new industrial conditions. Freeden charts the growth of Edwardian Liberalism, from its ideological foundations rooted in ideas based on sociology, evolution and idealism, to the work of key Liberal legislators of the twentieth century, but nonconformity and religion more broadly receive scant attention.\textsuperscript{33} The words ‘nonconformity’ or ‘nonconformist’ appears only twice in the entire book and only in passing. There is no mention of any individual nonconformist denominations. Other intellectuals, such as L.T. Hobhouse, were more often the focus of study reflected in the work of historians such as Peter Weiler and Stefan Collini.\textsuperscript{34} Another leading example from the early 1970s was H. V. Emy’s book \textit{Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics}, which in charting the transition within the Liberal Party to more advanced social politics before 1914, focuses more analytically on internal political changes and ideas rather than administrative debates and other external socio-economic imperatives such as the rise of labour movements. Despite its internal growth in the number of MPs within the party in the 1906 election, nonconformity does not feature high in the discussion.\textsuperscript{35}

Class was more often than not the main focus of explanation. While the complexities of class relations are an unavoidable consideration in changing Liberal

\textsuperscript{31} Helmstadter, The Nonconformist Conscience’, pp. 61-63.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, pp. 61-95.
\textsuperscript{33} Freeden, The New Liberalism.
ideology, it was specifically class division that many historians focused on.\textsuperscript{36} From the 1970s historians saw the emergence of New Liberalism as a product of class conflict, and an attempt to preserve bourgeois values in the face of the growing working-class electorate. A sample of the leading historians include Alun Hawkins, Kenneth O. Morgan and Joseph White.\textsuperscript{37} Hawkins stresses that in the Edwardian period ‘The Liberals’ attitude to class politics and industrial unrest’ was ‘a product not of their claimed position as a non-class party, but of the class position which the most of them occupied and represented’.\textsuperscript{38} Hawkins only mentions ‘nonconformity’ three times in passing, and cites a small number of dissenters who were ‘committed to a traditional kind of Liberalism’.\textsuperscript{39} White’s review article makes no mention of either ‘nonconformity’ or any individual denomination and the word ‘religion’ appears only once where he agrees with P. F. Clarke that ‘the importance of religion declined’ in Late Victorian politics.\textsuperscript{40}

However, over time other explanations have been considered by revisionist historians beyond socio-economic and class models. Many historians challenged the centrality of class in popular radicalism.\textsuperscript{41} Biagini argues that the success of popular Liberalism between 1860 and 1880, was due to the promotion of other values that built on collective consciousness such as Puritan traditions dating back to Cromwell and radical constitutionalism.\textsuperscript{42} Gareth Stedman Jones challenges what he considers the mythology of class perceptions, particularly through the distorted lens of Liberal ideology of the middle classes, that obscured the socio-economic realities and hardships of the urban poor. Nationalism and patriotism were often considered as important in building co-operative relations with labour movements.\textsuperscript{43} Narratives stressing class division were challenged by revisionist interpretations emphasising the formation of popular liberalism facilitated by nationalism and internationalism. Margot Finn proposed that New Liberalism was a continuation of popular Liberalism fostered by interclass relations.


\textsuperscript{39}Ibid, pp. 143-62.

\textsuperscript{40}White, ‘A Panegyric on Edwardian Progressivism’, p. 146.


\textsuperscript{42}Biagini, \textit{Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform}.

\textsuperscript{43}Steadman Jones, \textit{Outcast London}.
encouraged by shared European sympathies and national identities, further encouraged by the willingness of middle-class Liberals to drop the mantle of free-market ideology in the face of working-class criticism. However, Finn does not focus much on religion or nonconformity. While shared sympathies for the Bulgarian Crisis and the traditions of the ‘freeborn Englishman’ were important, so were religious traditions.

But as complicated class-based explanations alone were seen as insufficient the gap has further narrowed between the literature on nonconformity and New Liberalism, particularly as revisionist historians have accounted for the scepticism of secularisation. Over the last three decades of the twentieth century more historians cast off this model and accepted the continuing importance of religion in late Victorian culture. More political historians of the Liberal Party and nonconformity have encompassed the sphere of religion in historical narratives, but it is still far from complete. Over time the model of secularisation increasingly became less influential in informing historical narratives. Since the decline in secularisation theories, revisionist historiography can be divided into three main contributory areas.

First, some revisionist historians who considered the continued vitality of religious culture at the time, still saw New Liberalism as predominantly a secular movement. In these cases, assumptions about secularisation remained implicit in varying degrees. In the 1970s, there had been insufficient time to properly adjust to revisions in religious history and the historical narratives of historians such as Clarke bear the same imprint of secularisation. In _Lancashire and the New Liberalism_, examining the change from conservatism to Labour and New Liberalism, Clarke considers the importance of religion in this transformation. He stresses the relation between religion and working-class divisions. He does not dedicate a single section to nonconformity itself and his work emphasises how religious incentives gave way to economic. Often New Liberalism is seen as the product of those theorists who abandoned their earlier religious convictions. Political thinkers such as Thomas Hill Green were often seen as formative in redefining Liberal polemics. Historians have characterised the late nineteenth century as a period of existential crisis for many who subscribed to the Christian faith. Later

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44 Margot C. Finn, _After Chartism: Class and Nation in English Radical Politics, 1848-1874_ (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 1-12.
49 Freedeen, _The New Liberalism_.
50 Clarke, _Liberals and Social Democrats_; Leighton, _The Greenian Moment_, p. 23.
that decade, in *Liberals and Social Democrats* Clarke’s study focuses on such Liberals as Graham Wallas, men who had lost their religious convictions and sought to compensate through other public works. Clarke’s assertion that ‘the intellectual collapse of the Christian world-picture was distressing because its social and psychological functions were left unfulfilled’ suggests that he saw the intellectual basis of Christian orthodoxy on the decline.

Despite the growing emphasis on the role of religion in politics, there are still some omissions in the relationship between provincial nonconformity and Edwardian Liberalism. In some respects, there is a perpetuation of religion in many narratives which stress the crisis of faith amongst advanced Liberals. The distinction between religion and surrogate religion is not entirely clear-cut. A growing number of historians maintain that ethical socialism was a surrogate form of religion and that certain theological values and precepts continued to colour the work of many intellectuals who had abandoned their earlier religious convictions. This historiographical current suggests that the so-called ‘decline of faith’ among Liberal intellectuals was an oversimplification and that religion continued to have some impact. In particular, Richter stresses the moral dimension of T. H. Green’s idealism as an expression of social conscience. The leading examples include Mark Bevir and Denys Leighton. Bevir emphasises the ‘intellectual and rational link between faith and social reformism’ through adopting immanentist theology and moral idealism. Leighton’s book on Green explores the significance of evangelical theology in shaping Green’s political philosophy, as well as dissent in the social turn towards the end of the century. The shared themes and arguments that ranged from evangelical theology to the philosophical idealism of Green suggests there is some plausibility to this perspective. But this remains unclear and historians such as Leighton are certainly not considering religion in strict terms when discussing Green’s idealism; Green’s major works were after all not primarily theological texts but works of philosophy. Many historians see nonconformity as usurped by the interests of class

51 Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats*.
politics in New Liberal ideology. More recently, George Bernstein, through a case study of John Clifford, highlights the limitations of the nonconformist vision in adjusting to Labour demands and the growing working-class electorate.\textsuperscript{58}

Second, there has remained an abundance of work on religion, where religion assumes greater political importance, but remains aloof from Edwardian Liberal politics. The increasing emphasis on religion in the historiography of late-nineteenth century Victorian politics is undoubtedly a consequence of revisionist accounts of the secularization model as advocated by historians such as Callum Brown.\textsuperscript{59} More recent historiography integrates religion into several spheres of Victorian society and by examining popular literature Jeremy Morris demonstrates its prevalence in the cultural life of the time.\textsuperscript{60} S. A. Skinner stresses the importance of social questions and the ‘condition of England’ in so many religious polemics, as early as the 1830s.\textsuperscript{61} His work on the Oxford Movement focuses broadly on the nineteenth century. A broad edited collection of studies into nonconformity and social reform from the early nineteenth to early twenty-first century was published in 2012 entitled \textit{Free Churches and Society} edited by Lesley Husselbee, but even here New Liberalism is not considered in much detail. In his chapter, David Thompson focuses on nonconformist campaigns, including the Quaker prison reform movement, the anti-slavery and temperance movement. However, in covering so much ground, particularly in terms of chronology, the work does not deal with these issues in sufficient systematic depth.\textsuperscript{62} Other chapters, by historians such as Stephen Orchard, focus primarily on the education issue.\textsuperscript{63} James Robert Moore also considers nonconformity, but only in passing – there is some mention of their part in school board elections, but the focus is primarily on the political hazards of Lib-Lab cooperation after 1890.\textsuperscript{64} Much historical literature on electoral sociology reflected in the works of Kenneth Wald and Henry Pelling challenges the view advocated by historians


\textsuperscript{59} For revisionist works on secularisation, see p. 15.


such as Clarke that religion was usurped by class in determining voting behaviour.\(^{65}\) Wald emphasises that religion was more important than class in determining voting behaviour for political parties before 1918.\(^{66}\) This also includes David Bebbington’s study into ‘nonconformity and Electoral Sociology’.\(^{67}\)

The disconnection between Edwardian Liberalism and provincial nonconformity in the historiography is also evident in the chronological focus. Most studies into nonconformity still focus primarily on the Gladstonian period. A number of historians such as Jonathan Parry and Eugenio Biagini focus primarily on the period of mid-to-late Victorian Liberalism when examining the relationship between nonconformity and the Liberal Party. Biagini considers the role of nonconformist groups in cementing this popular Liberalism but his work does not extend beyond the 1880s.\(^{68}\) Parry focuses on the importance of religion and moral language during the period of Gladstonian Liberalism before 1875.\(^{69}\) Parry largely focuses on the uneasy alliance between the Gladstonian Liberals and the Whigs over issues such as church disestablishment and Ireland.\(^{70}\)

However, even seminal works that redress the emphasis on the so-called decline of nonconformity have not considered the full political implications of their findings. Bebbington is notable in his refutation of the Helmstader model maintaining that nonconformity continued to flourish in cultural and provincial life in the late nineteenth century. He stresses the importance of the ‘Nonconformist conscience’ and religious moralism in late nineteenth century politics.\(^{71}\) In chapter 4, he refutes Helmstader’s singular identification of nonconformist vitality with the politics of individualism that lost its ‘optimism and even viability’ after 1880, on the basis that nonconformity was also characterised by a sense of community responsibility.\(^{72}\) However, Bebbington does not consider New Liberalism in relation to nonconformity in any real depth, except in peripheral studies such as his analysis into the number of Free Church MPs in the 1906


\(^{66}\) Wald, *Crosses on the Ballot*, pp. 162-201.


\(^{68}\) Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*, pp. 2-16.


\(^{70}\) Ibid, pp. 46-47.

\(^{71}\) Bebbington, *Victorian Nonconformity*.

\(^{72}\) Ibid, pp. 43-51.
Parliament. Moreover, although he maintains that in terms of nonconformity ‘there was a high degree of continuity with what had passed before’, he charts the real decline as beginning in the early twentieth century. Gerald Parsons who sees nonconformity as merely changing and broadening its appeal to adapt to changes in late nineteenth century cultural life, devotes little attention to Liberal politics of the time. Parsons primarily focuses on the nineteenth century and he claims that ‘in sheer numbers, in religious vitality… in its contribution to the social, cultural and ethical mores of the era, Victorian Nonconformity was an integral and inescapable ingredient of national life’. His observation that ‘the late Victorian and Edwardian era was also one in which Nonconformist social and political status reached new heights’ does not necessarily suggest that they had a positive legislative role in New Liberalism and he does not go on to demonstrate that it did.

Third, the historical literature that deals directly with the role of nonconformity in New Liberalism is somewhat thin and lacking the systematic depth required for broad study. The issue is addressed either in studies that are narrow in scope or scattered throughout other broader studies which only touch upon this theme indirectly. Historians have made some progress in examining this space and in particular the works of Ian Packer demonstrate this historiographical pattern. In *Liberal Government and Politics 1905-15*, he dedicates one section to nonconformity and New Liberalism. Before addressing New Liberal ideology, he focuses primarily on such issues as education and Home Rule. He makes the bold statement that ‘Liberalism and nonconformity remained closely entwined and many aspects of Liberal thought and policy were influenced by nonconformist views’, but dedicates only limited space to further elaboration.

It is assertions such as these which demonstrate the value of more in-depth study. Packer, in his case study of the Rowntree family, emphasises the importance of religion in justifying New Liberalism amongst the party elite. Packer maintains that religion remained essential in this political change: ‘…religious developments were, in fact, crucial in allowing the party to accept the leadership’s wish to steer it toward the New Liberalism’. Packer stresses the significance of certain theological polemics in

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73 Bebbington, ‘The Free Church MPs’, pp. 136-150.
76 Ibid, p. 68.
77 Ibid, p. 68.
80 Ibid, p. 236.
justifying New Liberal socio-economic interventionism through this case study into the Rowntree family.\textsuperscript{81} However this work is confined primarily to a small number of nonconformists and ignores large numbers of radical nonconformists in the party, focusing too narrowly on a case study of extra-parliamentary campaigners. Packer’s main focus is the Rowntree family and a broader evaluation of parliamentary nonconformity is needed to get a complete picture. His claim that ‘while it [New Liberalism] may owe its implementation at the cabinet level to largely secular political strategists, it is impossible to understand how it was perceived or why it was accepted by the Liberal party in purely secular terms’ is significant and certainly calls for major revision in our view of Edwardian Liberalism through more detailed study.\textsuperscript{82}

In summary, while a strong engagement with provincial nonconformity in the nineteenth century is clearly demonstrated, study in relation to the New Liberal ideology of the early twentieth is more limited and a disconnection still remains. Our view of New Liberalism as reflected in the historiography therefore demands some revision in building a more complete picture of nonconformity and New Liberalism. This work makes this important contribution to historical knowledge.

\textbf{Methodology and Approach:}

In bridging the gap between the history of nonconformity and New Liberalism after 1906, the thesis charts the significance of extra-parliamentary nonconformity, its rise on a national level and its continuing impact on government legislation before 1914. While the most relevant study by Packer examines the role played by the Rowntrees in formulating policy and religion in justifying state interventionism in the social sphere, this study traces the origins of New Liberalism back to provincial nonconformity and fully evaluates a broader spectrum of nonconformists in Parliament. It shows that nonconformity led the vanguard of social initiatives, while the Liberal Party was bound by certain conservative traditions, initiatives that were realised as nonconformists emerged as a national force in the early twentieth century. The thesis examines the long-term significance of provincial nonconformity through a series of individual studies, and in the final chapter fully engages in a more thorough qualitative and quantitative critical evaluation of their direct legislative role in the New Liberal administration than any other study to date.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, pp. 236-7.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, pp. 236-7.
In the first few chapters the main approach is to evaluate the use of religious language in the press and the public arena to promote radical initiatives, social reform and shared identities with labour movements, as well as the role played by nonconformist Liberals in cementing these new directives through biographical profiling. The main sources considered include newspapers, periodicals, pamphlets and public speeches by nonconformist Liberals supplemented by private correspondence. Through assessing the use of rhetoric, the thesis probes the agenda of nonconformist Liberals and the religious cultural mentality of those targeted. It thematically evaluates how language was employed, particularly through the use of terminology such as ‘brotherhood’ by Liberal nonconformists in appealing to common religious values to promote popular Liberal platforms and transcend divisions of class. A similar approach is adopted by Callum Brown who examines the continued importance of religion in the mass circulation of popular media up until the mid-twentieth century, particularly through gender identities. Brown examines popular themes in the press relating to gender and domesticity to probe popular religious cultural mentalities before the rise of youth culture in the 1960s. In this thesis, the use of ‘religious language’ in public forums reveals the agenda of radical Liberals in appealing to provincial nonconformists. However, this thesis also examines religious rhetoric expounded by nonconformists, considering the significance of theological argument and how this was aimed at various sections of the community such as the working class. The press is particularly pertinent for the chapters on extra-parliamentary nonconformity given the relative exclusion of many radical nonconformists from high politics. For the nonconformists, the press often represented an extension of the pulpit.

There has never been a better time to explore more fully the press considering the abundance of online archives such as the nineteenth century British periodicals database, JSTOR’s collection of pamphlets and hundreds of digitalised newspapers. This thesis draws on many online databases including JSTOR’s pamphlets, nineteenth century British Periodicals and the British Library of Newspapers. With new methods and tools in digital humanities, these archives can be studied more comprehensively, with greater flexibility for detailed searches and content analysis.

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85 For discussion on the history of computational approaches, see: Donald G. Godfrey [Ed], Methods of Historical Analysis in Electronic Media (London, 2008). For various articles on approaches in digital humanities, see: Jack Dougherty and Kristen Nawrotzki [Eds], Writing History in the Digital Age (Michigan, 2016).
However, there are obvious limitations to this approach, considering the epistemological problems in evaluating the press. Although they can be revealing of general trends in the public sphere, without other forms of primary evidence the thesis would be necessarily vague. Press articles can reveal the agendas of certain Liberals and how they sought to influence their readerships, but they can omit many detailed nuances hidden from public view relating to complicated human actions and decisions. Other sources such as letters simply provide important details that cannot be gleaned from public forums. Hence, the use of other materials such as private correspondence compensates for these short-comings in assessing the role of individual Liberals and their nonconformist religious convictions. This also includes records from nonconformist organizations, located in physical archives such as the Joseph Chamberlain collection at the Cadbury Research Centre in Birmingham and the Bishopsgate Institute in London. From this, the thesis provides a more comprehensive picture of the role of provincial nonconformity in the changing political landscape of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The structure of the thesis progresses from the provincial to the national as it explores how the movements of provincial nonconformity shaped Edwardian Liberalism between the 1860s and 1914. The whole thesis rests on demonstrating that there was a clear continuity from local nonconformity to Edwardian Liberalism. The first three chapters explore how much of what constituted New Liberalism was rooted in traditions of provincial nonconformity. The fourth chapter considers how nonconformity was strategically and ideologically important in the realignments of the Liberal Party before 1906, charting the growth of parliamentary nonconformity. The final chapter examines the direct legislative impact of nonconformity on the Party between 1906 and 1914. The thesis assesses the impact of nonconformist MPs on government policy and engages in a quantitative and qualitative based study into the direct impact of nonconformist MPs on parliamentary legislation once they assumed national importance.

To break down the structure in more detail, the opening chapter provides an important context for more provincial micro-studies as it broadly explores certain theological features of late nineteenth century nonconformity which marked it out as an important precursor to New Liberalism. It examines its active provincial role in politics and the community through social gospels, its relationship with the working class and the continuing vitality of new social theological doctrines. From this the thesis is divided into several individual studies exploring three distinct themes. The first theme is class which is examined in the second chapter. It considers the relationship between nonconformity
and Lib-Lab co-operation, fostered by extra-parliamentary radicals of the Liberal Party. This is essential as New Liberalism largely constituted an ideological adjustment to the growing demands of the working class. The second chapter evaluates the role played by nonconformist sects in cementing co-operative platforms with labour movements, particularly with the use of common religious language centred on notions of ‘Christian brotherhood’. It considers how this common language, built on shared antipathies towards the landed interest and Anglicanism, helped to bypass class divisions in favour of shared inter-sectarian values. The use of ‘brotherhood’ as a polemical device advocating shared religious identities fostered important Liberal-Labour relations and working-class support which was essential for New Liberalism.

The third chapter focuses on Birmingham Liberalism and the civic gospel. It continues on similar lines by exploring the use of religious language in advocating the civic gospel, to develop important long-term platforms which enabled Edwardian Liberalism to develop. Birmingham is pivotal due to the vitality of its radical nonconformist culture in demonstrating the significance of nonconformity in the rise of New Liberalism. While the parliamentary Liberal Party was characterised by Gladstonian Liberalism, Birmingham led the vanguard in programmatic social reformist politics in the 1870s and 1880s. This chapter assesses how Birmingham’s leaders appealed to common religious identities and values through the civil gospel to promote radical initiatives and organizations such as the National Liberal Federation. It examines the use of religious language and rhetoric, developed on new theological doctrines of the Christian imperative represented by the civic gospel, in transcending local faddism and nonconformist sectarian differences. It explores how the radical movement in Birmingham was strongly galvanised by appealing to the sense of corporate responsibility through shared religious identities that set aside sectional divisions through the civic gospel.

The fourth chapter addresses the issue of ideological continuity and examines the growing impact of nonconformist associations, from the provincial to the national. It focuses on the nationalization of provincial nonconformity considering how nonconformist movements, such as the prohibitionist campaign led by the United Kingdom Alliance, helped the party maintain the continuation of Liberal principles during a period of growing challenge. It assesses the significance of the role played by such nonconformist groups as the UKA in adjusting to the changing political climate and sectionalism before the election of 1906. It is through this study that the complicated internal divisions and party sectionalism is examined in most detail, and it explores how nonconformist movements, such as those focused on education and prohibition, provided
a sense of political continuity in the party’s readjustment from old to New Liberal politics with the growth of parliamentary nonconformity.

The final chapter connects provincial nonconformity directly with New Liberalism. It assesses the legislative impact of nonconformist MPs on the Liberal Party between 1906 and 1914 at a time when they held more parliamentary sway than ever before. It evaluates how provincial nonconformity impacted directly on Edwardian Liberal legislation in Parliament by focusing on the role of dedicated nonconformists such as Percy Alden. It also engages in a quantitative based analysis correlating New Liberal legislation with religious affiliation, through voting patterns and those identified by studies as radical through careful biographical profiling. It considers whether there was positive correlation in the degree of religious affiliation of nonconformist MPs, those MPs considered ‘radical’ at the time and votes of support for a series of New Liberal reforms. It also considers the role played by a number of active nonconformist MPs who helped to shape a number of labour reforms.

By identifying the links between provincial nonconformity and Edwardian Liberalism, from the municipal to the national, the thesis helps to paint a more complete picture of the changing politics of the Liberal Party before its eventual decline after the First World War. As religion remained important in several spheres of Late Victorian and Edwardian cultural life, particularly with the social turn, nonconformity flourished as a social movement within the Liberal Party. There is as much plausibility in characterising the early twentieth century as a period of nonconformist vitality as the nineteenth. To paraphrase Gladstone, in many respects, nonconformity became ‘the backbone of British Liberalism’. Although nonconformity has been erroneously associated more exclusively with older style Liberal politics of the Gladstonian period, it would make as much if not more sense to describe nonconformity as ‘the backbone of British New Liberalism’.

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86 Watts, The Dissenters, p. 257.
1. Radical Dissent, Social Gospels and the Community, 1860-1906

1. Introduction

Late nineteenth century nonconformity was a complex social and cultural movement which helped shape political attitudes and civic life. Recent historiography increasingly emphasises its multifaceted nature and continued vitality, characterising nonconformity as more than just a pressure group campaigning for religious rights, but also a broad sectarian movement active in municipal socialism.1 Helmstadter’s assumption that ‘Nonconformist culture began to disintegrate in the late nineteenth century’ fails to account for the vibrant nonconformist activity in provincial politics. Helmstadter based his thesis on the limitations in ‘nonconformist conscience’ to adapt to demands for more radical social initiatives relating to labour issues.2 As hitherto demonstrated some historical literature explores the continued importance of nonconformity in many spheres of late Victorian life, including Michael Watt’s The Dissenters which in the later chapters explores the social turn before 1906.3 Since the 1980s, some historians singled out Helmstadter for criticism. David Bebbington emphasises Helmstadter’s failure to consider congregational, work and family life in building a sense of ‘corporate responsibility’.4 Gerald Parsons’ criticism of Helmstadter is based on nonconformity’s expanding cultural and ideological engagement with provincial life: ‘What we see in nonconformity in the 1880s and 90s is… the public diversification of a theology that had been steadily broadening for several decades.’5

In contrast, a growing trend amongst historians is to stress the theological importance of religion and nonconformity in politics, as demonstrated by S. A. Skinner’s emphasis on the importance of social questions in religious polemics throughout the nineteenth century.6 Boyd Hilton is another leading example, whose work explores the social turn in theology and the complicated ideological underpinnings of ‘incarnational theology’.7

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4 Bebbington, Victorian Nonconformity, p. 40.
5 Parsons, ‘From Dissenters to Free Churchmen’, p. 107.
This chapter, along with chapters 2 and 3, examines how many different facets of New Liberalism after 1906 can be clearly traced back to provincial nonconformity from the 1860s onwards. Why was nonconformity important in changing the face of Liberalism over the turn of the century? What differentiated it from other political movements and religions? The answer is best summarised by its more active engagement with the community, social problems and politics, as an extension of incarnational theology that set itself apart from other religious movements during the Christian Socialist revival. This chapter is careful not to underestimate the significance of other religions such as Anglicanism, but merely to show that their contribution was more theoretical and that nonconformity led the vanguard in radical initiatives. There is much truth in John De Gruchy’s assertion that ‘Nonconformity injected a sense of commitment, idealism, and social activism into British public life which had been largely absent before’. Provincial nonconformity was active in the community through municipal socialism, social reform and working-class interaction, themes explored in further depth through specific studies in the following chapters.

2. Growing Communitarianism and Religious Theology

That a majority of religious denominations underwent major ideological changes towards more communitarian values in the late nineteenth century has been well-established, although how this was expressed varied. The Baptist George Dawson, of Birmingham, was one of the earliest advocates of the ‘gospel of service’ and was a political activist, not only on ecclesiastical issues, but also municipal reforms. He preached the ‘gospels of service and brotherhood’ from the Church of the Saviour throughout the mid-nineteenth century. He offered a good example of the current in dissenting social thought when he emphasised the need for a more active church in social affairs:

We want... an active, restless, and untiring Church... a Church striving to make cease the painful contrasts that we everywhere behold - here a house, over-

8 John W. de Gruchy, Christianity and Democracy: A Theology for a Just World Order (Cambridge, 1995), p. 113
11 Sellers, ‘Dawson, George’, ODNB.
luxurious, abounding in wealth and ease and voluptuous indulgence; and there a hovel, poor, dirty, and degraded, with inhabitants to correspond. We want a church that all may enter; an approachable Church; a Church of refuge for the weary, of shelter for the poor, of solace for the sick, of help for the desolate, of tribuneship for the oppressed.12

Dawson stressed the importance of a church that was active in dealing with real worldly problems of the urban environment.13 Theological premises among different religious congregations varied, but a broad common thread was the notion of the spiritual community. It is unclear when this theological shift occurred and scholars such as Peter D’Alroy Jones identify the last few decades of the late nineteenth century as the period of Christian social revival.14 Hilton identifies the 1850s and 60s as the period which really marked the rise of incarnational theology away from traditional evangelical stress on atonement.15

The roots of the Victorian social gospels went back much further. This has been recognised by many more recent historians including Gerald Parsons who maintains that ‘representatives of middle-class, urban Nonconformity … were advocating a variety of interventionist and reforming social and political policies some three or more decades before the date Helmstadter proposes for the breakdown of the mid-Victorian synthesis’.16 Among nonconformists there were even coherent proposals for social reform involving state interventionism much earlier than the so-called revival in Christian conscience. Although he became more conservative later in his political life, William Forster was an early opponent of the principles of Laissez-Faire. Forster is therefore significant given his promotion of state intervention in the social sphere, decades before it was advocated in Birmingham municipal politics. Forster was for a time a Quaker and a philanthropist. He was forced to leave the Quaker Connexion when he married a non-Quaker. Although he never again acquired a denominational membership, particularly as he underwent a period of religious doubt in the 1850s, he still attended Anglican services from this time until his death.17 In the winter of 1850, he wrote a series of letters to The Leader on social and

12 George Dawson, The Demands of the Age Upon the Church: A Discourse, London, 1847, Cowen tracts, p. 11.
13 For more detailed discussion of Dawson’s theology, see chapter 3.
16 Parsons, ‘From Dissenters to Free Churchmen’, p. 93.
labour reform. *The Leader* was established that same year in the milieu of late Chartism and merged with the *Saturday Analyst* a decade later.\(^{18}\) In December 1850, Forster advocated positive labour legislation and in defending state aid for labour against its critics he rejected the notions of self-interest and individual responsibility: ‘…everyday each man knows his interest better - feels that it is more and more bound up with that of his fellows, and, therefore, that their business is theirs’.\(^{19}\) He also raised the issue of governmental responsibility:

> he and they together are more and more willing to appoint agents who shall do their joint business and save the time of both; and hence we find the tendency of society is to increase the power and enlarge the functions of government, while at the same time it increases its responsibility, and the number of those to whom it is responsible.\(^{20}\)

Here he clearly implied that state intervention was justified for the sake of the common good and that increased fiscal power was a natural outgrowth of the cooperation of individuals. He was not just defending the interventionism of social groups, but an increase in governmental responsibility as many of the measures proposed involved state aid.

Yet the theological and polemical importance of Anglicanism should not be underestimated. It was also in the mid-nineteenth century that Anglicanism, with its own social doctrines, became influential ideologically and this was most pronounced among the High Churchmen. Jeremy Morris, in examining the origins of the Anglo-Catholic school of social radicalism, stresses its importance in broadly redefining theological traditions towards notions of Christian conscience.\(^{21}\) Anglicanism shaped the character of Christian Socialist doctrines and it was largely the corporate nature of the Anglican Church, fulfilling its role as spiritual guide over the nation through the Eucharist, that promoted the work of social emancipation.\(^{22}\) Christian socialism had largely developed along its own ‘sacramental lines’.\(^{23}\) It provided a social critique of many cultural values

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\(^{19}\) W. E. Forster, ‘Social Reform’, *Leader and Saturday Analyst* Vol. 1 Iss. 37 (December 7, 1850), p. 877.


\(^{23}\) Norman [Ed], *The Victorian Christian Socialists*, p. 3.
in the late 1840s and early 1850s.\textsuperscript{24} Christian social doctrines were still formative in changing theological thought away from notions of original sin towards the notions of brotherhood.\textsuperscript{25} Some of the most important figures in the movement of Christian socialism were Anglican. This included F. D. Maurice, Stewart Headlam and Charles Kingsley.\textsuperscript{26} All three were ordained as Anglicans and amongst its clergy there was a growing awareness of the need to adjust to changing social conditions through the values of Christian socialism, particularly after 1848.\textsuperscript{27} Among certain Anglicans the doctrine of the incarnation came to stress the importance of spiritual fellowship.\textsuperscript{28}

However, assessing broad changes in theology within dissenting groups is more challenging owing to their complicated diversity, and this may have obscured their significance in the movement of social Christianity. It is easy to use the term ‘nonconformist’ as if it were homogeneous, but it largely refers to a collection of different sects often characterised by striking ideological incongruities. In 1873, during a lecture, the Liberal and Congregationalist Edward Miall spoke of Baptists and Quakers declaring that ‘they do not coincide with me. They are as much attached to their theological and ecclesiastical convictions as I can be to mine’.\textsuperscript{29}

Some of the disparities were striking. There were even differences between Quakers, Congregationalists and Unitarians. There were also class and social divisions. Bebbington estimates that in major cities, the Unitarians and the Quakers were most common among the affluent professionals. In contrast Congregationalism reflected broad sections of the middle classes while working classes more commonly subscribed to Primitive Methodism.\textsuperscript{30} Many conservative Congregationalists saw Unitarianism as essentially non-Christian.\textsuperscript{31} Quakers were perhaps the most theologically distinct of the other groups in terms of their political opinions.\textsuperscript{32} They also distinguished themselves culturally, in terms of their mode of dress and social activities.\textsuperscript{33} Congregationalists were

\textsuperscript{26} Hull, Towards the Prophetic Church, p. 237.
\textsuperscript{27} John Torrance, Karl Marx’s Theory of Ideas (Oxford, 1992), pp. 272-3.
\textsuperscript{29} Edward Miall, The Bearing of Religious Equality on the Rights of Individuals and Spiritual Communities: A Lecture, Manchester, 1873, Cowen Tracts, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{30} David Bebbington, The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870-1914 (Leicester, 1979), pp. 4-5.
\textsuperscript{32} Parry, Democracy and Religion, pp. 223-5.
\textsuperscript{33} Parsons, ‘From Dissenters to Free Churchmen’, p. 81.
often the most outspoken on such pressing issues as social inequality and urban poverty as shown by the activity of such journalists as W. T. Stead, Rev. W. Whittley and R. J. Campbell.\textsuperscript{34} Amid the Methodists there were few who were active within socialist societies.\textsuperscript{35} Interpretations of evangelical thought represented a major divide within dissenting theology. Both Quakerism and Unitarianism tended to remain theologically quietist and outside the mainstream evangelical traditions of dissent with their doctrinal orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{36} Unitarians were known for their distinctly non-evangelical vision.\textsuperscript{37} They existed more on the periphery of nonconformity but were distinctly influential for their size. By contrast, Baptists, Congregationalists and Wesleyans were more mainstream. The Wesleyans were largely the product of the evangelical revival in the eighteenth century and the others emerged from old dissent.\textsuperscript{38}

Drawing broad distinctions between Anglicanism and nonconformity is problematic. However, despite its diversity, nonconformity shared a common antipathy to the sacerdotal orthodoxy characteristic of Anglicanism, stemming originally from notions of individual conscience. Congregationalists and Baptists were the most outspoken in this respect. Wesleyans, far removed from the liberal background of old dissent, would more frequently support Sabbatarianism than the former groups. Even a majority of Wesleyans only remained aloof from nonconformist campaigns for religious liberty due to their disengagement from political concerns.\textsuperscript{39} This would become less pronounced during the course of the late nineteenth century.

Like Anglicanism, all dissenting sects underwent a broad theological shift towards a greater emphasis on community. The emphasis changed as the century progressed from that of individual moral responsibility towards the notions of brotherhood. Although some remained steadfast in their commitment to laissez-faire values, a growing number began to see man’s moral condition as the product of socio-economic circumstance rather than his own failings. The Congregationalists and Baptists were the most common advocates of a corporate interpretation of the Christian imperative. Even earlier in the century, Congregationalists were motivated by a sense of corporate responsibility as reflected in work, family and church life.\textsuperscript{40} There was a growing number of social activists among

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, p. 403.
\textsuperscript{36} Parsons, ‘From Dissenters to Free Churchmen’, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{37} Parry, \textit{Democracy and Religion}, pp. 223-5.
\textsuperscript{39} Bebbington, \textit{Victorian Nonconformity}, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, p. 40.
the Wesleyan Methodists particularly towards the last few decades of the nineteenth century, including Samuel Keeble and John Scott Lidgett.41

A major ideological shift within evangelical thought underpinned many such social doctrines. Hilton explores the changing emphasis in ‘incarnational theology from early nineteenth century ‘internalist’’ eschatology that underpinned much earlier evangelical thought to a teleological view of the human community which embraced new scientific and philosophical developments.42 In the early nineteenth century, evangelical theology was dominated by the notions of individual sin reflecting a private relationship between man and God. The moral emphasis was on the notion of individual responsibility and through the trials of adversity a man’s spirituality would develop.43 Nonconformist doctrines often preached the importance of individual conscience – that man was ultimately free and master of his own fate. This clearly shaped their attitude to politics and social reform as many dissenters considered poverty to be the product of an individual’s failings. Over the course of the century, other theories emerged with several common themes emphasising greater social responsibility. In religious thought the notion of Christian duty came to justify social intervention for the sake of man’s moral condition reflecting the principle that man and the world were intrinsically linked by a bond of brotherhood. Among certain nonconformist sects it was also argued that God was an active agent in the world and the theory of atonement, centralizing the theological significance of Christ’s death, saw Christ as a moral teacher.44

Ideologically this was a response to philosophical and scientific developments that emerged throughout the nineteenth century, which entailed a more malleable interpretation of sectarian doctrines. Changing societal conditions, such as the growth of industry and the urban working class, should not be ignored. The demands of the urban poor became a rallying cry for many radical dissenters. Much theology was a reaction to the ‘Condition of England’ debate.45 The Christian imperative was not merely a reflection of socio-economic demands, but also of intellectual challenges. The trend was as prevalent in Anglican theology as much as the various nonconformist groups. For many sects, it was clearly underpinned by the notion of God as an active agent in the world, as opposed to a transcendental unknowable entity. In resolving theology with empirical

41 Parsons, ‘Social Control to Social Gospel’, p. 81.
science and philosophical rationalism, God’s place had to be linked more directly with the world and its processes.\textsuperscript{46} The theology of several nonconformist sects adjusted to changing circumstances. A growing theological perspective that emerged with the onset of enlightenment rationalism was that religious principles were not entirely immutable. Private worship, linked to notions of original sin, was insufficient and religion was seen as worldly. Mark Bevir challenges the notion that Liberal welfarism reflected secularisation, maintaining that it was largely the product of theological immanentism in response to empirical science, Darwinism and philosophical teleology.\textsuperscript{47} However, when Bevir maintained that ‘the dilemmas besetting contemporary Christianity produced a definite shift in the mental world of the late Victorians’, he focuses primarily on Oxford intellectuals such as Thomas Hill Green, many of whom had lost their earlier faiths.\textsuperscript{48} He placed more emphasis on Immanentism as compensation for lost faith, than on its active role in religion and it is necessary to consider its relevance to changing nonconformist sectarian theology.

The influence of Anglican theology in this development was particularly pronounced. Although its intellectual origins could be traced to such thinkers as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Scottish ministers like John McLeod Campbell, its theological adaptation as a polemical force was strongly Anglican in character. Anglican clergymen were some of the most outspoken advocates including Connop Thirlwall and Julius Hare.\textsuperscript{49} Labour church members, many of whom were Anglican and had experienced personal doubt in Christian faith, adapted by embracing notions of brotherhood through the theories of romantics such as Ralph Waldo Emerson.\textsuperscript{50} The Christian socialist F. D. Maurice maintained, in the mid-nineteenth century, that the ‘Kingdom of God already existed on earth’.\textsuperscript{51} Notions of ‘divine immanence’ were reflected in the preaching of his associate, Frederick Robertson.\textsuperscript{52}

Many radical dissenters were also influential in this respect. Henry Vincent, who was a radical who became a Quaker, lectured on a variety of social and political questions throughout the 1860s. Vincent had been a Chartist, but was less militant by this time. He

\textsuperscript{46} Hilton, \textit{The Age of Atonement}, p. 336-339.
\textsuperscript{47} Bevir, ‘Welfarism, Socialism and Religion’, pp. 648
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, pp. 648
\textsuperscript{50} Bevir, \textit{The Making of British Socialism}, p. 285.
often emphasised Christian teleological arguments for social improvements. George Dawson was particularly important, as he was a leading Birmingham nonconformist and political activist, who played a major part in the city’s civic gospel movement. Dawson stressed how the teachings of Christ were fixed, while their moral and practical applications were circumstantial:

Religion is a great immutable thing; the Church is the means of applying it to mutable men. You have to be cured. The faith is to cure you; but inasmuch as you have the changeless to be applied to the varying, necessarily will the intermediate thing - the means - change and vary too. Ever in history will you find this the case.

He also wrote: ‘religion needs to be clothed. Everything with which we have to do must appear in an outward garb. In everything "the Word" must "become flesh" and that ‘all spiritualism must consent to clothe itself in form; everything concerning God must condescend to take upon itself a dress borrowed from the earthly’. This was reflected in his teaching, particularly through the Church of the Saviour, where he emphasised that it was the Christian duty of ‘mutable men’ to engage directly with the problems of society, particularly through politics.

The demands of rationalism and empirical investigation clearly became related to issues of Christian virtue. John Clifford equated man’s search for knowledge with the moral and spiritual quest for the divine. Clifford was a prominent Methodist and the minister of the New Connexion. He maintained that intellectual rationalism guided man towards a virtuous life by ‘filling us with worthy ideas of life and firing us with quenchless courage’. Scientific knowledge would help to reveal man’s spiritual nature: ‘Our instincts and training would lead us to begin with "redemption."... The "wisdom" of the physician works through his knowledge of the laws, conditions, and signs of health. He must know the body, its investing world and the relations of each to the other, before he can redeem it from any disease that enslaves it and give it an impact towards the power

54 Sellers, ‘Dawson, George’, ODNB.
55 Dawson, The Demands of the Age, p. 4.
56 Watts, The Dissenters, p. 231.
and joy of health’, continuing: ‘Our first need is light: light as to our true condition and destiny, our right relations to him in whom we live and move and have our being’. 58

One major theme that emerged through this was teleological, that suggested that such processes as evolution were reflections of God’s will as manifest in nature and the world. Mark Bevir finds synergies between late nineteenth century immanentism and Green’s idealism, particularly the notion of self-realization through gradual development of human reason. 59 Bevir claims that for Green individuals were linked to a single inner consciousness - the concrete universal between mind and the empirical world of observation through a presupposition of the divine, a self-revealing consciousness at one with the world and individuals. 60

Yet, this ideology was more prevalent among the religious and most likely the importance of idealism in these perspectives has been exaggerated. The writings of many idealists gave emerging Liberal social doctrines an essential ideological underpinning, but it was largely restricted to a minority of Oxford intellectuals and later Liberals out of touch with labour movements. Although for the New Liberal reforms a strong connection with labour was not essential, building bridges with the newly enfranchised working class was still an important objective. Even Stefan Collini, who dedicates much work to such theorists, emphasises how ‘Idealism was only ever a minority taste’. 61 Among religious sects, this was more prevalent. Congregationalist Edward Miall emphasised the spiritual teleology towards the historical self-realization of equality. In 1873, at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester, he announced: ‘religious equality… is one of those developments of Christian life which has been... imbedded in it from the beginning, but which waited for a prepared condition of society to make itself manifest’. 62 Unlike idealism, nonconformity was a multi-layered sectarian movement where theological social doctrines and action in the community were inexorably linked.

3. The Importance of Radical Dissent and the Community

That there was a broad religious change towards incarnational theology demands no further elaboration, but how this manifested varied depending on the denomination.

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60 Ibid, pp. 650.
61 Collini, Liberalism and Sociology, p. 45.
62 Edward Miall, Religious equality: Four Lectures Delivered in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, Manchester, 1873, Bristol Selected Pamphlets, pp. 3-4.
Radical dissent distinguished itself from other religious congregations in its direct practical engagement with the community. It constituted a broad multi-faceted movement that was both active on the ground and prone to radical Liberal proposals. To understand how radical dissent distinguished itself from other denominations it is important to contrast it with Anglicanism. Despite the demonstrable theological importance of Anglo-Catholicism in changing ideas about incarnation, the Immanentism of so many nonconformist groups was of a more pragmatic character in their active pursuit of Christian duty. Nevertheless, Anglican groups concerned over social issues were just as numerous and operated with greater organizational independence than existed under the auspices of such nonconformist sects as Congregationalism. The Anglican Church permitted members to establish autonomous societies provided they did not challenge its established religious orthodoxy. Towards the latter half of the nineteenth century there existed certain Anglican groups concerned with social issues, such as the Christian Social Union and the Guild of St Matthew.\textsuperscript{63} They were often socially radical, particularly towards the end of the century. The \textit{Christian Socialist} newspaper, under the editorship of Rev. C. L. Marson, attacked the whole capitalist system and the Irish Union. This led to the formation of the Christian Socialist Society, which was established to unite various denominations on these issues and included a great many Anglicans among its members.\textsuperscript{64} The original proposals included free compulsory education, the reorganization of society based on industry rather than privilege and the public control of land.\textsuperscript{65}

Moreover, it could be argued that Anglicanism was more coherent in its social doctrines than nonconformity. Peter D’Alroy Jones maintains that the contribution of dissenting groups to the Christian Socialist revival was undermined by its ‘lack of intellectual identity’.\textsuperscript{66} This was unsurprising considering their sectarian diversity and there were bound to exist ideological incongruities. A good example is the doctrinal division between orthodox evangelical and rational Unitarians. Evangelical Unitarians were more orthodox in their adherence to scripture, while rational Unitarians advocated a more scientific approach borrowed from the traditions of Enlightenment rationalism.\textsuperscript{67} Nonconformist association with formal socialist propaganda societies was tenuous at

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{63} Inglis, ‘English Nonconformity and Social Reform’, p. 73.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Phillips, \textit{Kingdom on Earth}, p. 181.
\item \textsuperscript{65} D’Alroy Jones, \textit{The Christian Socialist Revival}, p. 310.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Ibid, pp. 390-1.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Denis G. Paz, \textit{Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England} (Stanford, 1992), p. 191.
\end{itemize}
best. There was only a fraction of active nonconformists involved with such organizations as the Christian Socialist Society and the Free Church Socialist League.68

Nevertheless, Anglicanism, despite its theological commitment, was somewhat far removed from any realistic engagement with social issues. The association of Anglicanism with the established Church often hampered its ability to engage more actively in social legislation and provincial socialism. Many attempts at Anglican co-operatives throughout the century were short lived and dominated by a largely middle-class membership. The major focus of Anglicanism towards the late nineteenth century was educative and propagandist, reflected in such organizations as the Christian Social Union.69 The CSU remained nothing more than a discussion forum and there was little concrete engagement with the social problems within urban areas.70

The Guild of St Matthew, founded in 1877, was the leading Anglican socialist organization. It was largely a propagandist organization that advocated Christian morals, publishing a wealth of literature without engaging directly with the problems of urban poverty. It was established by the Curate of St Matthew’s in Bethnal Green to combat the secular propaganda of Charles Bradlaugh and other members of the National Secular Society.71 Its actual programme stressing redistribution of land was vague, unrealistic and they had no practical means for implementing such proposals. Land reform was a major feature of Victorian radicalism, from Chartists to more moderate Liberal reformers.72 The latter often sought land reform to avoid class divisions through a ‘progressive alliance’.73 Such proposals, advocated by the Guild ‘to abolish false standards of worth and dignity’ lacked tangibility.74 This is not surprising considering that its membership never rose higher than 450 members.75 Stewart Headlam, founder and head of the Guild, supported land reform. But they were either too few in number or their commitment to reform was limited.76 Stewart Headlam’s radicalism on such issues as land taxation did not represent a majority in the organization.77

69 Norman [Ed], The Victorian Christian Socialists, p. 3.
73 Biagini, Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform, pp. 51-2.
74 Bloom, Victoria’s Madmen, p. 91.
Also, the practical organization of nonconformity was more strongly politicised while Anglicanism remained aloof from a systematic engagement with social problems.\textsuperscript{78} Christian socialism had also been established to lure radicals away from militant Chartism.\textsuperscript{79} Some Anglican societies were active in pursuing social amelioration, but they were either few in number or lacked political weight. The Christian Socialist League was dominated by Nonconformists in 1894 and when it took on a more Anglican character in the early twentieth century, it was disbanded into associations.\textsuperscript{80} Anglican organizations could not rely on the same commitment from the Tories as dissent had from the Liberals. Admittedly, there were some Tory-Anglican ties and some attempts at social legislation but nothing quite so clear and tangible. Anglican and Catholic organizations would never become as effective in formulating coherent social programmes or implementing civic changes on a local level as nonconformist societies active in such conurbations as Birmingham. Anglicanism was less overtly politicised. There was nothing that carried the same political weight as the Liberation Society among the Anglican groups.\textsuperscript{81}

The evidence of Nonconformist activity within communities in the pursuit of social improvements is considerable, as demonstrated by local dissenters in cities such as Birmingham and Bradford.\textsuperscript{82} Social reform was still contrary to the interests of many nonconformist congregations. Many progressive ministers concerned with the problems of industrial society found it hard to persuade their congregations to follow suit, particularly the more conservative members. However, this was still a central issue among the more radical dissenters, particularly those connected with the Liberal Party as the most outspoken adherents of social reforms.\textsuperscript{83} The mid- to late-nineteenth century witnessed the growth of philanthropic activity and more importantly local social gospels which provided a strong impetus for radicalism.

The most striking example is offered by Birmingham’s civic gospel, but it was generally common throughout the major urban centres. In Liverpool, there was a strong Unitarian and Congregational presence. John Burns, who was a Unitarian minister, advocated municipal action in the 1840s through the publication of *The Christian Teacher*. In Birmingham Liberal radicals and Congregationalists pursued active

\textsuperscript{78} Parsons, ‘Social Control to Social Gospel’, pp. 48-49.
\textsuperscript{79} Norman [Ed], *The Victorian Christian Socialists*, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{82} Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 217.
\textsuperscript{83} Parsons, ‘From Dissenters to Free Churchmen’, p. 90.
municipal socialism through the construction of radical platforms that would shape social liberalism in the years to come. The ideological malleability of the different sects is demonstrated by George Dawson, who between the 1840s and 1850s, advocated a corporate interpretation of the Christian imperative for the sake of the community and remained untied to any specific nonconformist sect. Some of the most active campaigners for social reform were nonconformists. Birmingham radicals George Dawson, J. A James and R. W. Dale were active in promoting urban social initiatives before the 1880s. Dale was a Congregational Minister and a leading representative of nonconformity. In Bradford this included W. E. Forster and A. M. Fairbairn, the principal of Airedale College. John Brown Paton was a philanthropist and a radical Congregationalist minister in Nottingham, who stressed the importance of environment on the formation of character. Having spent time in Birmingham in the 1840s at Spring Hill College he became convinced that religion and the socio-economic problems of the world were linked. 

Despite certain internal sectarian differences in doctrine, nonconformity was primarily a provincial movement and was more politicised than other denominations. Its engagement with urban politics and programmes suggests it was more grounded in communal life. This was not just the result of its practical organization or theological emphasis on free thought, but also its relationship with the urban working class.

4. Nonconformity and the Urban Working Class

Out of all the various religious groups, it was the nonconformists who could legitimately claim to have established the closest ties to the labour movements, ties that were important in building Lib-Lab relations well into the twentieth century. The institutional position of many dissenting radicals ensured a greater degree of inter-class collaboration, particularly in the pursuit of social and political objectives. The cause of radical dissent went hand in hand with the efforts of certain middle-class reformists to appeal to what they perceived as a labour aristocracy through shared values, which later

84 Ibid, p. 93.
86 Phillips, Kingdom on Earth, p. 52.
characterised New Liberalism. Nonconformity embodied many of their cultural values, and yet was sufficiently malleable to adjust to the demands of labour movements. The necessity of gaining support of workers provided an essential impetus for these changes, particularly after the election of 1867. Different sects sought their adherence through an ideological readjustment to accommodate their interests and nonconformity was best placed to build on this through the promotion of shared antipathies towards the existing status quo, often typified by the established church and landed interest.

There were strong links between dissent and the organised working class, which if anything became more pronounced throughout the nineteenth century. This varied depending on time and geographical location. There was a strong but complicated relationship between Chartism and dissent. The Chartist Churches were led by active dissenters who were often rebellious against more conservative members of their congregations. Methodism had already sewn its seeds in working-class culture through the practice of lay preaching. While very early nineteenth century Wesleyanism had few contacts with the Chartists, a number of rebellious Wesleyans, Primitive Methodists and ex-Methodists had played an important role in the Chartist movement, particularly in the regions of South Lancashire, the West Riding, Staffordshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire.

The relationship between religion and the Chartist revolt was far from simple but clearly dissenting sects remained the most popular amongst the workers in the mid to late nineteenth century. There were many working-class radicals and Chartists, throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, who were atheists, deists, or from a variety of heterodoxies before moving back to more orthodox churches after the 1850s. However, dissent remained relatively strong among the working class. As workers became more open to co-operative relations with the middle classes more nonconformists identified with working-class interests, particularly considering the desire among ministers to promote religious worship among the urban working class. There was a common perception at the time, particularly among the clergy, that faith was declining and that the urban working classes were becoming alienated from religious practice with the onset of modern industrial life. There were consistent efforts by clergymen to galvanise

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90 Parsons, ‘From Dissenters to Free Churchmen’, p. 91.
93 Tom Scriven, Popular Virtue: Continuity and Change in Radical Moral Politics, 1820-70 (Manchester, 2017), pp. 18-19.
working-class interests in their own sect. This was common sense and as Walsh emphasises ‘simple prudence demanded that the Church pay more attention to the physical plight of the godless masses … in bringing the poor into the Christian fold’.95

This was also noted by Dawson. Writing in 1847, Dawson pointed to religious apathy among the urban working class, demonstrating the disconnection of so many churches from the social and material demands of the age:

There is, then, in this land at present, a large number of men… who neither do belong, nor wish to belong, to any of the existing churches or sects whatsoever. Are these men to go starve, because they will not enter into the existing unions? Are they to pine at home in sad solitariness because they cannot find food for their spirit in the existing churches? Assuredly not.96

The 1851 religious census seemed to confirm their worst fears. But despite its limitations the census still demonstrates a keen level of observance, with a total of 9,240,984 who attended service in England alone on the 30th of March.97 Bevir demonstrates how Labour churches tended to attract vastly more nonconformists than Anglicans or Catholics. This was largely as a result of their strategic position in the major industrial centres.98 Evidence of the 1851 census confirms this pattern. The proportion of attenders of dissenting places of worship was generally higher in larger towns with a greater percentage of urban workers. However, this trend was far from universal. Methodists were numerous in small mining towns and villages.99 One good indicator is the seat room provided by different denominations relative to the local population and on average the ratio was higher for dissenting churches in large towns when compared more broadly with the counties. Throughout all counties listed, the Anglican Church provided seat room for 29.6 compared with 27.4 for dissenting denominations out of 100. In the large towns, this was 17.2 to 18.8 respectively.100 The figures are generally lower for larger towns as conditions often made attendance among urban workers more difficult. Much of this was the result of the changes that emerged through industrial society, such as population growth.101 All denominations had chapels within working-class

communities, and they were not without attenders.102 There were many radical dissenters who were involved in these communities. Middle-class philanthropists such as the Liberal Samuel Morley often supported labour movements, often subsidizing their activities through Working Men’s Associations.103

Overall, the sitting capacity for denominations that had a large working-class following further demonstrates the significance of nonconformity in relation to labour movements. The combined total sitting capacity for Wesleyan Methodist and Baptist places of worship alone was nearly three million. Even the limited studies into church attendance figures convincingly demonstrate that Primitive Methodism and Baptism were generally more prevalent among the lower classes.104 The census of 1851 revealed that it was the Wesleyan Methodists that were the most numerous among dissenters in the general population, with 11,007 places of worship compared with 3,244 for the Congregationalists. More revealing are the raw attendance figures, which suggest that the combined number of attendants at public worship for Baptists and Methodists was 3.1 million compared with 5.3 million for the Anglican Church. Considering the particular prevalence of Baptism and Methodism among the working classes and their higher proportion in more industrial urban centres, this suggests that dissent was strongly working class.105 Methodist clergymen were often the most active in trade unions and labour movements, even as early as the first half of the nineteenth century.106 This was unsurprising considering the prevalence of Primitive Methodism in the more industrial towns and villages. In areas such as Suffolk, Oxfordshire and Norfolk they were associated with working-class interests as reflected in such organizations as the Agricultural Workers Union.107 The Methodist chapels provided working-class members with an outlet for organizing group social activities, to make speeches and express their antagonism.108

Dissent was ideologically more flexible in adjusting to the demands of labour, as without the institutional restraint characteristic of Anglicanism they could develop closer relations with workers. Dissenters were simply better placed to appeal to working-class interests. In 1870 Dale, in his critique of Matthew Arnold, emphasised: ‘Whatever life

102 Parsons, ‘From Dissenters to Free Churchmen’, p. 75.
105 Census of Great Britain, 1851, p. 110.
107 Parsons, ‘From Dissenters to Free Churchmen’, p. 97.
there has been in the churches outside the establishment has had freedom to grow…. the intellectual tendencies and spiritual forces which have revealed themselves among us have been able to assert themselves without restraint'. There were also strategic advantages over Anglicanism within dissenting sects. As shown, one was their historical position in relation to the established social order. They appealed to a common antipathy towards the British establishment and privilege. They could build on a shared heritage of opposition to landed interest symbolized by the Anglican Church whilst promoting themselves as champions of egalitarianism. It was difficult for Anglican polemics to construct such shared traditions by appealing to a seemingly alienated working class.

There were also many important commonalities which helped to encourage a distinct culture of nonconformity. Their opposition to the kind of strict ecclesiastical authority characteristic of the established church gave them more flexibility in this respect. Anglican organizations were tolerated provided they did not challenge doctrinal orthodoxy while Congregational organizations were often self-governing and thus the latter were less likely to be subject to the kind of doctrinal restrictions prevalent in Anglicanism. Although there remained a major individualist current through nonconformist theology, as we shall see from the 1840s many Liberal dissenters began to see communitarian values as an extension of individual conscience. The moral life of individuals would be changed by their sense of community. Guinness Rogers maintained that ‘it is of the very essence of Nonconformity that each man should be true to his own convictions, and as a necessary consequence that there should be varieties in the mode of his development. Assuredly all the most powerful tendencies of our own times are to the fuller identification of Christian men with public life.’ Rogers was a Congregationalist minister and a life-long Liberal. He was committed to free trade but was also open to new social reforms.

There were important ideological advantages to the fact that the notions of religious equality appealed to working and middle classes alike. Middle-class radicals could stress shared antipathies to religious exclusiveness, privilege and sacerdotal formalism in pursuit of building inter-class consensuses. This agenda was promoted by many periodicals like the Bee-Hive which was influenced by Liberal radicals in

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110 Inglis, ‘English Nonconformity and Social Reform’, pp. 73-4.
112 Bebbington, The Nonconformist Conscience, p. 11.
collaboration with labour leaders. The *Bee-Hive* was a highly influential union paper, which since its establishment had consistently opposed the separation of the political, economic and social spheres. The nonconformist chapel provided a strong interface between the classes and for the promotion of Liberal radicalism. The notion of individual conscience implied that religions be treated equally in antithesis to the Anglican establishment. The reality of civic inequality would run contrary to the free development of individual conscience. The principle of equality was an important common value in which middle-class radicals could legitimately claim a consensus with many labour movements. In 1873 Edward Miall, a major figurehead in radical dissent, wrote: ‘religious equality… grows out of the relation in which Christianity puts the spirit of man to the Father of Spirits’ and the ‘right to think and judge, and feel and act in spiritual matters, free from every kind of authoritative interference by other men’. He concluded: ‘This is the ultimate basis on which the doctrine of religious equality rests - this individual independence of the soul in the sphere of spiritual things.’

It was precisely due to their sectarian diversity that many nonconformists could legitimately claim to be consistently opposed to what they perceived to be the religious monopolization of Christian principles characteristic of the Anglican establishment. The importance of individual conscience over institutional formalism necessitated a degree of egalitarianism that stretched beyond mere religious practice. Although they became more communitarian in outlook, the emphasis on individual conscience was still a significant tradition in dissenting thought. Ideologically, the stress on individual conscience implied that nonconformist doctrines would reflect the popular concerns and demands of the time. This did not necessarily occur in practice, particularly considering its predominantly middle-class ethic, yet it was an unavoidable doctrinal consideration. Many members of nonconformist groups claimed that the establishment represented a backward step in religious practice as its authority obscured the spirit of religion with its institutional constraints.

The major ideological change in nonconformity stressed the need to address material and social conditions affecting the moral life of people. From the 1840s, there was a move away from the evangelical emphasis on original sin towards an acceptance that the moral character of people was affected by environmental and material

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Throughout the early to mid-nineteenth century, many nonconformists saw the state as essentially coercive, reflecting their distrust of church establishment and history of political exclusion. However, the social turn in radical dissent and religion more broadly, as identified by historians such as Hilton, cannot be simply understood in the context of the change from so-called individualism to collectivism, as there is evidence that this was mythical and borrowed from the vocabulary at the time. Harold Perkin argued that ‘individualism versus collectivism was not the boundary line that mattered’ but that there had been different degrees of legislative changes that could fit into either category. Nevertheless, there was certainly an increasing emphasis on the need to address the plight of the working class. Towards the latter half of the nineteenth century it is no coincidence that with the growth of trade unionism and the working-class electorate there emerged social gospels among dissenting sects. Nonconformists adapted to changing social and industrial conditions as demonstrated by their works addressing urban poverty and the activities of leading dissenters such as F. W. Crossley of Manchester.

In contrast, Anglicanism was less popular among the urban workers. There were attempts by Christian Socialists to engage with the labour movements, but they were in a minority. B. F. Westcott extended the notion of fellowship through the incarnation of Christ, supporting the plight of workers and trade unions. Other Christian Socialists who followed this trend included Henry Scott Holland and Charles Gore. However, these individuals ran contrary to the main currents of Christian Socialist political thought as promoted by Maurice, and their practical engagement with labour was limited. Nonconformity already had a strong connection with the working classes. It is not sensible to generalize about the religious practices of workers, not merely due to the heterogeneous nature of class but also the degree of sectarian diversity. Nevertheless, the association of Anglicanism with privilege would always hamper its appeal to workers. Although it had made some concessions towards dissenters earlier in the century, it was

118 Hylson-Smith, Evangelicals in the Church of England, p. 209.
120 Perkin, ‘Individualism versus Collectivism’, p. 117.
123 Sachs, The Transformation of Anglicanism, p. 218. As previously shown, Anglican engagement with social problems and labour organizations was limited, demonstrated by such organizations as the Guild of St Matthew; see p. 39.
still strongly associated with the political elite. This is not to claim that relations between workers and nonconformist protagonists were always harmonious. Even towards the late nineteenth century there was often discord over the issue of material interests. In 1871, George Howell and George Potter of the Reform League and Labour Representation League objected to working-class supporters of disestablishment for emphasising mere financial over religious and ethical considerations.¹²⁴ Howell was an ex-Chartist, a member of the London Trades Council and a Wesleyan who for some time taught at a Sunday School.¹²⁵ His commitment to Wesleyan Methodism was well known, and in his autobiographical reflections he wrote that joining a Wesleyan body at the age of 13 was highly influential on his development.¹²⁶ During his stay in London he described himself as ‘strongly imbued with religious convictions, which I can only describe as puritan’.¹²⁷ Howell also saw religion and socialistic politics as inherently linked and in his autobiography he also emphasised ‘Self-interest cannot organise a communistic community. Religious enthusiasm and deep religious sentiment may do so, at least for a time’.¹²⁸

It could be legitimately claimed that it was the middle-class secularists who developed the strongest ties with labour movements. Nonconformity was not directly linked with working-class radicalism, and there were clearly a number of non-religious radicals including Charles Bradlaugh and G. J. Holyoake.¹²⁹ However, nonconformity was still a major feature in working-class radicalism. Some historians have explored this relationship. In demonstrating the continuity of early nineteenth century ‘old radicalism’ in Liberal-Labour relations, Biagini also stresses the importance of nonconformity.¹³⁰ John Shepherd emphasises the centrality of mid-nineteenth century radical traditions, nonconformity and temperance on the mentality of the Lib-Lab MPs.¹³¹ For those Liberal protagonists, a shared sense of nonconformist identity served an important collaborative function. Despite the ultimate failure of Liberalism to incorporate labour movements, nonconformist ties were still important to the party’s new programmes. This meant that

¹²⁴ Parry, Democracy and Religion, p. 235.
¹²⁶ ‘Volume F: Autobiography 1860-1896’, pp. 28-9, How01-05, British Online Archives,
¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 46.
nonconformity served an important function in this respect, particularly Congregationalism.

The growth of the labour movements often took on a distinctly religious character in the last few decades of the nineteenth century. There was clearly a positive relationship between this and the Christian socialist revival. It was no coincidence that there was a marked increase in religious social activities at a time when the demands of the working classes were on the ascent. In 1894, Congregational minister John Paton called on the state to ‘provide labour and training for large numbers of the unemployed upon the land’, further emphasising that ‘it is an important and necessary part of that redemptive service to which all of us who are servants of Christ are pledged, and which can only be fully done, as all of us are united in it, in his name, and directed in it, by his spirit’. In 1895, when social issues were becoming more prevalent before the onset of the New Liberal programme, all five Labour MPs were of nonconformist sects. At this time two of the most influential Lib-Lab MPs included Henry Broadhurst and Thomas Burt. Broadhurst was a Wesleyan Methodist and powerful figure in many leading labour organizations such as the TUC. Burt was an ex-miner and leading trade unionist. He was also a Unitarian, who during his period as an MP was considered an ‘outside member of the denomination’. They would go on to form a separate Labour Party, but this is still indicative of nonconformist ties with radical workers.

It was Congregationalism in particular that fostered the closest ties with the labour movements. Scant attention has been paid to the Congregational influence on the Labour Party itself, despite its striking connections. Although less popular than Methodism in terms of raw attendance, Congregationalism better represented the leadership of labour movements. Congregationalism was more popular among the more skilled artisans and leaders of organised unions. It was the Co-operative Movement that was largely led by working men. Even Holyoake himself came from a distinctly Congregationalist

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133 Parry, Democracy and Religion, p. 234.
background and many members of the ILP were active in fostering ties with them, including Fred Jowett, Ben Tillet and Keir Hardie.\textsuperscript{139}

This was also shown by the use of religious rhetoric in the 1890s in forming an ILP.\textsuperscript{140} After the extension of the franchise in 1867, the interests of workers had become of paramount importance to the Liberal Party. There was almost a sense of crisis in the last decades of the century as fervent growth in trade unionism meant that social issues and the amelioration of urban poverty were imperative considerations. It was the 1880s that historians identify as the period of ‘New Unionism’, as shown by the London Dock Strike of 1889.\textsuperscript{141} Also, there was a reduction in the number of active anti-religious socialists towards the close of the century.\textsuperscript{142} A small group of aggressive atheist socialists emerged in opposition, around the 1880s, to the prevailing religious trend. Charles Bradlaugh was one of the chief advocates of agnosticism of the period and was relatively moderate in his outlook compared with a select few including the Marxist Belfort Bax. Most of his fellow Marxist compatriots were not as hostile to religion.\textsuperscript{143}

It was not only nonconformists who extended their ideology to accommodate the labour issues of the late nineteenth century. Cohesive social initiatives were common proposals, but this varied from mere volunteerism to more extreme socio-economic interventionist schemes. Both Catholics and Anglicans were concerned with the growing interests of labour, but their commitment was limited. Christian socialism was a particularly convenient solution to this problem as it did not demand major fiscal reforms and offered only a piecemeal challenge to economic non-interventionism. A handful of Christian Socialists supported ‘gas and water socialism’ and other moderate welfare schemes.

Liberals and nonconformists continued to appeal to the shared culture of nonconformity and its history of free thought. No doubt Guinness Rogers had the Anglican church in mind when he condemned elitist clericalism for assuming such a privileged role in interpreting Christ’s teaching: ‘Sacerdotalism has led its votaries away from the simplicity that is in Christ’, continuing: ‘what indeed could be more out of harmony with the spirit of the injunction before us, than elaborate directions as to the


\textsuperscript{140} D’Alroy Jones, \textit{The Christian Socialist Revival}, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{141} Bevir, \textit{The Making of British Socialism}, p. 38.

\textsuperscript{142} D’Alroy Jones, \textit{The Christian Socialist Revival}, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{143} Leighton, \textit{The Greenian Moment}, p. 189.
vestment of the officiating priest’. Rogers argued that in Christ’s teachings there is no special elite privilege held by clergymen of any institution representing his teachings: ‘Whole volumes have been written on these points. But… in this Statute book of the Church of Christ, there is not the most remote reference to them. Here, indeed, is no distinction between priests and people. Together, all believers form the one body of Christ’. They also appealed to brotherhood over class division in building co-operative relations with the working classes towards the late nineteenth century. In April 1892, Rogers was clearly concerned with transcending class distinctions when he wrote that nonconformity was ‘an assertion of the right of the individual conscience, a protest against invidious class privilege and distinction, an emphatic testimony on behalf of liberty and progress.’

There is therefore evidence to suggest that nonconformist radicals were more influential in fostering inter-class relations. Certainly, in the eyes of middle-class radicals the moral force of nonconformity was essential in building bridges with labour movements. George Holyoake, who was once a committed atheist, became more open minded to religion as a free thinker, by the 1850s. A common perception among middle-class orators was of a labour aristocracy conforming to their notions of moral respectability. There were a number of dissenting spokesmen among the working-class, including the Congregationalist George Potter who established the Bee-Hive, secretary of the Labour Representation Committee Henry Broadhurst and George Howell of the Parliamentary Committee of the TUC. Radical dissent was therefore an essential interface for crossing boundaries of class.

5. Nonconformity and the Liberal Party

In the long run, provincial nonconformity, with its social gospels, tangible relations with labour movements and special relationship with the Liberal Party, contributed to the ideological changes in Liberalism after 1906. The Liberals ensured that nonconformity existed as a practical force in public affairs. The party drew strength from nonconformity in building a consensus and in appealing to shared identities. The party

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145 Ibid, p. 482
148 Finn, After Chartism, p. 193.
also came to depend increasingly on dissenters, whose radical agenda became increasingly influential in its politics, particularly as they became more integrated with the political mainstream over the turn of the century. Conversely, what gave nonconformity both its polemical force and vitality was its close ties to Victorian Liberalism.

Outside the party the influence of nonconformity grew with the emergence of several extra-parliamentary organizations. It became pervasive as it not merely reflected the aspirations of one sect but several, and this necessitated external practical organization in the pursuit of common goals. It was therefore essential that the culture of dissent drew on common languages in fostering its many political aims and the Christian notion of brotherhood served as an important political tool in this respect. The pursuit of social and educational reform was essential in transcending sectarian divisions. Their quest for religious equality against Anglican privilege was perhaps the most significant of these, as many societies were established for this goal, despite a broad sectarian membership. In 1873, Congregationalist Edward Miall wrote that ‘I am content to stand upon the same footing as the Independents or the Baptists, the Presbyterians or the Quakers.’

There were consistent efforts to cement extra-sectarian organizations through appealing to common objectives and the Liberation Society is a case in point. In November 1859 Miall laid blame at the door of the establishment for existing religious discord: ‘I desire above all things to put an end to the source of sectarian hostility, and to bitterness of ecclesiastical contests; and if we succeed in the object we have in view, one instrumentality would suffice to effect that for which five or six are now often employed.’ The Liberation Society was a natural outgrowth of this development and came to represent the cause of dissenting radicalism. Miall was a leading spokesman in the society. It was largely a continuation of Miall’s Anti-State-Church Association, renamed in 1853 with the aim of campaigning for disestablishment, the abolition of church rates and social reform. Miall originally established the ASCA in 1844 as a militant pressure group organization to channel the various strands of reforming dissent into an effective political voice.

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149 Miall, *The Bearing of Religious Equality on the Rights of Individuals*, p. 9
151 Paz, *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England*, p. 16.
considerable and drawn from various groups that shared an antipathy towards the established church, including political reformers and even Chartists.\textsuperscript{153}

The society was not without its internal tensions however. Many of the more conservative dissenters were opposed to their more militant approach.\textsuperscript{154} Also, the society’s attempts at compromise would often serve to alienate the more radical hardliners. When the society agreed to a compromise with the Palmerston government for the mere exception of Non-Anglicans from the Church rate in the late 1850s, members protested in favour of full abolition.\textsuperscript{155} Still, the Liberation Society was a highly successful organ in providing a single cogent voice for marginalised dissenting sectarianism. It often appealed to common identities and shared traditions, particularly between the Baptists and Congregationalists.\textsuperscript{156} Apart from the various shades of anti-establishment sentiment, it could utilise the growing current among several sects towards the notions of Christian brotherhood.

Over time the cause of radical dissent became more vital within the Liberal Party. This is shown by the rise of nonconformist MPs in Parliament and the accommodation of the party to their interests in 1891 and 1902. Sectarian divisions among nonconformists were not merely ideological, but varied in terms of Liberal policies. There were divisions over issues such as disestablishment and education. Political differences existed between Baptists and Congregationalists. Some Baptists were inactive in opposition to full disestablishment and the abolition of denominational instruction in schools, supporting the more moderate anti-sacerdotalism.\textsuperscript{157} Charles Spurgeon left the Liberation Society unconvinced of the need for such extreme measures. Nevertheless, there was still a major degree of consensus and they still served a strong political function. The Liberation Society demonstrated its national importance by its impact on Liberal Party electoral successes in some English and Welsh constituencies.\textsuperscript{158} It remained more active in the social sphere than Anglicanism as it was not only an organised politico-religious movement tied together with common goals but also had intricate relations with the party of reform. In particular, nonconformity played a major role in the 1865 election and this only served to further improve its standing.\textsuperscript{159} Dissenters had strongly advocated the

\textsuperscript{154} Paz, \textit{Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian England}, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{157} Parry, \textit{Democracy and Religion}, p. 213.
\textsuperscript{158} Parsons, ‘Liberation and Church Defence’, p. 153.
abolition of Church rates and this was a major feature in the election. Gladstone had bowed down to the demands of so many nonconformist pressure groups, and eventually conceded to the abolition in 1868.\footnote{Skinner, ‘Religion’, p. 107.} The centrality of dissent as a political force was further demonstrated by the effects of the nonconformist revolt against the Liberal leadership over the 1870 Education Act, which contributed to the party’s defeat in the 1874 election.\footnote{Bebbington, The Nonconformist Conscience, p. 11.}

It is no coincidence that the Liberal Party became concerned with positive state legislation just as radical nonconformity became more influential within the party. Given their leverage, it is not unreasonable to suggest that nonconformist interests would come to have a major impact on shaping party policy, particularly with the growing demands of labour leaders. Due to their essential political significance, they were inexorably merged within the higher ranks of the party which helped to redefine the whole tone of party policy. This was a trend set in motion by Gladstone. Many dissenters had demonstrated both respect and support for Gladstone in the 1860s as he became more accommodating to their demands.\footnote{Bebbington, The Nonconformist Conscience, p. 10.}

There was clearly a sense that nonconformist demands could not be ignored. Even in the 1860s and 70s, Gladstone was conscious of the need to build an alliance with nonconformists. This largely reflected his own internal evolution from high Toryism to Liberalism, despite alarm expressed by his fellow high Churchmen for his growing sympathies with Protestant dissent. Gladstone had made concessions to dissenters that he had hitherto opposed such as his Bill for the abolition of Church rates introduced in 1868 despite his wish to maintain them earlier in the decade.\footnote{Machin, ‘Gladstone and Nonconformity in the 1860s’, p. 349.} In the 1860s Gladstone had been in lengthy correspondence with Congregationalists Newman Hall and Henry Allon.\footnote{Ibid, p. 353.} Hall who occupied the chair of the Congregational Union in 1884 acted as an important intermediary between nonconformist interests and Gladstone. The first meeting was held between Gladstone and several prominent dissenters at what became known as Newman Hall on his instigation, attended by ten Congregational ministers, professors and journalists of which two were Baptist ministers and one a Wesleyan minister.\footnote{Ibid, p. 355.}

Nevertheless, while Gladstone had forged an informal relationship with nonconformity, it was still an extra-parliamentary movement in the latter half of the
nineteenth century. Parry demonstrates that Gladstone was sympathetic to nonconformity and various other religious campaigns such as Irish disestablishment, which served to further drive a wedge between himself with his Liberal followers and the Whigs.\footnote{Parry, Democracy and Religion, pp. 46-7.} That Gladstone sympathised with the nonconformists is evidenced by his politics and many nonconformists certainly admired him.\footnote{Bebbington, The Nonconformist Conscience, p. 85.} Even though Gladstone may have had an affinity with the cause of nonconformity, the precise extent of this is unclear. But nonconformity was still essentially a provincial movement that existed outside the arena of high politics,\footnote{High politics refers to the politics of party leadership, state government or parliament, as opposed to municipal or local organizations.} particularly in the 1860s and 70s. The most prominent provincial movements were in Birmingham reflected in the city’s municipal socialism and civic gospel.\footnote{Ibid, p. 11.}

The changes in nonconformist doctrine were strongly reflected in the Liberal Party towards the twentieth century. This period represented a marked increase in Christian social activities. The Christian Socialist Journal was established in 1883, followed by the Labour Church in 1891 and the Christian Socialist League in 1894.\footnote{D’Alroy Jones, The Christian Socialist Revival, p. 80.} There was a dramatic increase in the number of pamphlets on the plight of the urban poor such as William Booth’s In Darkest England - and the Way Out of 1890.\footnote{Ibid, p. 81} This partly reflected the growing emphasis on social Christianity, as much as the growing integration of nonconformity in high politics. In his article on New Liberalism, Anglican George Russell wrote: ‘The poor, the ignorant, the weak, the hungry, the over-worked, all call for aid, and in ministering to their wants the adherent of the New Liberalism knows that he is fulfilling the best function of the character which he professes and helping to enlarge the boundaries of God’.\footnote{George. W. E. Russell, ‘New Liberalism: A response’, Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review Vol. 26, Iss. 151 (September, 1889), p. 499.} However, nonconformity was still more prevalent in this respect. Earlier, its theologies were characteristic of the Liberal emphasis on non-interventionism, individualism and political economy. This was partly reflected in their support for Gladstone.\footnote{Parsons, ‘From Dissenters to Free Churchmen’, p. 91.} Over time this commitment lessened as more outspoken dissenters in favour of state intervention began to emerge within the higher ranks of the party. In 1892, Rogers wrote that ‘nonconformity remains and is likely to remain a powerful factor in English political life. Many have been the efforts to ignore, or to
suppress it, but they have all ended in failure’.\(^{174}\) Clearly with greater integration, the changes towards a social religion would have a greater voice in directing party policy. Rogers was clearly conscious of how much Christian theology had become redefined over the course of the century as he wrote in approval that ‘the old idea that the great business of a Christian was to care for the happiness of his own soul has given place to a much wider and grander conception of obligation and duty’.\(^{175}\) Rogers was one amongst many Liberals who followed this trend.

The ideological synergies between dissent and Liberalism were clearly cemented. The political perspectives of these followers of the new Christian social gospels were characteristically Liberal, whilst still emphasising the importance of social reform. Rogers stressed the importance of Christian duty in the community but not in the political arena. The church was to confine itself to moral questions, which would guide the functions of those active in the public arena, through notions of public duty:

I should be the last to desire that the Church should subordinate its purely spiritual service to work… of social improvement or political reform. Its first aim is the regeneration of the man himself, and no amelioration of his outward condition can be accepted as a substitute for that. But not the less is it the Christians’ duty to seek to change the environment of poverty and vice which renders the condition of multitudes all but hopeless…To forget this is not only to neglect their duties as citizens, but to be unfaithful to their obligations as messengers of the Gospel itself.\(^{176}\)

While Rogers was relatively moderate in his view of the duty of religion, other ministers and MPs such as Dawson and Dale saw politics as no less a religious arena for the application of Christianity than the pulpit. Largely due to its active role in urban politics and relative politicisation, during the period of the Christian Socialist revival, nonconformity changed from an extra-parliamentary radical movement at the time of Gladstonian Liberalism to a major feature of parliamentary politics.

6. Conclusion

Provincial nonconformity was marked by vitality and its religious sects largely constituted the avant-garde in terms of the practical engagement with the most pressing

\(^{175}\) Ibid, p. 499.
\(^{176}\) Ibid, p. 499.
social issues of the day. The Helmstadter model fails to consider the complicated nature of sectarian ideology. Radical dissent played a pivotal role in nineteenth century social thought, due to its strongly politicised role and more active engagement with Christian notions of duty in many local urban centres. Although, there remained a strong current of individualism in many nonconformist outlooks, the importance of community became pervasive in transcending sectarian divisions in the pursuit of political objectives. Edwardian Liberalism owed much to provincial nonconformity, its early engagement with labour movements, its application of social gospels and the Christian imperative in the community in forming radical initiatives decades before they were accepted by the mainstream Liberal Party.
2. Nonconformity, Liberalism and Labour

1. Introduction

The rhetorical importance of Christian brotherhood was essential in developing inter-class co-operative movements before Edwardian Liberalism. Through appeals to shared values of Christian kinship nonconformity provided an important interface for working and middle-class radicals. This chapter shows that religious language was as important as other considerations such as internationalism, national identities and class consciousness in the relations between Liberals and organised labour. As New Liberalism was largely shaped by the complicated relations between Liberals and labour movements, demonstrating the significance of nonconformity in sustaining these relations, particularly through the use of religious rhetoric is the first step towards exploring the role played by nonconformity in reshaping the Liberal Party.

Exploring the role of labour movements has been central in historical narratives of Liberal Party politics before the First World War. Since the 1970s, there have been two rival interpretations of the decline of the Liberal party, one attributing this decline to circumstantial failures, such as the split in the party during the First World War, advocated by such historians as Clarke¹ and the other, advocated by such historians as Ross McKibbin, portrays New Liberalism as doomed to failure due to ideological limitations in adjusting to trade union demands.² Many labour historians saw the failure of New Liberalism as an inevitable consequence of class conflict.³ More recent interpretations stress a compromise between inevitablist and accidentalist perspectives, reflected in the works of John Fair and Michael Childs who argue for a more latent displacement of Liberalism by Labour before the war.⁴ James Owen also challenges the teleological perspective on the rise of the Labour Party emphasising that the accidentalist

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theory of Liberal decline was an over-simplification. He thus maintains a more complicated view of the relationship between Liberalism and Labour depending on a myriad of factors that varied depending on region, electoral context and working-class diversity.5

Religion has also received much scholarly attention. Leading historians such as Inglis and to some extent Hugh McLeod, chart the decline of religion from the 1880s onwards.6 Nevertheless, there is a rich historiographical tradition exploring the relationship between religion and working-class labour movements.7 Although Clarke maintains that economic imperatives displaced religion in working-class divisions, he still considers the importance of religion and nonconformity.8 The relationship between religion and socialism has been central in understanding the growth of labour movements. There has been much literature dealing with the Labour Church movement,9 including Jacqueline Turner’s book examining the contribution of the Labour Church movement to the Labour Party between 1890 and 1914.10 There is a recognition that nonconformity itself was strongly linked to working-class socialism, in particular Congregationalism. Kenneth Brown argued that while ‘the bulk of the industrial proletariat was indifferent towards organised religion… working class organizations… owed much to non-conformity’.11 Peter D’Alroy Jones, who dedicates an entire section to nonconformity in the Christian Socialist Revival, maintains that ‘Anglicanism was a minority faith among the people’ and ‘among protestants it was the Congregationalists who produced the largest number of socialist agitators’.12

However, while the role of nonconformity has been considered in working-class socialism, in terms of Liberal-Labour relations the historiography is more fragmentary.

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9 The Labour Church was a politico-religious organization originally established by John Trevor in 1891 as an outlet for the religious expression of the labour movement. See p. 90.
Although not inconsiderable, it is interspersed among other broader studies on nonconformity and other disconnected microstudies. That nonconformity was important in the relations between Liberal radicals and organised labour has been well established, but it is rarely the primary focus of study, particularly before the 1890s. J. Thompson maintains that ‘it is well known that the nonconformist chapel provided one of the seed-beds of the Labour movement, and that nonconformity helped to awaken the working classes to political consciousness’. However, for Thompson, nonconformity was on the decline in pace with political secularisation after the 1880s. Other historians, such as E. F. Biagini and John Belchem, stress how nonconformist groups such as Congregationalists helped retain support from skilled workers in the age of Gladstone, but this is a far cry from New Liberalism. Biagini stresses the importance of religious rhetoric about the reformation and Puritan traditions. Jonathan Parry emphasises the importance of corporate responsibility among provincial nonconformist philanthropists in cementing inter-class relations but his study goes little beyond the 1870s. Historians have addressed the issue but only in specific spaces such as Robert Pope’s study of the importance of nonconformity and religion in Wales, stressing the religious revival of 1904 and its role in addressing the socio-economic problems of the working class.

More broadly, revisionist historians, such as Biagini and A. J. Reid have sought other categories and identities beyond just class in explaining the currents of late nineteenth century interclass radicalism. In particular, through a detailed study into John Bright and Edwin Waugh, Patrick Joyce examines the significance of imaginary narratives to do with religion in transcending class distinctions and in the formation of identities, particularly through the use of language.

Moreover, while the work relating to nonconformity has been fragmentary, nationalism and internationalism in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries has received much scholarly attention in explaining the formation of popular Liberalism and interclass co-operative platforms. There is much historical literature emphasising the

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15 Biagini, Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform, pp. 30-83.
16 Parry, Democracy and Religion, p. 207.
18 Biagini, Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform. Biagini and Reid, Currents of Radicalism.
20 This reflects nationalism and also shared identities with the plight of other nations; see, Sutcliffe, Victorian Radicals and Italian Democrats.
importance of nationalism in socialistic movements from Chartism to mid-nineteenth century popular radicalism.\(^{21}\) The rhetorical power of nationalist traditions of the ‘free-born Englishman’ fighting the ‘old corruption’ of vested interests has been the model of many historical narratives.\(^ {22}\) This has been particularly pronounced in terms of popular interclass movements.\(^ {23}\) The most comprehensive study is Margot Finn’s *After Chartism*, which consistent with other revisionist historiography, rejects mere socio-economic imperatives for inter-class collaboration in favour of nationalist and internationalist rhetoric. Finn maintains that the growth of Liberal-Labour relations was marked by continuity from Chartism to New Liberalism, facilitated by common national and international identities.\(^ {24}\) She specifically focuses on common national traditions traced back to Cromwell and the free-born Englishman, as well as shared sympathies with the plight of insurgents in countries such as Hungary.\(^ {25}\)

The rhetoric of religious kinship and the shared cultural values of nonconformity are particularly important in our understanding of social relations and interclass cooperation, which as demonstrated has not received the attention from historians that it deserves. This chapter more thoroughly explores the rhetorical language of Christian brotherhood, in nonconformist discourse, in encouraging interclass co-operation between the 1860s and 1906. Although nationalism and internationalism were important, this chapter demonstrates that the rise of New Liberalism cannot be properly understood without examining the centrality of nonconformist religion. One area which certainly has not been considered fully is the rhetorical importance of ‘Christian brotherhood’ in radical co-operative platforms, particularly over the decades of the late nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries. By examining the use of language in promoting harmony and interclass co-operation, this chapter shows that nonconformity played a major role in sustaining important relations between the Liberals and organised labour. When exploring how classes relate in radical movements, the use of language through the press is particularly revealing of how leading figures promoted certain agendas through


\(^ {23}\) Catherine Hall considers the relationship between nation and citizenship, and how debates over the 1867 Reform Act were framed by internationalist discourse: Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000).

\(^ {24}\) Finn, *After Chartism*, pp. 1-10.

\(^ {25}\) Ibid, pp. 1-10.
appealing to common values. The emphasis on ‘international brotherhood’ amongst the aforementioned body of literature makes this study of religious language even more important.\textsuperscript{26} Concepts of international brotherhood were a major feature of interclass relations.\textsuperscript{27} Hence, it is also useful to explore the use of the rhetorical language of ‘Christian Brotherhood’, particularly considering the polemical importance of ‘brotherhood’ in terms of internationalist and nationalist rhetoric, and the social turn in nonconformity.

This chapter evaluates the role of provincial nonconformity and shows that a shared religious language based on notions of ‘Christian brotherhood’ fostered common identities between Labour and Liberalism. For these groups, nonconformist religion, particularly Congregationalism, was often a common denominator that helped to build radical consensuses. Out of all the various nonconformist sects, Congregationalism was the most significant in encouraging amicable relations between Liberals and the Labour members. Although ultimately Lib-Lab relations were a failure, in demonstrating the continuity and centrality of radical dissent in the Liberal Party’s ideological changes, it was still considered important for the whole New Liberal programme.

2. The Significance of Nonconformity in Co-operative Class Relations

In the late nineteenth century nonconformity offered the most tangible social and political connections with working-class radicals. An appeal to ‘Christian brotherhood’, particularly at a time when nonconformist theology broadened to meet the demands of labour movements and the urban poor, was important in building co-operation over class division. Although nationalist rhetoric was essential, nonconformist religion was also integral to the co-operation between classes. While the emphasis on international brotherhood and shared national traditions were significant, there were many particular advantages to shared religious identities over national and international.\textsuperscript{28}

First, nonconformist theology had a certain ideological flexibility that could meet the new demands of organised labour. Interpretations of what constituted the nation were varied among radicals in the late nineteenth century but depended on certain fixed

\textsuperscript{26} Some historians examine the rhetoric of ‘brotherhood’; Finn, \textit{After Chartism}, pp. 1-10; Sutcliffe, \textit{Victorian Radicals}.


\textsuperscript{28} Henry Collins and Chimen Abramsky, \textit{Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement: Years of the First International} (New York, 1965), pp. 2-5.
traditions pertaining to the freeborn Englishman, notions often associated with Liberal and Whiggish traditions. Rhetoric about ‘free-born Englishmen’ was used by Whigs during the French Revolution, against the so-called champions of the entrenched aristocracy.\textsuperscript{29} Chartism has been contextualised within radical traditions. Gareth Stedman-Jones challenges the older view that Chartism was a reaction to the industrial revolution through class consciousness, instead situating the movement in the traditions of radicalism since the mid-eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{30} Chartist ideology was complicated encompassing many spheres including religion, nationalism and campaigns for political reforms. After the Chartist movement, nationalist traditions were important in developing popular co-operative radicalism.\textsuperscript{31} But in appealing to the past there are limitations. Nonconformity was an active movement that was changing and was not merely limited to its own traditions and struggles against the established church. Also, while nationalism was characterised by old radical traditions there was an increasing emphasis on jingoism as Britain expanded overseas. Many members of working-class labour organizations participated in patriotic processions during the Boer War.\textsuperscript{32} While they remained important in middle and working-class identities, concepts of the ‘nation’ arguably lacked any meaningful ideological grounding for dealing with pressing issues of urban poverty.\textsuperscript{33} As demonstrated in chapter one, nonconformist theology expanded its reach to embrace more socialistic doctrines.\textsuperscript{34} In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, nonconformist organizations played a major part in supplying various tangible programmatic solutions to pressing social problems, reflected in radical programmes and municipal socialism.\textsuperscript{35}

Conversely, it could be argued that nonconformity was in many ways divisive. While shared national identities were common to all working people, specific sectarian affiliations were a potential source of differentiation. Certainly, nationalism and internationalism were polemically important in co-operative platforms. However, as shown nonconformist denominations occupied an active role in communities, particularly the Congregationalists with their ethos of corporate responsibility within major provincial centres such as Birmingham.\textsuperscript{36} They existed on the ground within the framework of

\textsuperscript{31} Finn, \textit{After Chartist}, pp. 1-10.
\textsuperscript{32} Andrew August, \textit{The British Working Class 1832-1940} (Harlow, 2014), p. 150.
\textsuperscript{33} Finn, \textit{After Chartist}, pp. 1-10.
\textsuperscript{34} Parsons, ‘Social Control to Social Gospel’, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, p. 47.
working and middle-class communities. In contrast, shared histories of the freeborn Englishman, although not entirely fictional, were imagined. Much of this was informed by historical traditions in the wake of the English Civil Wars of the Seventeenth Century.\(^\text{37}\) Nonconformity’s identification with the Liberal Party was much stronger. Emphasis on the traditions of the ‘free-born Englishman’ were strong but largely historical and even Tories appealed to the same traditions in defence of British constitutional arrangements.\(^\text{38}\) Nonconformist appeals to ‘Christian brotherhood’ were specifically tied to radical movements encompassing Liberals and labour group members.

Moreover, this highlights the second advantage of nonconformity for co-operative class relations – that it existed conveniently on the cusp of Liberalism and representatives of labour movements. Before the class co-operation of the post-Chartist era, religious rhetoric advocated particularly by certain Methodists, was employed to maintain working-class solidarity and this continued through popular radicalism after the 1860s.\(^\text{39}\) While Anglicanism was often associated with the establishment, nonconformists often identified with the working class.

There had been a long tradition of co-operation between certain Liberals and working men. Many secular and religious radicals were involved in artisan societies, including John Bright.\(^\text{40}\) Bright was a committed Quaker, radical and member of the Working Men’s Association who was described by R. W. Dale as having a ‘noble moral austerity in his conception of God’.\(^\text{41}\) Joyce’s study into Bright emphasises how he was instrumental in constructing his identity as a man of the people through oratory and stresses the importance of religion in the formation of identities of the self.\(^\text{42}\) Certainly religion was important in transcending class divisions and in the formation of working class identities. Bright was seen as a central figure in the Franchise movement. This was echoed, in February 1867, by a song sung by demonstrators at a meeting of the Reform League at Islington:

\(^{37}\) Much work has been done on the formation of class and radical movements in the nineteenth century, emphasising constitutionalist discourse and English national traditions particularly in the Chartist movement: Gareth Stedman Jones, ‘Rethinking Chartism’, in Gareth Stedman Jones [Ed], Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982 (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 90-178.


\(^{40}\) Dennis Smith, Conflict and Compromise: Class Formulation in English Society 1830-1914 (London, 1982), p. 98.


\(^{42}\) Joyce, Democratic Subjects, pp. 85-136.
So sure as winds the billows dash, across the foaming sea, orbs still roll and natures works, in harmony agree; So shall this glorious cause progress, it cannot will not fail, and with such champions as Beales and Bright, it must it shall prevail.43

After the extension of the franchise in 1867 collaboration became more imperative.44 The culture of radical dissent certainly helped to spearhead important collaborative objectives. Jonathan Parry maintains that nonconformist religion had encouraged the spirit of co-operation between the middle and working classes. Certainly, nonconformist businessmen and philanthropists, particularly Congregationalists, could boast that they had secured amicable relations with labour movements. In West Riding, in certain Liberal firms there was a strong bond between employer and employee.45 This extended to many other towns such as Birmingham.46

A majority of Lib-Lab members of Parliament came from a strong background of radical dissent, particularly Congregationalism. Labour MP Keir Hardie was from a Morisonian-Congregationalist background. Lib-Lab MPs Thomas Burt, Henry Broadhurst, William Abraham, Benjamin Pickard and Joseph Arch had been lay preachers.47 Out of a total of twenty Lib-Lab MPs between 1874 and 1900 twelve were nonconformists.48 Many Lib-Lab MPs came to Parliament in 1886 with a commitment to the time-honoured ambition for disestablishment, as demonstrated in William Abraham’s own maiden speech calling for Welsh separation from the Anglican Church.49 The assumption that with the split over Home Rule the influence of nonconformity within the Liberal Party declined and ‘began to move in diverse political directions’ is erroneous.50 Certainly, some nonconformists had abandoned the party over the issue in 1886.51 Heyck stresses how Home Rule strengthened what he termed the ‘radical wing’ of the party.52 Other scholars such as W. C. Lubenow maintain that the home rule split did not significantly change the political composition of the party in the long term, apart from reduce the number of Unionists.53 Although some Liberal nonconformists did abandon

43 ‘The National Reform League - A Song’, Howell 11/20/131, BIL.
45 Parry, Democracy and Religion, p. 207.
46 Watts, The Dissenters, p. 279.
the party in 1886, on balance the influence of nonconformist interests if anything increased due to the change in the political landscape. Only a handful of nonconformist Unionists abandoned the party, including a few Unitarians close to Chamberlain in Birmingham.\(^{54}\) With the departure of so many Whigs the party more readily adopted more radical measures. After this, only five great Whig families retained their affiliation with the Liberal Party.\(^{55}\)

However, there were some class divisions among the various nonconformist sectarian strands of the Liberals and labour movements. This was not merely limited to religious sectional differences, but divisions within the same congregations. There were often simple differences on matters of religious observance. In contrast to many Liberals, working-class Baptists such as Sam Woods and Broadhurst had defended the Sabbath through the TUC.\(^{56}\) The interests of labour groups were by no means synonymous with the cause of radical dissent. A large number of unions and other labour organizations were sectional. Writing to George Howell in June 1866, Edmund Beales confessed that ‘dissensions unhappily exist amongst the working men of London’.\(^{57}\) Beales was not speaking only of religious dissensions here. Moreover, since Chartism, many working-class radicals were hostile to the social exclusiveness and sectarianism of nonconformist groups.\(^{58}\) Although many unions became more accommodating to Liberalism, an increasing number of new unions were heavily critical of Liberal dissenters.\(^{59}\) Some were simply concerned with disassociating the cause of Labour from the Liberal Party more generally.\(^{60}\) Nevertheless, for all their differences they still had many common interests and sympathies, from concerns over extending working-class representation to common denominational affiliations.

Shared nonconformist values encouraged the interclass radical movement, through social as well as political connections. This relationship was often philanthropic. Nonconformist Liberals were often the chief financiers of important labour groups, such as the Agricultural Labourers’ Deputation. They were some of the most outspoken philanthropists. Titus Salt was considered one of the leading radicals in Bradford, occupying many local public offices including the position of mayor. His nonconformist background made him a convenient arbiter between Liberal and Labour radicalism in


\(^{57}\) Edmund Beales to George Howell, June 1866, Howell 11/2C/10, BIL.


\(^{60}\) Ibid, p. 285.
Bradford. He was an active member of the Congregational Church. His famous Saltaire Mill provided generous living conditions for his workforce including a drainage system, a school, a Methodist chapel and a large Congregational church.

Two of the most active in promoting co-operative relations between labour and organised Liberalism were Samuel Morley and Howell. Morley took a considerable interest in the welfare of working people. He was philanthropic in his commercial enterprises, known for paying high wages and providing good living conditions. His factories were some of the cleanest and most well ventilated in the 1880s. He enjoyed a long correspondence and friendship with Howell. In his autobiography Howell described Morley as ‘not only the most generous of men I once knew, but he was the kindest’.

Morley was treasurer of the Reform League which helped to mobilize working-class effort behind their candidates in the 1868 election ‘on the condition that they did not stand against official Liberals’. Morley had also taken an active interest in issues of self-improvement and working-class morals. He was a Congregationalist, philanthropist and Nottingham based textiles owner who had taken an active interest in Joseph Arch’s Agricultural Labourers Union. His reputation as a philanthropist was highlighted when the Bee-Hive, in January 1867, openly praised his ‘beneficent spirit’ in inviting his workforce to Fletcher Gate promising them weekly pensions for life. Morley also owned the radical newspaper the Daily News. Son of a leading Congregationalist, he maintained a life-long interest in theological issues. However, unlike many nonconformists he was opposed to church disestablishment, resigning from the executive committee of the Liberation Society in 1868.

Morley enjoyed many other important relations with labour group members. As an active campaigner he was often associated with many labour radicals. In November 1867, he defended his attendance at a lecture at St James’ Hall with the ex-Chartist Ernest Jones who many considered a dangerous agitator, claiming: ‘Mr Jones is... trusted and believed in by many thousands of his fellow countrymen’. He further emphasised that being in ‘contact’ with ‘working men’ he was ‘overwhelmed by a fear, not that

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62 James, ‘Salt, Sir Titus’, ODNB.
66 Ibid.
69 Parry, ‘Morley, Samuel’, ODNB.
communism will proceed to Universal confiscation, but lest wealthy... Englishmen may not promptly and faithfully devote themselves to solve the problem how the poverty, disease, and vice of so many of our own flesh and blood can be diminished and removed’.  

As well as Morley, there were a number of influential nonconformist Liberals who championed the cause of labour and the unions. Sir Wilfrid Lawson, who was an advanced Liberal and temperance reformer had often alarmed more moderate MPs with his radical views. Brought up in the mould of nonconformity, he was privately educated by J. Oswald Jackson who later became a Congregational minister. Peter Alfred Taylor was a radical and a Unitarian. By the late 1860s, Taylor was on the radical side of the Liberal Party supporting women’s suffrage, land tenure reform and opposition to the Contagious Diseases Acts. There were exceptions. Politician and philanthropist A. J. Mundella did not come from a nonconformist background. His father was Roman Catholic and there is little evidence of his religious allegiance in later life. He grew up in Leicester which was a centre of radical agitation and he turned to Chartism throughout the 1830s. He became increasingly concerned with collective action between working and middle-class radicals, particularly when he entered Parliament. In 1872 Mundella declared his ‘willingness to introduce to the House of Commons a bill for the reduction of hours of labour’. He played a major role in establishing the boards of conciliation during his tenure.  

The relations between radical Liberals and organised labour largely grew out of nonconformist traditions, which continued well into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries due to both their ideological adjustment to working-class socialism and its inter-class appeal. This meant that language, emphasising values of brotherhood, had great rhetorical power in building a ‘fraternity’ through co-operation over class division.

74 ‘Work and Wages: Mr Mundella, M.P. and the Hours of Labour in Factories’, Manchester Guardian, 2 January 1872, p. 5.  
75 Frances Elizabeth Willard, Let Something Good be Said: Speeches and Writings of Frances E. Willard (Urbana, 2007), p. 206.
3. The Reform League

The use of religious rhetoric and language in building on shared nonconformist values is nowhere more evident than in the early campaigns of the Reform League. The extension of the franchise was strongly propelled by nonconformist appeals to bonds of brotherhood between classes. The work of the Reform League offers a good example of the polemical importance of ‘Christian brotherhood’ in interclass co-operation in the 1860s, particularly considering existing work emphasising the importance of nationalism and shared internationalist sympathies in promoting the cause.76 Finn explored the co-operation between the Reform League and the International Working Men’s Association through their public show of solidarity on issues such as Italian nationalism.77 The Reform League was originally established to promote manhood suffrage and ‘amendments in the representative system of government’.78 It emerged largely in response to the breaking up of the Working Men’s Garibaldi Committee by authorities.79 As many labour movements were a natural outgrowth of franchise extension, the work of the Reform League is a good starting point for examining the role of religion in inter-class relations. There were also two important features of the League which highlight its significance in exploring Christian notions of brotherhood.

First, it was a leading organization with true inter-class appeal. The Reform League was supported by many working and middle-class radicals. Unlike the National Reform Union, founded in April 1864 as an association of Lancashire merchants and manufacturers, it was genuinely committed to full male suffrage and many had been active in the Anti-Corn Law League including middle-class members. Although it lacked the Union’s funds, it was more radical with a larger demographic membership.80 A major difference between the Reform League and the Reform Union was that the League had a significant working-class membership.81 The Union was essentially a middle class organization that enjoyed little support from the unions.82 In contrast, ex-Chartists such as Robert Hartwell and George Mantle had been active in the League, alongside such

76 Hall, McClelland and Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation*.
78 Advertisement: Representative Reform: Report of the Committee Appointed by the Conference Members of the Reform League, and Others, on Mr Hare’s Scheme of Representation, Held 28th February, & 7th &21st March, 1868, London, 1868, Earl Grey Pamphlets Collection.
trade unionists as Howell himself. The Reform League was considered the main interface between the Liberals and the unions. It depended very heavily on the support of philanthropic radical dissenters such as Titus Salt and Samuel Morley. Howell was secretary.

They had campaigned vigorously for the franchise extension. A year after it was established, at a meeting of the League, Edmund Beales emphasised that ‘the extension of the franchise’ was a ‘moral right’. In 1867, in one of their many pamphlets, the League opened with an appeal to their ‘unenfranchised fellow-countrymen’ demanding ‘that those whom the burden of state are thrown, who create the nation’s wealth, obey its laws and fight its battles should have voice in the administration of government’. Two years later, the League adopted a resolution denouncing the lack of parliamentary representation with respect to a ‘number of men connected with the artisan classes, or of advanced Liberal opinions’.

It was sufficiently malleable to attract support from working and middle-class radicals as it advocated social harmony, arbitration, the balance of classes and franchise reform. By 1867 the League boasted a membership of 65,000 with 600 branches throughout the country. Throughout the 1860s Howell had succeeded in gaining the support of several major unions, including the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters, Edwin Coulson of the Operative Brick Layers and an endorsement from the London Trade Council. Even though it was not essentially a grass-root trade union organization, it could still claim some legitimacy amongst key labour leaders. Along with George Potter, the leadership also included general secretary of the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, Robert Applegarth and George Odger, shoemaker secretary of the London Trades Council. Leading trade unionist George Potter is an interesting case in point. He helped to establish the nine-hour working day, the London Working Men’s Association and the Bee-Hive journal. Potter, like Howell, co-operated with a number of Liberal

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86 Speech of Edmund Beales, President of the Reform League: At the Meeting at St Martin’s Hall, in Support of the League, May 13, 1865: with Notes, London, 1865, Cowen Tracts, p. 3
89 Breuilly, Labour and Liberalism, p. 173.
91 Finn, After Chartism, pp. 245-7.
radicals including Samuel Morley, particularly through the *Bee-Hive* and was for a time a supporter of Gladstonian Liberalism.93

The role of middle-class Liberals and radicals in the League should also not be underestimated. The Union had funded the League without which the League would probably have disintegrated.94 The League also played a major role in the Liberal Party election in 1868 and was often seen as an essential component of the party itself, although this was considered controversial as the funding was kept secret at the time.95 What gave the League its polemical force was its broad appeal through the pursuit of common objectives. However, the relationship between workers and the League was not an entirely harmonious one. Many workers opposed the League’s willingness to compromise on the issue of Universal Suffrage.96 There were dissensions among members of the League and many trade unions had become dissatisfied with the party’s moderate trade union legislation as shown in the election in 1874.

Yet it still led the vanguard in Liberal-Labour relations and it was held together by shared objectives relating to Ireland, education and the cause of radical dissent.97 The League represented the politicisation of trade unions, through arbitration and negotiation. It provided a clear conduit of expression for Liberal and labour radicals. Howell and other leading figures in the League sought trade union support, and they secured adherents from a variety of unions in Birmingham and Manchester by the 1870s.98 The temper of the League was distant from more extreme sectionalism that characterised Chartism in the 1840s.99 Initially Liberals were not accommodating to their interests, but after the election, it increasingly became identified with Lib-Lab relations.100 It was supported by many Liberal radicals, such as George Glyn and Morley, who sought to integrate the League with the party. Initially, Liberal involvement was minimal stretching only to financial sponsorship but soon it involved the formation of Liberal electoral committees, bringing together Liberal managers with the new working-class electorate.101

The second feature was the League’s strong connections with interclass nonconformity. When Edward Miall promoted universal manhood suffrage on the

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98 Finn, *After Chartism*, p. 245.
grounds that it would ‘give a mighty impulse to popular intelligence and morality; and... secure an amount of education, order, and even religion’ he could draw on a common culture of dissent.\textsuperscript{102} Jonathan Parry contended that responses to the reform of 1867 were significantly more radical among nonconformists than Whig Liberals.\textsuperscript{103} It was the more radical wing of the party that enjoyed the strongest ties with Labour. Some of the League’s demographic reports on constituencies demonstrate a concern with how nonconformity enhanced the League’s influence. In 1868, in the report for Winchester W. L. Worley declared that ‘the dissenter of Winchester are not very numerous – there are two Baptist Chapels – one independent; one Wesleyan…the dissenters generally are advanced Liberals’.\textsuperscript{104} The influence of dissent on the League is also evident by its membership. Between 1866 and 1868, W. H. Bonner, who was a Congregational Minister, had been Vice-President of the League.\textsuperscript{105} In 1867, he wrote a pamphlet emphasising the importance of the Christian citizen in ‘political and social life’.\textsuperscript{106} He advocated the importance of the League on religious and moral grounds, as opposed to mere ‘class legislation’:

The Reform League, then, I would urge every Christian to join, because it is opposed to class legislation, and proposes by the employment of moral means only, to do justice to the entire manhood of the country, irrespective of parties, and to the extinction of prejudices and opposing interests.\textsuperscript{107}

On the Liberal side, most of the leaders were nonconformists, particularly those key sponsors, including Congregationalist Samuel Morley, Unitarian Taylor and Titus Salt. As a vast majority of its financiers were philanthropic dissenters, they exercised a great deal of influence over the League.\textsuperscript{108} Labour’s leaders included Thomas Mottershead and the Methodist William Cremer.\textsuperscript{109} The League also became involved in issues reflecting the interests of dissenters, including education. In 1868, Goldwin Smith

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{102} Edward Miall, \textit{The Suffrage or Reconciliation Between the Middle and Labouring Classes}, London, 1848, Hume Tracts, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{103} Parry, \textit{Democracy and Religion}, p. 200.
\textsuperscript{104} Report of Winchester, 1868, How01-05, Records and Documents relating to the Reform League, 1865-1869, British Online Archives.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{108} Wright, \textit{Democracy and Reform}, p. 178.
\textsuperscript{109} Saab, \textit{Reluctant Icon}, p. 51.
\end{footnotes}
congratulated the League for its commitment to educational reforms commenting that ‘education must teach us how to use them [votes] so that we shall produce, not that anarchy which our enemies accuse us of seeking, but that better and nobler order to which we really trend’.  

Considering its largely nonconformist membership and leadership, it is unsurprising that notions of the ‘Christian brotherhood’ were rhetorically important in appealing to shared nonconformist values through the League. The use of religious language was as common as the use of nationalist rhetoric and in many respects, they were strongly linked. When Edmund Beales delivered his address to the League in 1867, he not only appealed to shared national and international identities, but also common religious values of fellowship, in promoting amicable relations between middle-class reformists and working-class labour group members:

Brethren... it is time that we should come to a true fraternal understanding with regard to our mutual interests and our common rights. Freedom is our birthright of no particular nation or race... Our interest is one and the same, peace, concord and harmony are equally precious of all of us. There is nothing of this earthly good that your united moral force cannot, by the will of God, accomplish.

The appeal to a united ‘earthly good’ built on action guided by the will of God had strong Immanentist connotations and was aimed to appeal to a shared culture of nonconformity in building bridges with workers and unions. Beales further promoted the moral force of progress in overcoming mere sectional differences in nationality and religion: ‘The age is called the age of progress... These are heart felt words in which we all can join, whatever our creed, our country, or our race… in the heavenly chorus of "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will to all men"’.  

The Bee-Hive was, according to its editors, ‘recognised throughout the country as the London weekly organ of the reform movement’. Howell and Samuel Morley were two of its leading journalists. In 1869, Morley had purchased the periodical and came to play a major role in editorial decisions. The same year, similar themes were also

110 Goldwin Smith on the Reform League and National Education, London, 1868, Pamphlet of the Reform League, Howell/11/2D/100, BIL.  
discernible in the rhetoric of the League in a literary address to the ‘people of Europe’:
‘Be united, strengths in union, rulers cannot say you may; On your side are justice,
heaven. Every man of sense and worth, patriotism and Christian precepts, and the lord of
heaven and earth’.115

Members of the League also advocated the importance of co-operation by
appealing to values of religious kinship between workers and classes, as much as shared
international identities. In 1867 Bonner emphasised the importance of Christian
principles in righting the wrongs done to labour. In particular he stressed the importance
of the Bible which he described as ‘the people’s book’ and ‘the poor man’s friend’:

Let every working man who reads these pages, ponder the principles that have been
advanced…and he will see, if he has doubted before, that every wrong done to the laborer of
any grade, is reproved and denounced in the sacred volume. Yet it is not the book of a class—
of any class whatever. It is for the millions all the earth over. Every right for every man by it
is claimed but claimed by way of enjoining appropriate duties upon men of every class and in
every relation.116

The appeal to a religious and international brotherhood that superseded class
interests is evident here, particularly in promoting manhood suffrage. There was clearly
an intention to persuade readers of the importance of religion over class, particularly with
the remark that ‘every wrong done to the laborer’ was ‘denounced in the sacred volume’;
a sacred volume that was ‘not a book of class’. This also marked a clear change in the use
of rhetoric away from the Chartist period where the Bible was often used to criticise
middle-class hypocrisy through more militant language, while here inter-class
brotherhood was promoted.117 Also, the League under the auspices of its secretary
Howell, addressing other ‘people of Europe’ called for a true ‘fraternal understanding
with regard to our mutual interests’, further stating: ‘our interest is one and the same;
peace, concord, and harmony are equally precious to us all’. Howell’s appeals to
international brotherhood went hand-in-hand with his emphasis on religious kinship:
‘There is nothing of this earthly good that our united moral force, cannot by the will of
God accomplish. That force is irresistible… Grounded in justice, based on law and order,

115 To the Reform League: On Their Address to the People of Europe, London, 1869, Howell 11/20/130,
BIL.
116 Bonner, The Christian as a Citizen, p. 35.
117 This is discussed in the first chapter of Scriven, Popular Virtue, p.3, pp. 13-44.
it has more than the power and… evils of political force and revolutionary violence’.\textsuperscript{118}

He further declared:

\begin{quote}
We struggle not against the righteous and the honest in any class or sphere, but be you resolved to be no longer the victims or the tools of unjust rulers of false prophets, of either kingcraft or priestcraft. These are heart-stirring words in which we can all join, whatever our creed, our country or our race. We can all join in the heavenly chorus of "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men".\textsuperscript{119}
\end{quote}

The characterisation of ‘kingcraft’ and ‘priestcraft’, which were likely allusions to English national traditions such as the Anglican church, as ‘false prophets’ is interesting, particularly when juxtaposed against the appeals for harmony with a reference to Luke 2:14. This is significant, as similar phraseology was used in the biblical rhetoric of working-class radicalism since the French revolution, particularly allusions to the New Testament.\textsuperscript{120} There were subtle suggestions of the importance of fraternity between those classes who were ‘tools of unjust rulers’.\textsuperscript{121} The rhetoric of Christian brotherhood was important for overcoming class sectionalism, particularly in promoting the extension of the franchise. Edmund Beales, in 1865, appealed to what he described ‘as that harmony’ and ‘unity of interest’ that ‘...every earnest Christian ought to long for’ impeded by the disenfranchisement of thousands of working men.\textsuperscript{122} Alderman Weston, addressing workers at a meeting of the League, advocated the union between the working and middle-classes, stating that ‘we assisted you in the attainment of your object, now help us…let us go together to obtain your own and the world’s liberty, and the prosperity of England’, continuing: ‘Let them go hand-in-hand together now - and by God’s blessing they would obtain their rights’.\textsuperscript{123}

There was a growing urgency in calling for unity in the face of the forthcoming motion on household suffrage. In February 1867, the editors of the \textit{Bee-Hive} called for co-operation and ‘unity of action amongst working-class leaders in the reform movement’, and added that they were ready to ‘hold out the hand of fellowship to all

\textsuperscript{118} George Howell, \textit{The Peoples of Europe and the Reform League}, London, 1867, George Howell collection, BIL.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} Howell, \textit{The Peoples of Europe}.
\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Speech of Edmund Beales}, p. 9
\textsuperscript{123} A \textit{Report of the First Meeting of the Reform League, Held in the Town Hall, Birmingham, May 3rd, 1848}, Birmingham, 1848, Hume Tracts, pp. 5-6.
willing to grasp it’.

A few months before the legislation, the Bee-Hive entreated labour movements to put aside sectional differences: ‘it is...the broader duty of all leaders of the working class, to whatever section they may belong, in the face of the common danger, cordially unite and co-operate with each other’. It was claimed that the ‘Reform League, the Working Man’s Association’ and ‘the London Trades Council’ who all professed to be concerned with ‘the elevation of social and political condition of the masses’, saw it as ‘their duty to work not in opposition but in harmony with each other’.

For many radical Liberals, franchise extension would lead to an improvement in the working-classes material and ultimately moral condition. This was reflected in the polemics of 1840s radicalism relating to self-improvement emphasising the effects of environment on the moral condition of the working class and was retained in the Reform League, as explored by such historians as Tom Scriven. Miall had been one of its earliest advocates. In 1848, he claimed that ‘a degraded position sooner or later insures a degraded character. And the converse of this rule is no less true - that if you would succeed in elevating the character, you must first restore a man to self-respect by giving him unhesitatingly the rights of manhood’. The rhetorical importance of the ‘rights of manhood’ is significant as it appealed to those natural rights of all men. He further emphasised the importance of environment on the moral character of workers:

when multitudes starve in the midst of abundance - when homes... resound with the maddening cries of children for bread... and incessant anxiety preys upon the spirits and drinks up all the kindliness of a man’s heart, we are not to be greatly surprised if he sometimes discusses topics which trench upon the security of property and that let the light of hope in upon his soul and all the black thoughts which crawled about his heart in the gloom of his misery will disappear and die.

The extension of the franchise in 1867 only served to strengthen the nonconformist cause and helped to bring it into national politics. Between 1865 and 1868, the number of Protestant nonconformist MPs had doubled to seventy.

125 Ibid, p. 4.
126 Ibid, p. 4.
128 Miall, The Suffrage or Reconciliation Between the Middle and Labouring Classes, p. 12.
129 Ibid, p. 23.
4. Nonconformity, Class and Christian Brotherhood in the Age of Gladstone

Although the 1867 franchise debates were revealing, they pertain to the period of mid-nineteenth century popular Liberalism. After this, relations between labour movements and Liberals reflected the growing independent representation of the unions and working-class interests more generally. This section demonstrates the continued importance of nonconformity through appeals to Christian kinship, between the 1860s and 1880s. Attempts at interclass co-operation would prove more difficult after the working class were given the vote, as they could more readily influence the political process, but they still endured.¹³¹

The rhetoric of ‘Christian brotherhood’ strongly resonated with nonconformity in terms of its aims and its active engagement with the community and it therefore served a strong polemical function for Liberals. This rhetoric was a broad language with diverse ideological origins, including the incarnational theology of certain Anglican biblical critics and Christian Socialists like F. D. Maurice.¹³² However, what distinguished the nonconformist rhetoric of ‘brotherhood’ was that it mirrored the more pro-active approach of nonconformity to incarnational theology, grounded in municipal life, as shown in chapter one, as well as what was overwhelmingly a Liberal-radical tradition. Unlike Anglican claims of ‘brotherhood’, nonconformist rhetoric was a language grounded in local politics, municipal socialism, long-standing traditions and interclass relations encompassing labour movements. In contrast, Anglican appeals to ‘brotherhood’ lacked the same justification in municipal and interclass politics.

Class and other socio-economic considerations were often seen as a source of discord rather than harmony, therefore Liberals turned to nationalism and shared religious values.¹³³ For the period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, values of ‘brotherhood’ and ‘kinship’ featured enormously in the rhetoric of those aforementioned radicals who sought co-operative platforms. The language of ‘brotherhood’ had strong religious connotations and was used to transcend class interests in the pursuit of greater co-operation. Such religious language was often used to advocate a harmonious relationship between Liberalism and Labour during the Gladstonian period.

What gave the terms ‘Christian brotherhood’ polemical strength was that it expressed an existing vocabulary emphasising co-operation and harmony of class relations. This language was in political parlance through much of late Victorian and early Edwardian politics. It already appealed to a socialistic and internationalist language which characterised labour movements. Internationalism and ‘Christian brotherhood’ were not mutually exclusive. This was clearly evident when George Potter, in 1881, defended fair trade for workers:

Woe worth the day when, for the good pleasure and selfish profit of any other class or classes, the fair - yes, \emph{fair} - wages of skill and labour shall suffer diminution! But the question is one of neither one class nor one country. It is a question in which class and country are merged, or should be merged, in the whole world as one, and in all the equal claims and common interests of all mankind.\footnote{George Potter, ‘The Workman’s View of Fair Trade’, \emph{Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review} Vol. 10, Iss. 55 (September 1881), p 447.}

His article was full of biblical references which linked the theme of religious and international brotherhood. When discussing London, he wrote that ‘one meets almost daily with as many nationalities in this metropolis as were assembled at Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost’. He also advocated that privileged landowners ‘let their farms at rents on which occupiers might live in comfort and our labourers be not quite slaves and might learn at length to put their deer parks under the useful plough, and wilderesses, too long left desolate and waste, might, as the fervid prophet has it, “be tilled, and become like the garden of Eden!”’.\footnote{Ibid, p. 444.} Potter clearly emphasised a fairer distribution of land. He was appealing for ‘fair trade’ rather than ‘free trade’ and his publication was issued in the hundreds of thousands.\footnote{Anthony Howe, \emph{Free Trade and Liberal England 1846-1946} (Oxford, 1997), p. 130.}

It was in the interest of many Liberals and labour leaders to avoid class sectionalism. This strategy was advocated by those labour or Liberal radicals concerned with fostering amicable relations, such as Morley, Howell and Potter. In December 1870, Potter remarked: ‘Wonderful unanimity ceases to be a phrase of irony when one contemplates the many marvels wrought by united labour in harmonious conjunction with proportional capital’, continuing: ‘What the Psalmist said of the building of Jerusalem under Solomon, may be repeated of every similar enterprise by those persons who believe
in the sure though silent working of a Divine influence through the hearts, the brains, and the hands of men: "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it."  

The Christian imperative was a common theme in the language of so many polemics, particularly in advocating egalitarianism in industrial relations. In 1871, Potter, opposing inequality of wages based on capacity, wrote that ‘we open a book of great age’, asking: ‘what...does this book… tell us concerning the mutual relations and mutual duties of men in ordinary life? "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” "Thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother”..."Bear ye one another’s burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.” The Christian imperative took on a largely moral character which was essential in justifying inter-class co-operation. The moral improvement of workers was a common theme in the language of dissenters concerned with labour issues and evident when Potter commented: ‘Without hope in the future and in the ameliorations brought by time and effort, their condition would... be degraded’, continuing: ‘therefore, it is to be wondered that any of their number should be found supporting those whose policy aims at making their poverty, ignorance, and degradation permanent, and - as a consequence - their lives miserable and ignoble’. Howell in advocating a degree of interventionism, again appealed to the moral improvement of workers:

better homes for the people will do more than Public-house Closing Acts to improve the condition of the masses and stimulate them to make an endeavour to lead nobler lives. The surroundings of a large proportion of the labouring population are such that the higher aspirations of a man’s nature are deadened from his birth: there is no chance of their development, no room for their growth.

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Howell advocated the need for more substantial social intervention: ‘if helping the poor in this way… or aiding them to do what they cannot accomplish alone, be socialism or communism, the more we have of it the better, when wisely and judiciously administered’. Unions were often defended on these grounds. Ethical imperatives were injected with a growing concern for social justice. Religion, most importantly nonconformity, underpinned these arguments in the form of social gospels. Broadly speaking the social gospel was a theological movement emphasising the Christian importance of social reforms. In 1876 several articles appeared in the Bee-Hive defending the unions against the charges made by Lord Aberdare, attacking what they considered his notion that ‘low wages stimulate exertion on the part of the worker and that long hours, if added, would greatly increase production.’ It was claimed that this charge was ‘a principal chapter in the gospel of greed, and the sect that acknowledges it is without heresy or schism’ and ‘therefore in the blindness and eagerness of their evil faith; they become angry and fling unsavoury epithets at trade unionists and those who encourage them.’ The use of terms such as ‘gospel’, ‘heresy’ and ‘faith’ in close proximity suggests subtle religious connotations here.

Consequently, many radical dissenters and Liberals promoted interclass relations in the face of more sectional and militant styled unions. Radicals were willing to defend militant action in the event of extreme coercion from employers. In 1875, in South Wales, owners of coalmines locked out workers offering a meagre settlement. Journalists for the Bee-Hive responded: ‘The savage who openly tomahawks his victim… cannot in the sight of heaven be more guilty than the conspiring coal-owners who lock-out and starve men willing to work at their own conditions’. But this militant approach was by no means the preferred solution for labour disputes. The following January journalists for the Bee-Hive praised the moral prudence of many working-class unions in face of the dissensions ‘between men and their employers’: ‘the different trades by their committees or delegates, have succeeded in supporting themselves and each other in tranquil demonstrations of moral strength that have uniformly relied upon reason and common sense for producing conviction in the employer or in disinterested observers’.

142 Howell, ‘The Dwellings of the Poor’, p. 1006.
143 Hawkins, Victorian Political Culture, p. 356.
145 ‘Lord Aberdare Warning the Unionists’, Bee-Hive, 5 February 1876, p 3.
146 Ibid, p 3.
149 ‘Ourselves and Our Readers’, Bee-Hive, 1 January 1876, pp. 9-10.
Industrial arbitration was seen as an effective means of avoiding labour-capital disputes. In December 1874, the *Bee-Hive* reported on an address from the Liverpool Working Men’s Association, calling for unity in the face of factionalism:

If… we would retain the civil and religious freedom, wrung from the enemies of the people... or if we would wish to still further advance those principles of equity and justice which have already conferred inestimable blessings on our country, we must now be prepared to sink all sectional views... and unite on a common platform.¹⁵⁰

In appealing to members of the LWMA, there was a discernible thematic association between ‘civil and religious freedom’, the need to ‘unite on a common platform’ and the need to ‘sink all sectional views’.¹⁵¹ The following September the journal promoted the work of Liberal radicals and working-class unionists in the Parliamentary Committee in securing important labour reforms within the existing socio-economic framework.¹⁵² Like many Liberal radicals, the paper was a strong supporter of more co-operative unions. In January 1876, the paper praised the growth of peaceful demonstrations by unions in negotiating with employers.¹⁵³

There had been a motion supporting compulsory arbitration, by the TUC, every few years in the late nineteenth century.¹⁵⁴ Towards the 1890s many ILP reformers were advocating establishing a Ministry of Labour for settling industrial disputes.¹⁵⁵ In a pamphlet of 1880, Howell commented: ‘with the revival of trade will come… a demand for an increase of wages. Two paths are open to the disputants - strikes, always expensive, often dangerous, never without their train of suffering... and the more peaceful course of conciliation and arbitration’.¹⁵⁶

The TUC’s proposals for industrial arbitration did not come to fruition until 1905, when after a series of refinements, a bill advocating such measures under the Board of Conciliation and Arbitration was passed.¹⁵⁷ Religion was even promoted as a means of settling labour issues. In 1880, Howell stressed the importance of the clergy in the arbitration of labour disputes over class divisions:

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¹⁵⁶ George Howell, *Conciliation and Arbitration in Trade Disputes, Dedicated to the Committee of Clergy on "The Church and Trades' Unions"*, London, 1880, LSE Selected Pamphlets, p. 7.
...there is no body of men better fitted to undertake this important duty than the Clergy, for the simple reason that by their position they are listened to with respect by all classes of the community, notwithstanding the differences of opinions that may exist with regard to many questions, polemical, political, and social, and which sometimes divide us into strong partisans of this or that faction.\textsuperscript{158}

Here religion was advocated as a means of industrial arbitration by a devout Wesleyan Methodist and broad nonconformist on the basis that it extended beyond political and class divisions. Although Howell’s religious view of industrial arbitration was not universal for all nonconformist radicals, a significant number still shared the view that religious values of brotherhood were important in settling labour disputes.\textsuperscript{159} It is tempting to attribute Howell’s views on the importance of religion in industrial arbitration to his subscription to the Quaker movement for international arbitration, but this is unclear. Nevertheless, if Howell was in a minority, his view was merely consistent with a general trend amongst many nonconformists.\textsuperscript{160} While Guinness Rogers maintained that ‘churches could not themselves undertake the settlement of… labour issues’, he still emphasised the value of religion in questions of labour arbitration.\textsuperscript{161} While Howell advocated religion in arbitration, he was also committed to the political aims of nonconformity and an outspoken opponent of Anglicanism.

5. ‘That Church and King Mob’: Nonconformity, Brotherhood and Anti-Tory Rhetoric

The appeals to shared values and antipathies which strengthened the bonds of kinship was reflected in the identification of Toryism as a common foe to nonconformity and organised labour. The historical importance of nonconformity, in the radical rhetoric of the people versus the old corruptions of the establishment through Anti-Toryism, demands more scrutiny. James Vernon argues that the nineteenth century witnessed the restriction on the scope of national politics and the disruption of class conflict by

\textsuperscript{158} Howell, \textit{Conciliation and Arbitration in Trade Disputes}, p 3.
\textsuperscript{159} Shepherd, ‘Labour and Parliament’, pp. 190-1.
\textsuperscript{161} ‘Free Church Congress in Manchester: Industrial Questions’, \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 11 November 1892, p. 7.
discourse about popular constitutionalism. He focuses on shared symbols and identities built on national traditions of the free-born Englishman and to a lesser extent Protestant religion. Biagini in his analysis of the ‘language’ of popular liberalism stresses the importance of nonconformity and Protestantism more broadly in the rhetoric of the people against privilege before the 1880s. The scattered work of existing historiography demonstrates the need for more systematic study of the late nineteenth century, particularly at the time of ‘one-nation’ Toryism when Liberals were competing for working-class votes.

Liberals appealed to common nonconformist interests and antipathies in building a sense of brotherhood with working-class organizations. This was given additional impetus by the growing threat of Toryism in urban centres in the late nineteenth century. This period was marked by the ‘Tory Democracy’ movement, which was largely an outgrowth of Benjamin Disraeli’s adoption of the Second Reform Act and emphasis on ‘one nation’ Toryism. Disraeli appealed to the notion that all classes belonged to one nation and that the rich-poor divide was the product of unbridled free-enterprise. Disraeli could present himself as the champion of democracy, stealing the thunder away from the Liberals and adapting his own rhetoric in pushing through legislation. The strategy was partly successful. Jon Lawrence, who examines the rise of urban Toryism between 1870 and 1900, suggests that ‘for the most part of the Victorian era the major cities of England were bastions of political Liberalism, but between the mid-1870s and 1900 many increasingly fell under the sway of a revitalized Conservative Party’. The Liberals lost Woolwich to the Conservatives in the 1890s largely due to the appeals of the ‘Tory Democracy’ movement to working-class voters.

Many Liberals drew on the common antipathy with workers to social exclusiveness and class privilege commonly associated with Toryism. They often appealed to the historical dimension of radical dissent in its struggle against the establishment. In February 1876, the Bee-Hive gave an optimistic report of ‘a conference

163 Biagini, Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform, pp. 30-59.
166 Historians argue that the 1867 Act was a product of Disraeli’s parliamentary tactics e. g. P. Smith, Disraelian Conservatism and Social Reform (London, 1967), others stress that he was part of a deeper vision into the popular psychology of the working-classes e. g. R. W. Davis, Disraeli (London, 1976).
167 Lawrence, ‘Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism’, p. 629.
of the friends of religious equality’. The Bee-Hive consistently demonstrated its support for the political, social and religious cause of nonconformity. This was a particularly important for building a sense of fraternity between Liberals and organised labour considering the growth of Toryism in the late nineteenth century. Lawrence stresses that this rise was the result of a growing number of working-class adherents in urban centres through their appeals to social and gender-based identities. Certainly, there was a growth in social organizational structures with a cross-class appeal, such as the Primrose League. This was a definite threat to the Liberals’ own relations with organised labour. This was also reflected in the existence of many other working men’s Tory clubs in towns such as Wolverhampton.

Hence, there was clearly a strategy of alienating those working men seen as hypocritical subscribers to Conservatism. Two years later, George Potter wrote a pamphlet highly critical of working-class sympathisers of the Tory Party. Potter described working-class Conservatives, through the past hundred years, as a ‘Church and King mob’. Potter also described how radical dissenters were persecuted by these hypocritical Conservative working men of days past: ‘Dissenters and Liberals were hunted down like mad dogs by an infuriated rabble, acting as friends of the King and Church’, concluding that ‘this detestable mob spirit became gradually less as education became more general’.

Developing ‘kinship’ between classes through common enemies entailed singling out the enemy from within. In the Bee-Hive, March 1876, the editors were also damming of what they considered to be the self-defeating nature of the hypocrisy of working-class Conservatism. Their concern was to appeal to the growing principle of kinship through the common denominator of dissent: ‘The new doctrine of brotherhood, carrying in it the great thought of human progress, preached nearly two thousand years ago, in Judea was novel and beyond the scope of the intelligence of the Conservative working men of these days’. In 1878, he denounced working-class Toryism as simple self-deception: ‘Working men, above all other men, are false to themselves, when they oppose progress. Political right, the moral and intellectual strength developed by education, the social

169 ‘Religious Equality’, Bee-Hive, 19 February 1876, p. 3.
170 Lawrence, ‘Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism’, p. 629.
172 Lawrence, Speaking for the People, p. 105.
174 Ibid, p. 5.
status only attainable by wise and determined effort’.\textsuperscript{176} Potter promoted both the importance of positive education and individual effort for the development of moral character. This was also evident when the \textit{Bee-Hive}, in January 1876, defended the character of workers claiming they had made ‘considerable advances in sobriety, order, manners, morals and social comfort’.\textsuperscript{177} Potter was outspoken in his condemnation of Toryism and support of Liberalism, often characterising working-class Toryism as wrongheaded. In 1885 when comparing the two ideologies he remarked:

It may be said to be a question of large-mindedness versus narrow-mindedness between the two political opponents which we have been discussing – the one is anxious and willing to labour for the good of his fellow-men, and the other views the existing state of matters with a jaundiced vision, and this arises from the fact that he is extensively ignorant of the working man.\textsuperscript{178}

In the political polemics of radical Liberals, the Tories were characterised as the party of class elitism, derived from landed gentry. In 1899, Guinness Rogers emphasised that ‘it would not be easy, indeed, to find anything which more completely reveals the true spirit and tendency of that Toryism against which the Liberal Party has to wage continued warfare. It is class legislation of the most flagrant kind’ and ‘it is clear that the old Toryism is not dead. It believes still, as it always has believed, in class legislation, and, deluding itself with the idea of a reaction among the people, has been seeking to recover some of the ground which has been lost’.\textsuperscript{179} Under the common banner of nonconformity, the whole idea here was that the Liberal Party, in contrast to the Tory was not a party of class. This meant that they could appeal to a fraternity between organised labour and Liberalism, as opposed to those instigators of unfavourable ‘class legislation’.\textsuperscript{180}

Also, Anglicanism, which was strongly associated with Toryism, was singled out as a common enemy to religious liberty and working-class interests. In 1878 Potter wrote a major tract for the \textit{Bee-Hive} supporting the cause of religious equality and opposing Anglican sacerdotalism, stating that ‘the outnumbering of churches and congregations in

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\item \textsuperscript{176} Potter, \textit{The Conservative Working Man}, pp. 6-7.
\item \textsuperscript{177} ‘Ourselves and Our Readers’, pp. 9-10.
\item \textsuperscript{180} Ibid, p. 530.
\end{itemize}
every town and throughout the country by the modest places of worship... chapels, meeting-houses, conventicles, or gospel shops... affords... irresistible proof that the State Church arrangements have failed to supply the religious wants of the nation’. Potter implied that Anglicanism, unlike nonconformity, was alien to working-class religious practices.

It was not just representatives of religious inequality but also financial privilege that often came under attack, as shown when Potter maintained that ‘the state church is not worth what it costs; that the unthrifty and unequal manner in which its funds are distributed’ and thus ‘Englishman, as such, have just grounds for demanding its disestablishment and disendowment’. He further argued, with some truth, that ‘at least a full half of the population are nonconformists of one kind or another’. To contemporary observers the 1851 religious census indicated a surprisingly high degree of religious observance for dissenting sects. It showed that nationally, almost as many attended dissenting congregations as Anglican sermons, and out of the seventy-five major towns with a population of over 20,000 the nonconformists were in a positive majority. Bebbington estimates that by 1901, 15% of the population were attending nonconformist chapels including both members and adherents.

Church establishment with its sacerdotalism was seen as the bane of the existing social order. It was often charged that the Anglican Church had failed to meet pressing socio-economic demands of the day. Unlike radical dissent, the Anglican establishment was frequently seen as a common enemy, out of touch with the interests of working people. Between 1871 and 1873 there were many well-supported motions for disestablishment in the Commons. In 1872, Potter maintained that ‘no man with open eyes and open ears can have even stayed at one of the great centres of population without understanding quite clearly that the state Church is not an institution which either possesses the love or interests the sympathy of the masses’. Potter clearly appealed for solidarity amongst working and middle-class dissenters through a common enemy - a mutual antagonism to a church out of touch with working men. Instead, Potter saw dissent as a more popular religion among the majority of working people:

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181 George Potter, *The State-Church and Disestablishment*, Bristol Selected papers, n.p., 1878, pp. 4-5.
183 Ibid, p.17.
let it be granted... that a certain percentage of the working men are in the habit of attending church, these are absolutely outweighed by the portions of the mass who may be found from Sunday to Sunday in the chapels and meeting-houses of different denominations of dissenters or in the places of Roman Catholic worship.187

Liberals appealed to shared values of nonconformity and the language of Christian kinship in building co-operation between Liberals and labour movements, at a time when organised labour was on the ascendency and in reaction to the growing influence of the Tory Democracy movement among the working classes through such organizations as the Primrose League.

6. Liberal-Labour Politics and the Late Nineteenth Century Social Turn in Nonconformity

The importance of Liberal-Labour relations owed much to the social turn in nonconformity in the late nineteenth century.188 With the increasing demand for more socialistic legislation various nonconformist denominations were broadening their theology, while also emerging as a national force in the Liberal Party. While the seeds were already sewn by certain representatives of provincial nonconformity in previous decades, it was the late nineteenth century which secularisation sceptics have identified as the period of theological change.189 Denys Leighton maintains that ‘the social turn in Dissent from the 1880s may indeed have been more widely felt than Anglican social activism, and it had important consequences for British society and polity down to 1914’.190

These theological changes reflected changes in Liberal ideology even within congregations. In 1894 Thomas Roseby, who was a renowned Congregational minister and an outspoken opponent of the principles of laissez-faire, gave a lecture criticising the freedom of contract on ethical grounds and he targeted the philosophy of Herbert Spencer for criticism: ‘The only ethic which Herbert Spencer can find in this science…practically amounts to this: that social justice consists in removing all restrictions on… Economic

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188 The social turn refers to the growing emphasis among nonconformist sects on social and labour issues. Leighton, The Greenian Moment, p. 254.
Laws… there are some of us not so easily satisfied with this idea of Justice. That profound sentence of our Lord’s, "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and His Justice," seems to us to reveal the possibility of a nobler political economy than this'. Nonconformists such as this were more concerned with industrial arbitration and co-operation between classes. Roseby also emphasised the importance of harmony in social co-operation in opposing militant class conflict:

There are socialists whose Utopian theories… whose class hatreds, whose methods of violence and dynamite mean one thing: and there are socialists… whose methods are constructive, who seek not to pull down but to build up… They are men who work by the patient researches of science and take love of justice and humanity as their guide, but who have not…learned in vain the modern scientific teaching that the condition of all stability is continuity. They recognise the fact that when God would make a new thing under the sun he always grows it.

In opposing those ‘socialists’ with ‘Utopian theories’ Roseby’s emphasis on morality over ‘class hatreds’, his assertion that ‘all stability is continuity’ and the closing allegory about God suggests that he was appealing to shared religious values over class warfare. He concluded: ‘… they maintain that the germ of the noblest thoughts of to-day, the promise and potency of our sublimest ideals for to-morrow, already exist in the teaching, the life, the ministry, the example of Jesus Christ’. The social turn coincided with the implementation of radical programmes propelled by provincial nonconformity, such as Chamberlain’s municipal Programme of 1886 and the Newcastle Programme of 1891. An increasing number of nonconformist Liberals were advocating systematic social reforms to combat urban poverty. This was not confined to nonconformity as demonstrated by such reformers as Octavia Hill, who were influenced by Anglican theology. However, her more direct engagement with these issues made her rarer among Anglicans compared to the work of nonconformists throughout urban centres and the social studies of nonconformists such as Charles Booth. Howell was concerned with

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191 Thomas Roseby, A Lecture on Village Settlements, with Some Discussion of the Questions of the Unemployed, the Land and Co-operation: Delivered... April 16th, 1894, etc, Sydney, 1894, LSE Selected Pamphlets, pp. 5-6.
193 Mitchell [Ed], Victorian Britain, p. 661.
the plight of the urban poor through effective social reforms. In 1883, on the subject of urban dwellings he wrote:

…these registered dens of wretchedness, infamy, vice, and crime ought to be more carefully and constantly inspected, not only for the sake of those who abide in them… but in the interests of ratepayers generally, as a measure of precaution against the filth and pestilence and crime generated therein to the detriment of the community.¹⁹⁵

He clearly emphasised the effects of the environment on man’s moral condition and society more broadly. In promoting the need for legislation to address the issue of urban dwellings Howell emphasised that ‘in England there is no need of political promptings as motives for engaging in the work, for the social and moral reasons are strong enough, if duly weighted’.¹⁹⁶

While studies into urban poverty were also abundant, the sense of corporate responsibility among businessmen had not diminished either and a growing number of philanthropists were actively encouraging profit-sharing. In 1888, Thomas William Bushill, a Baptist and managing director of a box-making firm, began a profit-sharing enterprise with his workers in Coventry.¹⁹⁷ The following year when advocating the benefits of profit sharing in an address to the Baptist Union Bushill declared: ‘Christian employers have an opportunity of striking a blow for the good fame of their holy religion’. Here again were the same appeals to an inter-class language of Christian kinship: ‘the theory of Christian brotherhood raises hopes, which at our peril we stultify; the results of justly-devised profit-sharing working men can understand’.¹⁹⁸

Yet, while nonconformity had led the vanguard in inter-class relations in previous decades, the broadening of its theology to accommodate the interests of labour after the 1880s, if anything only served to strengthen the importance of nonconformity and the value of ‘Christian brotherhood’. For the Liberals, with the growing threat of the ILP and the need to maintain Liberal-Labour relations these shared values of nonconformity were all the more essential. In 1894, William Hill published a pamphlet warning that ‘the managers of the Liberal Party need to be keenly alive to the strength of the working class

wish for more direct and sympathetic representation’. The strength of unions increased from around 750,000 members in 1888 to well over 2 million by 1900. In the early 1890s the TUC sponsored many Lib-Lab MPs. After the election of 1885, twelve new Labour members entered the party, including miners Thomas Burt, Alexander McDonald and the TUC secretary Henry Broadhurst. Thomas Burt was a Methodist who became a Unitarian and represented the cusp of Lib-Labism. He once remarked at the Eighty-Club: ‘One of the signs of the times is the demand for State interventionism in all directions’, continuing: ‘I am not going to enter into a dissertation on Individualism and Socialism; I cannot draw the line between them. It seems to me that every Individualist is to some extent a socialist, and every Socialist is very much an individualist’. The alliance was not altogether harmonious and many were still disillusioned by the Liberal Party. Keir Hardie abandoned his earlier support for the Liberals and became an independent Labour candidate in 1892. J. Havelock Wilson also followed suit in 1893. The ILP offered an alternative, and inter-party relations were often difficult. The ILP proposed many reforms including welfare provisions, free universal education and an eight-hour work day. Despite this, most of these reforms were eventually adopted by what was often termed, in political parlance, the advanced wing of the Liberal Party. The Liberals found that conciliation with Labour was fraught with problems. The difficulty often lay in a conflict of interests. The stance of the Liberal Party, on labour and industrial issues, was not always consistent. Many industrial employers in these cases were Liberals with a conflict of interests, shown in the dispute at Hull docks in 1893, where Charlie Wilson, chief ship-owner and Liberal came into conflict with the unions. The Liberal Party was forced to a position of delicate compromise between labour interests and middle-class capitalists. This was also reflected in its relationship with the ILP. James Robert Moore’s local study into the relationship between the Liberals and
Labour in Manchester examines the viability of progressivism through intra-party alliances. He concludes that even on a grass-roots level it was fraught with practical difficulties.\textsuperscript{208} Certainly, there were fundamental ideological and practical incongruities between Labour and the Liberals. While Labour represented a strong sectional interest group, the Liberals represented a broad party of consensus.\textsuperscript{209} One major obstacle lay in the degree of commitment to the cause of industrial and labour issues. Many Labour MPs were accused of being subservient to middle-class values of political economy. At the 1887 Bradford Trade Union congress, Broadhurst came under attack from Hardie for the latter’s political affiliations with the Liberal employer J.T. Brunner.\textsuperscript{210}

However, despite these problems Liberal-Labour relations endured and it is difficult to ignore the centrality of the social turn in nonconformist theology, particularly considering their existing ties with labour movements. It is no coincidence that Edwardian progressivism, encompassing Lib-Lab politics and the advanced wing of the Liberal Party, remained a major political feature of the period just when nonconformity was on the political ascendancy. This was no doubt reflected in the continued stress on ‘brotherhood’. The polemical importance of brotherhood remained high in the Edwardian era and as noted by Paul Thompson it was a major feature of the ‘Social movement’ of the period with its emphasis on class cooperation over division.\textsuperscript{211}

Liberals publicly opposed extreme forms of socialism and the language of brotherhood was all the more pertinent in advocating co-operatives. However, even towards the late nineteenth century, the language of brotherhood was sufficiently malleable to promote working-class solidarity through their own labour movements and bonds between classes in seeking co-operation. Although linked, working-class internal co-operation and interclass relations were distinct, as one advocated the internal bonds of one class while the other advocated inter-class solidarity. The Labour Church movement built on solidarity between workers, but was promoted by middle-class ministers such as John Trevor who was the movement’s founder. In 1895 he established the Labour Church Brotherhood.\textsuperscript{212} During Labour demonstrations in Manchester the same year, the Social Democratic candidate for Salford H. W. Hobart when remarking about the aims of those ‘advocates of social democracy’ declared that ‘they aimed at the complete socialisation of the means of production, and their ultimate goal was an international socialisation,

\textsuperscript{208} Moore, ‘Progressive Pioneers’, p. 989.  
\textsuperscript{211} Thompson, \textit{The Edwardians}, p. 181.  
\textsuperscript{212} Inglis, \textit{Churches and the Working Classes}, p. 245.
which should include men of all countries and all nations, united in one universal bond of brotherhood’.\footnote{Labour Demonstrations: Manchester Rochdale', \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 6 May 1895, p. 8.}

Significantly, this rhetoric about religious brotherhood at the end of the nineteenth century, also coincided with the desire for greater unity between various denominations. This was essential in transcending class divisions. In May 1895, the chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales Urijah Thomas gave a talk on ‘brotherhood’ declaring that: ‘unless Congregationalism was false to its type, it was essentially and inherently fraternal. Brotherliness was the genius alike of its internal and of its external relations’. Thomas also emphasised the importance of brotherhood in transcending sectarianism, in various spheres of late Victorian life relating to social questions and the condition of England:

“The World’s Parliament of Religions”, “The Civic Church,” General Booth’s “Darkest England” scheme, were also signs of the growing desire for brotherhood. Brotherhood! Was it not the chord struck with clear resonance not only by all Progressive workers for and on County Councils and Parish Councils and School Boards, but by the chiefs of the administrative departments of our nation?\footnote{Congregational Union of England and Wales: The Chairman’s Address: “Brotherhood”…', \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 8 May 1895, p. 6.}

He also emphasised that the ‘idea of brotherhood touched every social question’ and that the ‘axiom… without which the social problem must not and cannot be worked out is the brotherhood of man’.\footnote{Ibid, p. 6.} In 1898, in promoting sectarian unity at the National Congress of Evangelical Free Churches, John Clifford declared that ‘the teachings of Christ… ought to lead in the Christianisation of the social order and the advancement of social well-being’.\footnote{National Congress of Evangelical Free Churches: R. Clifford on “The Federation of The Churches”, \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 9 May 1898, p. 5.} While there was a major surge in theological enthusiasm for social legislation, nonconformity was also extending its connections throughout the national Liberal Party. It was nonconformity’s unique attachment to the party that made it a convenient go-between for Lib-Lab relations in the late nineteenth century, and this would continue in the Edwardian Period. Moreover, the revival of nonconformity in the early twentieth century re-galvanised the party’s fortunes. Opposition to the 1902 Education Act was part of a broad nonconformist campaign, supported by many Liberals and the
Labour movement. Lib-Lab MPs were largely united on this issue. The number of Lib-Lab MPs never fell below eight before 1914, which still indicated some commitment on the part of workers and Liberals. A number of ‘advanced Liberals’ who may have turned to the ILP, remained committed to the Liberal Party in part thanks to nonconformity.

7. Conclusion

By exploring the use of religious language in promoting ideas of Christian brotherhood, this chapter has demonstrated the enduring importance of nonconformity and religion in sustaining relations between the Liberals and organised labour before 1906. In appealing to organised labour, the language employed by figureheads such as Potter and Howell, shows that for the long nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, common religious values were polemically important in overcoming class conflict. The rhetoric of ‘Christian brotherhood’ employed by certain Liberals, and in the Bee-Hive, demonstrates this agenda. Nonconformist Liberals employed a rich multi-layered religious vocabulary promoting kinship and fraternity over sectionalism. Nonconformity played an important role in these co-operative relations beyond the 1880s and into the early twentieth century. For this period, the movements of popular radicalism were propelled strongly by the shared values of nonconformity, in particular Congregationalism considering its popularity in relations between radical Liberals and organised labour. The strategy of Liberals was to promote harmony in class relations to avoid sectionalism and class divisions, and nonconformity offered an effective means of building bridges with leading members of labour groups. Religious culture was just as important as shared national and international identities in Lib-Lab relations. The viability of New Liberalism depended on building some cordial relations with the working class and nonconformity was essential in this respect.

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218 Ibid, p. 190.
3. Birmingham and the Civic Gospel: 1860-1886

1. Introduction

Birmingham’s civic gospel is a prime example of how religious rhetoric was emphasised over class division by middle-class radicals. While the rhetoric of Christian brotherhood was instrumental in building inter-class cooperatives in many urban areas, in Birmingham it was used to develop important corporate platforms out of a mythology of inter-class cohesion. Before exploring the rise of parliamentary nonconformity, this chapter explores the roots of New Liberalism within Birmingham’s provincial nonconformist tradition. This chapter contextualises the civic gospel within the wider radical movement from the 1860s to late 1880s, by exploring how its religious rhetoric helped galvanise political movements that reshaped the direction of the Liberal Party before 1906. Appeals to shared nonconformist values, through the civic gospel, enabled Birmingham’s leaders to build an effective corporate leadership. While historians have considered the role of the civic gospel in developing Chamberlain’s municipal socialism, more often within secular based narratives, this chapter more thoroughly examines the rhetoric employed by Birmingham’s leaders in the pursuit of wider national programmes. This chapter thus makes three distinct historiographical contributions.

Firstly, unlike much existing historical literature this chapter does not simply examine the civic gospel as a local philosophy that merely coincided with the wider radical movement, but rather affirms its rhetorical centrality in the formation of national organizations. Much historiography on municipal socialism only alludes to religion and is constructed around secular based narratives.¹ This was particularly pronounced after 1945. Francis Herrick stressed that ‘the purpose of the caucus in Birmingham was civic betterment; its spirit was fundamentally that of the nonconformist churches’, but his work is mainly dedicated to examining the political manoeuvres of secular political strategists.² Despite growing scepticism with secularisation theories over the proceeding decades, this has still remained implicit in many historical narratives. It is recognised that Birmingham’s radical movement was a significant precursor to Edwardian Liberalism,

¹ Leading examples include: Sykes, The Rise and Fall of British Liberalism; Biagini, Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform.
demonstrated by leading historians of the Gladstonian period, most notably D. A. Hamer.³ Hamer examines how different political players sought to overcome the faddism of the Liberal Party, such as Gladstone’s isolation of single issue causes or Chamberlain’s more programmatic approach.⁴ The civic gospel is still largely considered by some a movement as much characterised by secular political ambitions as nonconformity.⁵ Most striking is Gerald Parsons’ remark that ‘secular political ambition was by no means the only major factor in the evolution of Birmingham’s civic gospel’ which demonstrates that he only saw religion as one aspect.⁶ Leighton, who considers the importance of many religious leaders in Birmingham, asserts that ‘although the Birmingham civic gospel was not sectarian, its chief proponents were Dissenters’.⁷

There have been a number of twenty-first century studies which have increasingly examined the importance of religion in the civic gospel and broad radical movement, but these are still somewhat piecemeal. The most recent work that considers Birmingham religion in the most systematic depth is Andy Vail’s article examining Protestant nonconformity and the civic gospel in Birmingham in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Despite his analysis of the ‘strength and significance of Protestant nonconformity in the city’, he does not suggest that the civic gospel was in itself primarily a religious movement.⁸ Leighton has written on both T. H. Green and Birmingham. In The Greenian Moment, Leighton dedicates one section to the ‘social gospel and radicalism’ but not specifically on Birmingham, and his primary emphasis is on how Green helped channel the interests of dissenters into social reform and radical objectives in the late nineteenth century.⁹

Second, this chapter engages in a full examination of the civic gospel’s religious rhetoric as employed by religious and political leaders. The historiography of Birmingham has remained relatively untouched by the linguistic turn.¹⁰ But examining

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⁴ Ibid.
⁵ This is also reflected in biographical works on Chamberlain: Crosby, Joseph Chamberlain; Peter Marsh, Joseph Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in Politics (New Haven, 1994).
⁶ Parsons, ‘Social control to social gospel’, p. 47.
¹⁰ Most of the works predated the linguistic turn. The linguistic turn was a movement popularised in the 1970s emphasising the importance of language and textual analysis for exploring a range of cultural sources and multidisciplinary approaches that go beyond traditional social scientific methods. There is no real engagement, by Briggs or Tholfsen, with the rhetorical language employed. Asa Briggs focuses on
the use of language is still important. Without exploring the use of language and rhetoric, it is difficult to assess the civic gospel’s municipal impact with any precision. It is insufficient to make assumptions about the teachings of Dawson and Dale, without considering how this information was disseminated through the use of rhetoric. Leighton, who asserts that ‘Birmingham’s civic gospelers exhorted individuals to constructive social action… for the common good’, does not examine the rhetoric itself, how it was expressed and who it was aimed at. Matthew Roberts’ broad critical evaluation of the historiography pertaining to mass political movements between the 1832 Reform Act and the First World War, considers the work of revisionist historians in examining the relative importance of language, but little space is dedicated to Birmingham Liberalism. However, over the decades of the late twentieth century some historians did consider the use of political language in Birmingham in some small measure. In the 1980s Clive Behagg engaged in a limited examination of ‘class rhetoric’. Leighton’s article only mentions the civic gospel in passing and there is certainly no textual analysis of the rhetoric used.

Third, this chapter considers the importance of nonconformist rhetoric in the leadership’s desire to identify with radical traditions and, to use Leighton’s words, paper over divisions that existed in the social structure. This chapter demonstrates that appeals to shared nonconformist values, through the civic gospel, were essential in building on myths of class cohesion and corporate responsibility. Some twentieth century historians such as Trygve Tholfsen and Asa Briggs, have stressed how Birmingham’s civic leadership emerged organically out of a local culture characterised by class co-operation. This would suggest that Chamberlain and radical organizations were largely an outgrowth of local co-operative class relations. Tholfsen examines how Liberal leaders in Birmingham developed the new caucus by incorporating existing organizational frameworks and how the caucus had matured ‘steadily and continuously for a quarter of a century’. Decades later, there was greater emphasis placed on how Birmingham’s leaders transcended internal divisions by building on the mythology of existing radical socio-economic considerations: A. Briggs, History of Birmingham, Vol II, Borough and City 1865-1938 (Oxford, 1952); T. R. Tholfsen, ‘Democracy in Victorian Birmingham’, Birmingham Historical Journal (1950); Herrick, ‘The Origins of the National Liberal Federation’; Alan Fox, ‘Industrial Relations in Nineteenth-Century Birmingham’, Oxford Economic Papers, VII (1955).

traditions. Leighton stresses that the leadership, throughout the nineteenth century, often styled itself as the inheritors of true radical traditions of class-cooperation ‘to paper over fissures between Tories, Whigs and Liberals, between churchmen and dissenters and between ‘masters and men’.16

Also, the theory that much of nineteenth century Birmingham was characterised by harmonious class relations has been questioned by many revisionist historians since the 1970s.17 This would suggest that the efficacy of Birmingham’s corporate leadership was less a natural product of favourable local conditions such as class cohesion and that the civic gospel’s theological rhetoric was more essential in bringing cohesion amongst the corporate leadership. Briggs emphasises the importance of the civic gospel in a city characterised by class harmony.18 Historians such as Briggs stressed the importance of a local culture dominated by cottage-scale workshops, less susceptible to the hazards of labour disputes in fostering class collaboration.19 These assumptions have been challenged by historians such as Clive Behagg who maintain that this historiography was too reliant on optimistic middle-class constructions and that their language emphasising social cohesion was merely a ‘justification for the social and economic anomalies of a capitalist system’.20

Hence, this chapter examines the polemical importance of the civic gospel in reshaping the Liberal Party by developing important political formations, both local and national. It examines how Birmingham’s leaders used the civic gospel’s theological rhetoric to paper over the cracks of sectionalism and class division, to promote effective corporate leadership that brought about a decisive shift in the political landscape of the late nineteenth century. The chapter does not focus primarily on Chamberlain, but as he was mayor, he does feature prominently. The results of Birmingham progressivism served to strengthen the cause of radicalism in the long term providing it with a more coherent voice within the party.

20 Behagg, ‘Myths of Cohesion’, p. 381.
2. The Civic Gospel: The Origins of a Civic Theology

The civic gospel was fundamentally a religious movement inspired by nonconformist theology. It is hard to ignore the connection between the relative cohesion in Birmingham’s local leadership and the enduring influence of the civic gospel.\(^{21}\) It was in many ways distinct and therefore its origins are important, particularly considering its relative success and internal unity compared with other civic movements in other major conurbations. Movements in cities such as Manchester or Liverpool would never achieve quite the tenacity and cohesion as those in Birmingham. In Leicester, there were semblances of something similar, but it often disintegrated due to internal rivalries and divisions.\(^{22}\) Hence, the civic gospel was particularly significant for Birmingham and the radical movement. The enormous expansion in municipal socialism and programmes of urban regeneration coincided with the civic gospel movement advocating corporate responsibility and civic duty.

One problem lies in the lack of clarity in defining ‘civic gospel’. The historiography on Birmingham and the civic gospel dates to the 1940s, but despite this the term ‘civic gospel’ has not been defined with any precision.\(^{23}\) There are no indications in the press that it was widely used in the vocabulary of the time.\(^{24}\) This suggests it was largely historiographical, but pertaining to a movement that was all too real.\(^{25}\) There is evidence that the term only really came into usage in the 1950s.\(^{26}\) Often historians merely refer to the movement without unpacking the language with any clarity. What do


\(^{22}\) Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 184.


\(^{24}\) A search of British Periodicals online and JSTOR for the term ‘civic gospel’ for 1840-1950 returned no results. The same for British Library Newspapers online which also returned 350 results for the term ‘social gospel’. Terms such as ‘civic pride’ and ‘social gospel’ were often used in reference to cities such as Birmingham; ‘The Best Governed City in the World – Glasgow and Birmingham’, *Birmingham Daily Post*, 28 May 1890, p. 5.


\(^{26}\) There is little trace of the terms ‘civic gospel’ in major secondary literature before World War Two. There was no mention of ‘civic gospel’ in W. W. Dale, *The Life of R. W. Dale of Birmingham* (London, 1898). The term was used occasionally before this, e.g. when discussing John Clifford, John Carlile mentions ‘civic gospel’ but there is no direct reference to Birmingham; John Charles Carlile, *The Story of the English Baptists* (London, 1905). It was in the early 1950s that the terms seriously entered the vocabulary of historical literature, reflected in the works of Asa Briggs but also other works including Charles. R. Fay, *Round About Industrial Britain, 1830-1860* (Toronto, 1952). Most likely, the specific terms ‘civic gospel’ was largely an historical construct pertaining to a real movement of the nineteenth century where terms like ‘civic pride’ and ‘social gospel’ were in parlance.
historians mean when they refer to the civic gospel? Are they referring to what was essentially a religious movement? Briggs does not give a working definition, merely asserting that ‘civic pride was the driving force of a whole civic philosophy, known at the time and since as the civic gospel’. However, as shown, there is no evidence to suggest that the term ‘civic gospel’ was used by contemporaries at the time suggesting that this is largely based on Briggs’ own assumption. There are also no indications that Briggs saw the civic gospel as primarily a religious movement, but rather a complicated philosophy embodying local civic pride and culture. Tholfsen does not make any attempt to define ‘civic gospel’. Providing a precise definition to historiographical terms denoting a complicated cultural movement is always problematic. While the historiographical definition of the ‘civic gospel’ is unclear, the movement that the terms denote was essentially underpinned by nonconformity and religious theology. Given both its origins and the role of key religious advocates, a good working definition of the civic gospel is a broad religious movement that extended its emphasis on incarnational theology and Christian duty to the secular sphere of urban civic life.

Its origins were demonstrably religious and it was a nonconformist movement. The view of historians from Briggs to Parsons that religion was only a facet of a broader secular movement does not hold up to scrutiny. Although the civic gospel was not a ‘sectarian’ movement in so far that it was not tied to a specific denomination, this does not diminish the centrality of religion. It represented the social turn in radical dissent, as it was not only religiously inspired by two prominent dissenters George Dawson and R. W. Dale, but also emphasised the Christian imperative in the public sphere. Boyd Hilton, who examines the social turn, does not consider the civic gospel and there is no mention of Dawson in his work, as he focuses more assiduously on Anglicanism and Christian socialism. This is a surprising omission as the civic gospel represented the early practical application of incarnational theology, as early civic gospelers saw the manifestation of God’s will through virtuous acts in the community as an extension of their religious vision.

This is particularly significant considering the chronology of early nonconformist social doctrines as shown in chapter one. Hilton may have done well to consider

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31 Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*. 
nonconformity in Birmingham before the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{32} The origins of the civic gospel are often placed around the 1840s, when Dawson began to preach on the theological importance of social duty for the community. Dawson was the founder of this movement.\textsuperscript{33} However, also significant was the Christian Chartist Arthur O’Neill.\textsuperscript{34} Dawson and O’Neill were the first two people identified to have preached the civic gospel.\textsuperscript{35} O’Neill had established a Chartist Church in Birmingham. After his involvement with Chartism, O’Neill became a devout Baptist Minister and a Cobdenite.\textsuperscript{36} Dawson and O’Neill were the original driving force and it was further popularised by Dale.\textsuperscript{37} Dale inherited the role of spokesman for the civic gospel after Dawson’s death in 1872.\textsuperscript{38}

The civic gospeler’s work was certainly consistent with incarnational theology. In his sermon of 1847, Dawson emphasised how God’s will was immutable but man’s interpretation of his will was not and varied depending on the age:

\begin{quote}
The Christian religion, or the eternal idea of God touching man, rendered in and through Christ for the instruction of men to the end of time, changes not; it is the doctrine of the Eternal, the Immutable, and the Infinite. The Christian Church, on the other hand, is a provision for the application of these immutable doctrines to a mutable and changing state.\textsuperscript{39}
\end{quote}

The immanentist connotations were particularly evident when Dawson implied that there existed an ‘ever-dwelling spirit of God in the World’.\textsuperscript{40} Dawson’s emphasis on the oneness of spirit, considering scientific and philosophical developments, is also consistent with trends in incarnational theology: ‘we see a struggling towards unity in the effort to connect and unite the sciences with religion’.\textsuperscript{41} Dawson further announced:

\begin{quote}
The heart of this modern age is sighing for oneness of spirit, for reconcilement and unity. Men of science are lifting up their prayer that the hostile distinctions between mind and matter,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Leighton, ‘Municipal Progress’, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{36} Vail, ‘Birmingham Protestant Nonconformity’, p. 211.
\textsuperscript{38} Parsons, ‘Social Control to Social Gospel’, pp. 47-8.
\textsuperscript{39} Dawson, \textit{The Demands of the Age}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, p. 9.
distinctions which degrade now spirit, now matter, may cease; that those weary philosophical battles between materialism and spiritualism, between material science and metaphysics, may be at an end.  

Dawson saw these distinctions within the political arena as variations from this unity of spirit: ‘this world, with its multiform phenomena, and varied colours and forms, is but one great thought, spoken by one great God, "in whom there is no variableness, neither shadow or turning."’. Although similar immanentist ideas could potentially be found in Anglican theology, these remarks were made by a minister who was broadly nonconformist and consistent with those teachings adopted by Birmingham’s leading advocates of the civic gospel. To all intents and purposes, this was nonconformist theology.

Dawson’s emphasis on engaging with real-world problems of the urban environment, as an extension of his immanentist theology, was tailor made for dealing with Birmingham’s urban poverty in the early to mid-nineteenth century. There was much needed demand for urban development, particularly before the municipal socialism of the 1860s. Despite these secular problems, the rhetoric of the civic gospel was decidedly theological with incarnational connotations. In 1847 Dawson also remarked that ‘We must have a Church that will condescend to us men of low estate; it must reach our sympathies; we cannot have angels in this world; we cannot awaken an enthusiasm for them’.

What particularly marked out the civic gospel was also its broad inter-sectarian appeal. Dawson was not attached to any particular sect. While a committed dissenter, he had been an advocate of non-sectarianism in religious affairs, establishing the non-denominational Church of the Saviour. This also gave extra credence to the notions of brotherhood in transcending divisions. Dawson himself helped to bring the concept of brotherhood into common usage when he wrote: ‘The present age wants also a church that shall teach the great doctrine of brotherhood and equality’. The civic gospel’s emphasis on unity was a consistent theme throughout his teaching, which built on inter-sectarian identities. His congregations were attended by many local religious and political

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42 Ibid, p. 11.
43 Ibid, p. 11.
45 Parry, Democracy and Religion, p. 201.
47 Dawson, The Demands of the Age, p. 10.
elites well into the 1870s.\(^{48}\) He had been active in promoting this vision with the aim of transcending the insularity of sectionalism.\(^{49}\) In response to the French revolution of 1848, he addressed the middle classes, warning that a ‘reform delayed is a revolution begun’.\(^{50}\)

The theology of the civic gospel may have been advocated as a means of dealing with secular problems, such as urban poverty, but it was by no means a secular movement considering its origins. The civic gospel was the product of nonconformity and the growing emphasis on incarnational theology as demonstrated by the work of its main advocates as early as the 1840s.

3. The Civic Gospel and the Cohesion of the Birmingham Corporation: 1860 - 1886

The period of the 1840s and 50s were important in the theological origins of the civic gospel, but it was from the 1860s onwards that its rhetoric was used to build an effective and cohesive corporate leadership. While historians such as Leighton have already demonstrated that the leadership tried to build on past radical traditions based on mythology in overcoming internal fractures, the appeals to shared nonconformist values were the most critical.\(^{51}\) This section demonstrates that the civic gospel’s rhetoric was used by the Liberal leadership to build an effective radical platform based on myths of ‘class harmony’ and corporate responsibility.

Birmingham was a city whose cohesion was largely mythical. The significance of Birmingham’s social and class structure in encouraging the civic gospel can easily be overestimated. Briggs suggested that Birmingham was less heavily industrialised than other major cities and thus workers possessed greater degree of occupational diversity and social mobility.\(^{52}\) The idea that Birmingham was a model city dominated by small workshops, possessed of harmonious relations between employer and artisan is largely fictitious. There was some truth in Behagg’s claim that Birmingham’s culture of class harmony was largely mythical, but Behagg himself relies too heavily on the rhetoric of a handful of major manufacturers.\(^{53}\)

With a large artisanal class conditions were still favourable for the civic gospel in some small measure, but the culture of class harmony had largely eroded. Throughout the

\(^{48}\) Parsons, ‘Social Control to Social Gospel’, p. 47.


\(^{50}\) George Dawson, *A Letter to the Middle Classes on the Present Crises*, n.p., 1848, Hume Tracts, p. 3.

\(^{51}\) Leighton, ‘Municipal Progress’, pp. 115-16.

\(^{52}\) Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, p. 186.

\(^{53}\) Behagg, ‘Myths of Cohesion’, pp. 379-82.
long nineteenth century, the number of large-scale firms in Birmingham increased. There was certainly a rise in the number of firms, which largely displaced the small workshop as the dominant unit of production. In 1830 there were 7,700 firms in Birmingham, which increased to 20,000 by 1860. This increase outstripped Birmingham’s overall population growth, which roughly doubled over the span of three decades. In the 1850s, Chamberlain installed new technology from the United States in his screw-making factory, which put out of business a number of smaller factories and workshops. By 1870, there were many large-scale mechanized factories in industries such as glass manufacture. From the 1880s there had been major reorganization of local industry. Many small munitions workshops were demolished in the 1880s and 1890s. Moreover, class divisions remained relatively low when compared with other cities, but they still existed.

Historians have offered explanations for this. Behagg emphasises that small-firms remained small, while larger units of production developed independently. He argued that there remained an abundance of small firms as they offered no threat to large scale firms that ‘controlled their credit and marketing facilities’. Similarly, Dennis Smith emphasises that ‘the small producer was torn between the self-regulating artisan community and the petit-bourgeois individualism within the marketplace’. Alan Fox also claims that there was less class consciousness amongst leaders of small crafts as they more often saw themselves as their own masters easily differentiated from ‘underhand wage-day labour’ of the larger factories. Whatever the reasons, labour conflict was relatively low compared with other cities as reflected in the activity of trade unions. The Trades’ Union Directory of 1861 listed only forty-two trade unions for Birmingham compared with sixty for Sheffield, despite Birmingham’s larger population.

It is not necessary to establish the precise degree in which this cohesion was based on myth, but there was clearly an agenda amongst Birmingham’s leaders to build on a mythology through appeals to shared nonconformist values. The lack of cohesion in class relations meant that any radical platform could not be built on class but other shared values, such as nationalism and religion. The civic gospel was not a national movement and nonconformity was thus important in this respect. The civic gospel built on myths of

54 Smith, ‘Craft and Organizational Rationality’, p. 216.
55 Ibid, p. 221.
56 Ibid, p. 221.
57 Behagg, ‘Myths of Cohesion’, pp. 381-82.
58 Smith, ‘Craft and Organizational Rationality’, p. 213.
60 Rodrick, Self-Help and Civic Culture, pp. 116-118.
harmony between Birmingham’s artisans, workshops and corporate leaders. The extent that socio-economic conditions of class encouraged more harmonious class relations is unclear, but it has certainly been exaggerated.\(^{61}\)

Hence, there were two important features of the civic gospel that provided cohesion to its leadership in this context. The first was its inter-sectarian appeal, which provided its polemical strength in building a myth of class harmony and corporate responsibility. The civic gospel was a broad nonconformist movement.\(^{62}\) Dale demonstrated an appreciation for the wider interests of nonconformity and in 1879 he paid tribute to the ‘great spiritual benefits conferred by Methodism’.\(^{63}\) Dale’s devotion to Congregationalism as demonstrated by his work for the Carr’s Lane Church was matched by his broader commitment to the civic gospel movement. Dale would often address ward meetings and organise Liberal candidates for local elections.\(^{64}\) The civic gospel brought together many different sects dedicated to the same goal. All the major advocates including Dawson, Dale and H. W. Crosskey were from nonconformist denominations.\(^{65}\) The civic gospel was an inter-sectarian movement which appealed to various different denominations.

What really gave the civic gospel its polemical power was the support of Birmingham’s nonconformist community. Birmingham was not the only city imbued with dissenting radicalism. According to the 1851 census of religious worship, Birmingham was only one of twenty towns where nonconformity was in the majority, over other religious denominations.\(^{66}\) Nevertheless, the genuinely cross-sectional and sectarian appeal of the civic gospel was evident in activities of Birmingham’s political and religious leaders. The civic gospel’s most devout advocates were from a variety of different denominations and backgrounds, including ministers, businessmen, Liberals and even ex-Chartists. As well as Unitarians and Congregationalists, there were a number of Baptists such as minister John Jenkin Brown. Dawson’s followers included urban middle-class elites such ministers as Dale, Crosskey, Charles Vince and Edward Baines.\(^{67}\) Dawson was originally a Baptist who became a Unitarian, while his devotee Dale was a

\(^{62}\) Parry, Democracy and Religion, p. 201.
\(^{66}\) Parsons, ‘Social Control to Social Gospel’, p. 69.
\(^{67}\) Parsons, ‘From Dissenters to Free Churchmen’, p. 93.
Congregationalist. Vince, a confirmed Baptist, became Dawson’s successor. All these major figureheads including Crosskey and Dale were active in promoting the values of the civic gospel from the pulpit.

Radicals clearly shared many common religious values, although there were clearly some sectarian differences amongst dissenters. The Unitarianism of Chamberlain and the Congregationalism of Dale were not necessarily the same but nonconformists often had many common ambitions as explored in previous chapters. The Liberation Society was the most prominent conduit for nonconformist expression tied with Birmingham Liberalism. It was originally established as the Anti-State Church Association supported by seven hundred representatives of various nonconformist denominations. Many prominent nonconformists expressed solidarity with other sects, such as the mustard manufacturer J. J. Colman who called for unity among these dissenting groups.

This sense of unity was largely built on inter-sectarian alliances. Many pressing decisions on local affairs were decided by a close-knit community of Unitarian families, often in co-operation with other sects. A notable feature of Birmingham was the unusually high proportion of Unitarians amongst the urban elite. The civic gospel’s emphasis on corporate responsibility was tailor made for Unitarians who were often influential in local politics and business. Outside London, Birmingham had the largest proportion of Unitarians and Quakers among its religious denominations. They comprised 4.9 percent of all those affiliated with religious sects, compared with 3.4 percent for Sheffield. It is tempting to attribute the civic gospel largely to Unitarianism, however this would be an oversimplification, as it was advocated on non-sectarian grounds and many of its advocates were, as shown, from other denominations.

The Liberal leadership in Birmingham was also made up mostly of committed nonconformists, such as Francis Schnadhorst, Jesse Collins and Chamberlain. They often shared an interest in the teachings of Dawson. In 1877, reviewing Dawson’s legacy, Dale wrote: ‘When I came to Birmingham... Mr. Dawson was already exerting a great influence

68 Ibid, p. 93.
70 Parry, Democracy and Religion, p. 7.
72 Parry, Democracy and Religion, p. 201.
73 Briggs, Victorian Cities, p. 204.
74 Smith, Conflict and Compromise, p. 96.
on the religious thought and the general public life of the town’.  

Dale himself enjoyed a strong personal relationship with many members of Birmingham’s leadership such as Schnadhorst. As a young man Schnadhorst had been personal secretary to Dale and they were lifelong associates. Schnadhorst was a valuable political organiser in the caucus, a devout Congregationalist and had been secretary of the Central Nonconformist Committee. The most distinguished amongst this group was Chamberlain himself who was a Unitarian. It was during this time that Chamberlain’s ‘gas and water socialism’ was introduced which was the first real break from the principles of Laissez-Faire. Chamberlain was elected mayor of the city during Gladstone’s first term.

The degree that Chamberlain was influenced by genuine Unitarian convictions is not entirely clear, but there are signs that his outlook was far less secular than has been suggested. Historians have characterised Chamberlain as a secular politician. The majority have viewed his involvement in radical politics as a matter of practical convenience in controlling municipal affairs, reflected in Jonathan Parry’s analysis on the importance of religion in party politics and Travis Crosby’s more recent biographical work. While emphasising the centrality of religion in Gladstone’s first government, Parry characterises Chamberlain as a secular pragmatist not motivated by any ‘theological vision’. Auspos notes that most of Chamberlain’s parliamentary associates, like John Morley and Charles Dilke, were not dissenters. Parry concurs, citing a strong association with Dilke and F. A. Maxse. However, citing a small number of MPs as evidence of Chamberlain’s secular pragmatism is misleading, considering the reliance of these historians on parliamentary radicals at a time when nonconformists were in a minority in the House of Commons. More revealing are his associates in the press and local leadership, who were often nonconformists, including W. T. Stead. Stead was a devout Congregationalist. In Birmingham, his more long-standing and intimate associates included nonconformists such as Dale and Jesse Collings. There were interesting parallels between Collings and Chamberlain; both had risen into the higher

78 Parsons, ‘From Dissenters to Free Churchmen’, p. 80.
80 Crosby, Joseph Chamberlain, pp. 224-5.
81 Parry, Democracy and Religion, pp. 224-5.
83 Parry, Democracy and Religion, pp. 224-5.
84 Watts, The Dissenters, p. 39.
echelons of Birmingham municipal politics sharing a commitment to land reform and both came under the influence of Dawson’s civic gospel. Chamberlain’s seemingly secular style of legislation does not suggest that religion was insignificant in shaping his politics.

However, whether he still held convictions as he grew older is unclear, but for much of the period of his premiership he remained a committed Unitarian. In the early days Chamberlain showed an active interest in the chapel, which no doubt remained with him for some time after. Chamberlain came under the influence of Crosskey, the minister of the Church of Messiah. Chamberlain’s association with Dale of the Congregational Chapel also helped to shape his outlook. Both had stressed the need for Christian action in the social sphere. This was reflected in the lengthy correspondence between Dale and Chamberlain. Dale was brought up a devout Congregationalist and it was in Birmingham that he became a major voice for nonconformity. He was well-known for the power of his public sermons and speeches. The civic gospel had a significant impact on his own outlook.

The second feature of the civic gospel was its theological underpinnings emphasising corporate responsibility and class cooperation, that were well suited for the local leadership’s ambitions in encouraging cohesive radical programmes. In terms of municipal corporations, in 1864, John Bright gave a well-known speech emphasising the importance of corporations for the ‘health and comfort and improvement of our people’.

The theology of the civic gospel provided important ideological foundations for local government, emphasising the balance between local socialism and corporate responsibility. It emphasised the importance of the municipal corporation of Birmingham and also business corporations. Although these two senses of ‘corporate responsibility’ were distinct, as the latter stressed philanthropy and not the duty of local government, the two were linked. The gospel appealed to the network of merchants, many of whom were nonconformists and certain artisans who would benefit from much needed urban development. Dale emphasised the value of corporate philanthropy and its benefits for the community at large. He argued that God allowed wealth as it enabled corporate

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88 Chamberlain to Dale, 10 July 1886, JC5/20/57, CRC, BU.
89 Jones, ‘Dale, Robert William’, ODNB.
responsibility of business for the public good and the improvement of urban conditions. In 1877, reflecting on his own personal memories of Dawson, Dale wrote: ‘Men of business knew what he meant when he talked about honest trading… he was satisfied with insisting on the duty of being unselfish; he attacked the selfishness which would not do municipal work that happened to be unpleasant’. Dale also wrote a chapter on the ‘sacredness of property’ claiming:

Christ calls wealth “the mammoth of unrighteousness,” because it has had so much to do with human selfishness, dishonesty, and cruelty; because it is wickedly used. By-and-by, when all men become Christ’s loyal servants, and when his laws have real authority of secular life, material wealth will receive a nobler description, and the “Sacredness of Property,” instead of being a phrase, will represent a most Divine reality.

The emphasis here on corporate responsibility is clear, as Dale characterised property and wealth as representing ‘divine reality’. Even though the stress was more on the duty of business corporations than municipal government, there were overlaps in theological argument. Dale saw property as belonging to God through man and thus man was bound to virtuous acts of the community: ‘the Lord Jesus Christ never suggests that private property should be abolished, but tells us to use it as God’s Stewards’. The emphasis on the duty of business corporations was understandable in a chapter about private property and in the same book, in another chapter entitled ‘Political and Municipal Duty’ Dale also emphasised the ‘sacredness of civil authority’. Just as business corporations were seen as part of the kingdom of God, so was the state or municipal authority: ‘Christ does not suppress the state, but inspires political life with a more generous temper, and directs it to higher ends’. A central focus was a duty to the community: ‘the municipal as well as the political franchise is a trust; both to be used, not for private but for public purposes’.

The theology of the civic gospel also appealed to the practical business of urban life. There is some truth in Briggs’ assertion that the rise of municipal socialism was partly

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93 Dale, ‘George Dawson’, p. 49.
96 Ibid, p. 35.
a response to the urgent demands for urban development.¹⁰⁰ It enabled the city to implement much needed improvement of local metropolitan conditions. In August 1886, John MacDonald wrote: ‘From main drains to free libraries, from coal gas to the antique, whatever concerns the physical and mental well-being of her children, that is the business, the official business, of this renowned city of the caucus’.¹⁰¹ However, this comment does not sufficiently explain the significance of Birmingham. As Birmingham radicalism extended beyond just municipal socialism to encompass questions of national importance there were clearly other significant explanations.¹⁰² There were other towns with a much-needed demand for urban development including the Blackfriars of Glasgow and several districts of London.¹⁰³ This in no way accounts for such a vibrant movement that left Birmingham as ‘the best governed city in the world’.¹⁰⁴

Most likely, certain theological features of the civic gospel provided important incentives for dealing with these problems. Dale emphasised that the secular problems of the world were an extension of Christian duty. At the Congregational Union in October 1871 Dale declared that ‘instead of mingling with the life of nature and of man, religion has been for ages too much an affair of priesthoods and ceremonies.’¹⁰⁵ This was a bold statement about the theological insularity of strict religious sacerdotal practice. Doing God’s work demanded you deal in secular matters. Dale emphasised the need to transcend mere religious esotericism and accept the world as it was for the welfare of society.¹⁰⁶ This was reflected in a lecture published in 1877, where Dale declared:

No matter how deep and strong your faith that you can get on in business by merely reading the Bible… you will soon be in the Bankruptcy Court unless you avoid bad debts. You cannot make a universe for yourself out of your own head. Water drowns, fire burns, whether you like or not.¹⁰⁷

The civic gospel was a theology that addressed real material problems of the urban environment, which for Dale needed to be addressed if God’s work had any real meaning. Dale concluded that ‘the conditions of human life are fixed; it is of no use arguing against

¹⁰⁶ Jones, ‘Dale, Robert William’, ODNB.
them... You must respect the reality of facts... 108 Work deemed as ‘secular’ was considered necessary in dealing with urgent problems of the world and in 1884 this was more thoroughly articulated in Dale’s published sermons:

God Himself... is always doing, a great deal of work that we must call secular; and this throws considerable light on the laws which should govern our own secular calling. He is the Creator of all things. He made the earth, and He made it broad enough for us to grow corn and grass on it, to build cities on it, with town halls, courts of justice, Houses of Parliament, schools... It is impossible to use it all for churches and chapels, or for any other “consecrated” purpose. 109

This remark demonstrates a strong theological underpinning to the civic gospel, particularly the emphasis on immanentism. Dale implied that secular work was essentially religious and governed by the ‘Creator of all things’. 110 For Dale the civic gospel was an extension of his Christian vision into an arena where Christians could do God’s work. 111 Dale preached the importance of social obligation and God’s will as manifest in the natural environment and in December 1884 he wrote:

when the eternal word and Son of God became flesh, he revealed the sacredness of human life; its sacredness, not merely in its direct relations to God, but in its relations to that natural order and social environment by which it is disciplined and developed, and in which it exercises its affections and virtues. 112

Despite subtle distinctions between the various sects, the civic gospel provided Birmingham’s local elite with polemical ammunition for promoting political and corporate leadership. This was important for overcoming internal divisions of class through a mythology of cohesion. They appealed to shared nonconformist identities and ideas that balanced out the efficacy of corporate leadership with the responsibility of municipal socialism.

108 Ibid, p.49.
The appeal to shared religious identities, through the civic gospel, was not only instrumental in developing local corporate leadership but also municipal reforms and national organizations. This was reflected in Chamberlain’s own agenda and in May 1877, he wrote to Stead stressing the need for a unified radical programme of liberal reform:

the future programme of Liberalism must come from below. It is evident we have no inspiration to expect from our present official leaders; and I hope that a result of the present movement will be to secure some greater unity of action and to give force and clearness to Liberal opinion.\footnote{Joseph Chamberlain to W. T. Stead, 24 May 1877, JC 6/4k/5, CRC, BU.}

Chamberlain and Schnadhorst put these plans into practice establishing the NLF the same year.\footnote{Ian Sellers, \textit{Nineteenth-Century Nonconformity} (London, 1977), p. 82.} They set about a series of local radical initiatives linking growing notions of community through the civic gospel without completely abandoning more orthodox religious and liberal creeds. Rodrick’s claim that Chamberlain’s radicalism linked the values of self-help with the growing emphasis on community is reasonable.\footnote{Rodrick, \textit{Self-Help and Civic Culture}, pp. 134-5.} Self-help was largely an extra-class ethic that took on a distinctly social dimension. The concept of self-help was sufficiently malleable to embrace certain communitarian values that would aid both individual self-elevation and the community. They were often seen as antithetical as shown by the Liberty and Property Defence League’s campaign promoting ‘self-help versus state-help’.\footnote{Anthony Wohl, \textit{The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London} (Oxford, 1977), p. 231.} However, in Birmingham, the notions of civic responsibility were demonstrably linked with many mutual improvement societies. Members of the Town council were often associated through such organizations as the Midland Institute.\footnote{The Midland Institute was an organization established in 1854 to promote adult education. Rodrick, \textit{Self-Help and Civic Culture}, pp. 134-5.}

Chamberlain’s radicalism grew out of local socio-religious traditions that developed to encompass broader national programmes. He used his popular base in Birmingham as political leverage to develop a more far reaching national vision.\footnote{Marsh, \textit{Joseph Chamberlain}, p. 105.} After Chamberlain became Mayor in 1869, in cooperation with local radicals he set about a
programme of civic reconstruction. Throughout the 1870s Chamberlain implemented many financial reforms enabling civic improvements in gas, water and sanitation. In 1873 Chamberlain became mayor of Birmingham with a commitment to improve urban conditions. In 1876 he introduced the Town Improvement Scheme. During the 1870s he established a network of associations extending beyond Birmingham. At the heart of Chamberlain’s interpretation of the civic gospel was the importance of improving urban conditions for the benefit of the community through the work of local government. In Hackney in October 1885, when Chamberlain claimed that ‘local government is the most powerful instrument of the democracy’ and a ‘means by which all can co-operate for the common good’ he could cite Birmingham as a model city.

In developing radical initiatives, Birmingham leaders appealed to common religious identities to promote sectarian unity over sectionalism. Chamberlain’s emphasis on brotherhood was aimed not only at appealing to corporate leaders but also at building this outward myth of cohesion and class harmony through appeals to aspiring artisans. There is some truth in the assertion made by Peter Marsh that ‘…Chamberlain stood out… as a spokesman for the alliance between industrialists and organised labour’. In defending the Labourers’ and Artisans’ Dwellings Act, Chamberlain wrote that ‘…of all the provincial improvement schemes, that which is being carried out by the Corporation of Birmingham is the most important and instructive’.

The character of his speeches, from very early on, suggests an agenda to appeal to shared religious values over the sectional interests of class. Chamberlain clearly associated the perpetuation of socio-economic evils with class divisions when, in September 1873, he announced that ‘I dread more than I dread the possibility of violence from trades unions... the growing conviction... that the laws grind the poor, and that the rich men rule the laws, and that the sacred name of justice is invoked to perpetuate class distinctions and to protect class interests’. Chamberlain made a pious appeal to wealthy

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members of the community about the need to address social issues through cooperation, warning that:

if they continue the course they now pursue, the time is coming when the working class, strong in its perfected organisation as it is already in its overwhelming numbers, will say to them - we looked for guidance to the blind, we sued for counsel to the dumb, fling the vain fancy to the wind - your hour is past and ours is come. You gave in that propitious hour no kindly look, no gracious tone. But Heaven has not denied us power. To be your duty and our own.¹²⁷

To help the poor was seen as a corporate responsibility, particularly with emphasis on ‘guidance’ and ‘counsel’. Linked in with the desire to transcend class division through the civic gospel were his appeals to the inter-sectarian interests. Over the next few years Chamberlain set about installing nonconformists as local councillors, including the Quaker William White.¹²⁸ In May 1876, during a speech at the Liberation Society, Chamberlain was distinctly critical of the exclusiveness of the established church in spiritual matters and the remarks of a clergyman of the diocese of Winchester which read ‘if a Dissenter be sick and send for the parish priest, the latter ought to visit him in order to convert him to the gospel’. Chamberlain responded:

Now that ladies and gentleman, appears to me to form part of a new Church commentary on the Gospels. A Dissenter may be hungry and ye shall give him no meat; naked, and ye shall not clothe him; sick, and in prison, and ye shall visit him in order to obtain an acknowledgement of his schism. The evil does not end there. It interferes with business relations… It is the condition without which the little tradesman cannot supply the neighbouring gentry.¹²⁹

This is a very telling remark, particularly considering the emphasis on the duty of religion to address material conditions and the subtle appeals to ‘business’ and the ‘little tradesman’. This was another appeal to inter-sectarian unity over class divisions. With the growing schisms in Birmingham’s complicated class relations between small workshops, artisans, big business and other workers, the civic gospel’s rhetoric built on shared religious values contributed to this public sense of unity. As more larger scale

firms emerged, particularly by the 1870s, smaller business tried to compete and artisans often suffered increasing restraints to meet demands.\textsuperscript{130} Throughout the 1870s Chamberlain had pushed through many reforms aimed at small workshops. In 1869 he made his first unsuccessful attempt to introduce the Workshops Act, which aimed to enable town councils to restrict child labour and instigate schooling requirements for small workshops.\textsuperscript{131} Although Chamberlain also sought to appeal to the great body of workers, he was simply less likely to gain support from those who felt exploited in large factories. In 1876, at the Liberation Society, Chamberlain’s appeals to sectarian unity over division, emphasising the need to address these social evils, was also evident when he remarked:

Although the differences which divide us, even upon this platform, one from another are greater than the differences which separate us from the Church; but we are governed in our social and secular relations; at all events, by the claims of common citizenship and human brotherhood, and not by distinctions of faith and of doctrine.\textsuperscript{132}

Birmingham’s leaders appealed to corporate responsibility and the need to redress social evils, particularly when advocating important initiatives. This was clearly aimed at establishing a sense of inter-sectarian unity over complicated class relations that existed. For Chamberlain, gaining the support of various nonconformists was particularly important in the early to mid-1880s as his political activities became more assertive and more concerned with national programmes.\textsuperscript{133} In 1886, when reflecting how he ‘was drawn into politics by an interest in social questions’ some fifteen years previously, he announced:

At that time, I saw the great majority—the masses—of industrious, thrifty, hard-working artisans and labourers condemned by bad laws and by neglect of their rulers to a life of exacting toil without the advantages and liberties which education affords, and borne down by conditions which I thought to be unfair and unjust.\textsuperscript{134}

\textsuperscript{130} Crosby, \textit{Joseph Chamberlain}, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{131} Marsh, \textit{Joseph Chamberlain}, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{132} Chamberlain, \textit{The Practical Working of Establishment}, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{133} Biagini, \textit{British Democracy and Irish Nationalism}, p. 220.
He also remarked that ‘I looked to the Liberal Party as the means for removing and remedying these grievances’ and that ‘I have made sacrifices of money and time and labour… I have made sacrifices of my opinions, to maintain the organization and to preserve the unity of the Liberal Party’. Chamberlain emphasised the value of the education question, which was taken up by nonconformists, for bridging the gap between classes. He addressed his fellow dissenters at the Eighty Club at the Westminster Palace Hotel in April 1885 advocating the value of brotherhood, through state socialism, as a remedy for socio-economic evils:

Do not ignore the fundamental right which every man holds in common, for a chance of decent existence, but try rather to give it the sanction of law and authority for it is the eternal foundation of justice and of equity.

This clearly implied that the value of the community and the material condition of its members were matters of ‘eternal’ justice. This was his main justification for measures that could be deemed socialistic: ‘because state socialism may cover very… unwise doctrines, that is no reason at all why we should refuse to recognise the fact that it is only the organisation of the whole people for the benefit of its members’. No doubt Chamberlain was careful not to alienate segments of the middle-class when he also commented:

the public good is a greater and higher object than any private interest, and the comfort and the happiness of the people... must not be sacrificed to the exaggerated claim of a privileged class who are now the exclusive possessors of the great gift of the Almighty to the human race.

God’s grace was not bestowed merely on the privileged which was often seen by various nonconformist sects as the bane of Anglicanism. His emphasis on minimal socialistic measures went hand-in-hand with his stress on the importance of corporate responsibility. In August, during a speech in Hull, he reaffirmed the importance of competition based on capacity while advocating the need to empower the lower classes

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135 Ibid, p. 5.
138 The Radical Platform: Speeches at Hull, Glasgow, Warrington, Inverness, Edinburgh, Autumn 1885, LSE selected Pamphlets, p. 3.
through schools, libraries and local government.\textsuperscript{140} The importance of building corporate authority, through the civic gospel, was also evident when Chamberlain echoed Dale’s own thesis on ‘the sanctity of private property’. The same year Chamberlain emphasised the importance of duty relating to property: ‘I think in the future we shall hear a great deal more about the obligations of property and we shall not hear quite so much about its rights’.\textsuperscript{141} This was strongly consonant with the notions of public duty for the sake of the wider community as advocated by Dawson and Dale.

\textbf{5. The National Liberal Federation}

The NLF was probably the most important organization, for the future of the Liberal Party, that was established by Birmingham’s corporate and nonconformist leadership during the period of the municipal socialism in the 1870s. Civic gospel rhetoric was an important device for promoting unity within the new organization. ‘Political liberty, it has been well said, if in one sense a sheer negative and a doctrine of rights, in another sense is thoroughly positive and a gospel of duties’ was Chamberlain’s bold assertion defending the Birmingham caucus in April 1876. With this distinction and emphasis on obligation there were parallels with Green’s philosophy and it was well known that Green had co-operated with many dissenters on matters of social reform.\textsuperscript{142} Leighton’s emphasis on Green’s role in channelling the interests of dissenters to social radicalism can easily be exaggerated as the beginnings of the social turn in dissent were much older.\textsuperscript{143} Chamberlain’s remark was undoubtedly aimed at nonconformists who made up the ranks of the NLF. The National Education League was also important on a national scale, but it was an organization that disbanded long before the onset of New Liberalism. Although the NEL embodied the interests of militant nonconformity, this continued within the NLF, albeit less overtly. While it has been demonstrated that the appeal to brotherhood and intersectional unity among nonconformists of the civic gospel was instrumental in establishing municipal initiatives and organizations, this extended to the formation of the caucus. The polemical importance of the civic gospel, in establishing the NLF, was shown by three features of the organization.

\textsuperscript{140} The Radical Platform: Speeches at Hull..., p. 3.
\textsuperscript{141} Joseph Chamberlain, The New Democracy: Its Wants, its Claims, and its Rights: Three Speeches... Delivered at Birmingham and Ipswich, Birmingham, 1885. LSE Selected Pamphlets, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{143} Leighton, The Greenian Moment, pp. 229-232.
One was that the NLF remained strongly imbued with Birmingham’s civic gospel culture. Nonconformity formed the backbone of the NLF. When originally established all the chief officers of the federation were Birmingham nonconformists.\(^\text{144}\) William Harris was the architect behind the caucus model and helped to found George Dawson’s Church of the Saviour.\(^\text{145}\) Harris formulated the caucus model of organization in the 1860s and with this system local constituency associations elected delegates to a national committee who in turn chose its officers from the selection.\(^\text{146}\) Harris’s suggestion was to amalgamate the work of the NEL, the Reform Union, the Liberation Society and the Land Reform Association.\(^\text{147}\) With the exclusion of the Reform Union, this meant that many supporters and members of these nonconformist organizations populated the ranks of the NLF. The most significant of these was the NEL, which was developed out of Birmingham’s own civic gospel culture and Chamberlain’s desire to build a radical platform by channelling the interests of nonconformists into one organization. In July 1877 Chamberlain stressed that ‘at present we are groping blindly in the dark. Liberals are at a loose end, each advocating some favourite reform, and producing little impression, because there is no uniformity or consistency in agitation.’\(^\text{148}\) The same year Chamberlain announced the disbanding of the NEL in favour of the NLF. Most of the officers of the NLF were selected from the NEL leadership.\(^\text{149}\) As the NEL was essentially a nonconformist organization, built on shared religious identities in Birmingham’s civic gospel culture, this fed into the NLF organization. The importance of shared nonconformist identities was therefore central in promoting the NLF.

Also, the NLF remained closely tied to Birmingham’s nonconformist leadership. The organization was structured in such a way that its representation was largely national, while it retained a strong Birmingham leadership. The NLF combined tightly controlled centralized leadership with the principle of mass politics, which meant that the corporate responsibility of Birmingham’s religious and political elite still remained important. Despite its claims to democratic representation, it was seen as coercive by contemporaries. Many saw it as merely a front for Chamberlain’s own political ambitions.\(^\text{150}\) Auspos views Chamberlain’s approach as autocratic, concerned with

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\(^{144}\) Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 257.

\(^{145}\) Ibid, p. 257.

\(^{146}\) Auspos, ‘Radicalism, Pressure Groups, and Party Politics’, p. 201.


\(^{149}\) Crosby, *Joseph Chamberlain*, p. 23.

controlling the opinion on the ground.\textsuperscript{151} Certainly, like many organizations it became a major platform for moulding public opinion and during the 1870s and 1880s it remained closely linked to Birmingham politics where Chamberlain’s associates exercised a great deal of influence over the organization. Even outside Birmingham, the NLF represented grassroots Liberalism where nonconformity was strongest.

The second feature was that the NLF brought cohesion to various faddist movements.\textsuperscript{152} The NLF was established to bring cohesion to the various faddist causes. Thus, appeals to shared nonconformist identities through the civic gospel clearly played a part in this aim. The NLF was established to bolster the radical cause by transcending narrow pressure group activity and provide a single conduit for faddism that challenged the party elite. In May 1877, this was outlined by William Harris at the inaugural assembly of the NLF who remarked that one objective was to promote unity over the divisions of single-issue causes.\textsuperscript{153} The importance of transcending sectional differences through the NLF was particularly evident when Chamberlain wrote that ‘the divisions which are so often caused by sectional or personal interests are rendered impossible or harmless by the width of base on which the association rests.’\textsuperscript{154}

It was a combination of strong centralized leadership and broad constituency representation that enabled Chamberlain to bring cohesion to the various faddist strands and no doubt appeals to ‘harmony’ built on shared nonconformist identities also played a major role. Chamberlain sought to incorporate the grass roots within the organization.\textsuperscript{155} In May 1877, a hundred associations responded to the circular inviting delegates to discuss the plan for the new Federation.\textsuperscript{156} Chamberlain was conscious of the dangers of faddist pressure group politics for the future of radicalism, and the NLF was well suited to bring them all under one organization. Chamberlain both institutionalised and tempered faddism by offering congruity in political objectives particularly through the civic gospel’s emphasis on inter-sectarian unity. Chamberlain declared that ‘Liberalism should not be narrowed by any stereotyped creed.’\textsuperscript{157} The NLF was largely a continuation of

\textsuperscript{151} Auspos, ‘Radicalism, Pressure Groups, and Party Politics’, p. 203.
\textsuperscript{152} Faddism refers to movements that were often dedicated to single issues without consideration of wider, more unified programmes. Politicians of the time often referred to sectionals who threatened to unbalance broader political objectives as faddists. Hawkins, \textit{British Party Politics}, p. 294.
\textsuperscript{153} Marsh, \textit{Joseph Chamberlain}, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{155} Auspos, ‘Radicalism, Pressure Groups, and Party Politics’, p. 198.
\textsuperscript{157} Chamberlain. ‘The Caucus’, p. 38.
pressure group politics which represented provincial nonconformity. The growth of the NLF marked the decline of pressure group agitation, as Chamberlain succeeded in absorbing faddism within the caucus machine. Many Liberal associations, throughout the country, who lacked a single organization welcomed the NLF. It grew to encompass a hundred local associations by 1879. During the election of 1880 the NLF came under the scrutiny of critics and in its defence the secretary Francis Schnadhorst wrote: ‘it is the mission of the Federation to teach that all Liberal organization must be representative’.

Out of a total of 198 Liberal Associations, 88 were affiliated with the NLF by 1884.

The organizational structure of the NLF brought more cohesion amongst associations and faddist ambitions. The NLF linked Birmingham with national level politics. Its structure was an extension of the Birmingham Liberal Association (BLA) only on a large scale. Throughout the late nineteenth century Birmingham radicals sought to channel the power of volunteer associations, that attracted support from radicals, into well-coordinated local Liberal associations. The NLF was largely borne out of the BLA. Chamberlain and Schnadhorst played a major part in its establishment. The BLA was pioneering as it was the first model of a modern democratic organization and it could sell itself as a popular representative organization. In 1877, Crosskey wrote:

Any town copying the Birmingham method… without at the same time attending to the political and general education of its people and cherishing some enthusiasm for righteousness and truth in national affairs, will find that it will not work.

Here he stressed the importance of the public service spirit as a platform for popular representation. He further emphasised that ‘in its activities a Liberal Association is essentially educational. It calls meetings both of men and women in every ward, at which great social and national questions are brought home to the mind and

159 Ibid, p. 201.
162 Francis Schnadhorst, County Organization, National Liberal Federation, Birmingham, 1880, Bristol Selected Pamphlets, p. 2.
163 Crosby, Joseph Chamberlain, p. 23.
164 Biagini, British Democracy and Irish Nationalism, p. 175.
conscience of the community’. The BLA was structured in such a way as to maximize local representation on the ground. From this, the NLF formed an ‘umbrella organization’ by incorporating many different pressure groups, while the Birmingham radicals still retained a strong executive function. With its headquarters in Birmingham, the character of NLF legislation reflected the agenda of Chamberlain and other leading radicals to a large extent. Chamberlain had rejected suggestions that the NLF executive be formed under the joint auspices of Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester, insisting that this model would have hampered its functions.

Third, was the importance of appealing to various classes, as reflected in the civic gospel’s emphasis on harmony between organised labour and corporate responsibility. It could also be argued that the NLF also represented the relationship between organised Liberalism and labour on the ground, where the shared religious values of the chapel were all the more important in developing radical relationships. At the inaugural conference of the NLF Harris also stressed that one of the most important aims of the organization was to maximise voting strength for overcoming divisions between the working and middle-classes. However, the degree that the NLF truly represented working class interests is not entirely clear; there was certainly an impression among working class representatives, such as George Howell, that the NLF was largely a middle-class organization. James Owen examines the complicated, yet pragmatic and somewhat fickle relationship between organised Liberalism and working-class radicalism, arguing that while the latter’s relationship with the caucus varied regionally working-class participation was relatively limited.

The NLF was certainly far removed from the shackles of high politics and in a strong position to appeal to those marginalised radicals. Compared with other Liberal organizations of the time, it was relatively democratic. Despite its strong executive power, the NLF was still a mass based extra-parliamentary political organization and could claim to speak for grass-root radicals. It was repeatedly outlined in its constitution that its first object was ‘to assist in the organisation throughout the country of Liberal Associations based on popular representation’.

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173 Owen, *Labour and the Caucus*, pp. 91-120.
174 National Liberal Federation: Constitution, 3rd February 1880, Liberal Association papers, ASSL, UoB, p. 27.
the 600 headed by a select group of the Council of Ten.\textsuperscript{175} While the organization was technically democratic, the scope for genuine working-class participation was more limited. However, it could legitimately claim that it was the most democratic Liberal organization of the time as it represented working-class interests more than the mainstream party. The caucus did favour middle-class Liberal candidates over working-class representatives, but the latter were still involved in the caucus in some measure as demonstrated by James Owen’s study.\textsuperscript{176} Moreover, the sense of non-inclusion from working-class representatives only made appeals to shared nonconformist identities more essential in maintaining cohesion. Most likely, the organizational structure of the NLF largely reflected that of Birmingham’s corporate leadership built on myths of class harmony but extended nationally.

In building on the ‘myths of cohesion’, class harmony was promoted through religious rhetoric of brotherhood. In 1878, when defending the NLF against charges that it was autocratic, Chamberlain was clearly conscious of the importance of appealing to artisans in Birmingham when he remarked that ‘Tyranny, dictation, wire-pulling, would be poor weapons for dealing with the shrewd tradesmen and artisans who form the bulk of electors in our manufacturing towns’.\textsuperscript{177} Moreover, Chamberlain’s contention that Liberal Party policy and its selection of candidates was too elitist carried some weight.\textsuperscript{178} Despite the authoritative role of Birmingham in the NLF, it could at least claim that its candidates were selected on a more democratic basis. Writing for the \textit{Nineteenth Century}, in July 1882, Schnadhorst boasted: ‘the Caucus, both local and national, is lengthening its cords and strengthening its stakes. Every fresh attack brings it new adherents.’\textsuperscript{179} In promoting the NLF as a democratic organization, Schnadhorst emphasised the importance of brotherhood and unity. When discussing meetings of the NLF he wrote:

\begin{quote}
They sustain the interest of the members of the party in public affairs... quicken their intelligence, extend their political knowledge, and by bringing into contact men belonging to varying social grades, and affording opportunities for the free discussion... they maintain the party in the unity of the spirit and the bonds of peace...\textsuperscript{180}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{176} Owen, \textit{Labour and the Caucus}, pp. 91-120.  
\textsuperscript{177} Chamberlain, ‘The Caucus’, p. 730.  
\textsuperscript{178} Auspos, ‘Radicalism, Pressure Groups, and Party Politics’, p. 199.  
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid, p. 16.
Schnadhorst’s emphasis on the ‘unity of spirit’ and ‘bonds of peace’ brought about through the NLF for members of ‘varying social grades’ was clearly an appeal to Christian kinship over class division. The NLF incorporated nonconformist and Liberal faddism into a coherent organization, which enabled Birmingham’s leaders to establish a more programmatic approach to politics.

6. The Radical Programme

The importance of appealing to shared nonconformist values and identities was evident in Chamberlain’s Radical Programme. Some historians, such as Peter Marsh, have characterised the programme as hostile to nonconformist sectarianism, however there is evidence that appeals to nonconformist unity was essential.\(^{181}\) The programme’s leaders were nonconformists, many of whom were devout. There was also a great deal of devolution of responsibility between specialists in formulating the programme.\(^{182}\) Marsh and other historians have exaggerated the role of John Morley and other secularists in shaping the initiative.\(^{183}\) John Morley may have urged Chamberlain into action, but his piecemeal commitment to laissez-faire and tendency to compromise meant he became increasingly dissociated from the programme. He merely contributed one chapter on the issue of religious equality.\(^{184}\) Birmingham radical and Unitarian Jesse Collings was more devoted and contributed to a majority of the articles on land reform.\(^{185}\) The journalist T. H. S. Escott was also committed to the programme from the outset. Escott enjoyed a lengthy association with Chamberlain.\(^{186}\) Escott had two qualities as a journalist, one was his conviction and the other was the ability to promote radical agendas.\(^{187}\)

Also, the programme, whilst national, bore the stamp of Birmingham’s local radicalism and the civic gospel.\(^{188}\) The NLF became an important conduit for promoting the programme. At Bradford, in October 1885, the officers of the NLF drew special attention to the series of articles published on the programme. Although they did not agree with every proposal outlined, they requested that the NLF assisted in circulating the

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\(^{182}\) Ibid, p. 168.

\(^{183}\) Ibid, p. 168.


literature and promoting its cause. Chamberlain’s years of municipal socialism in local politics largely coloured his national vision for the programme. It was finally presented to the public, for the coming election of 1885, but much of the preliminary campaigning had been done in Birmingham. Birmingham was also one of the most significant cities to reap the rewards of this new programme, as all seven seats were won by Chamberlain and other Liberal associates. Chamberlain’s policy directives were not entirely unilateral as activities between members were strongly convergent, but he was a major influence. Activities between radical leaders were often well co-ordinated or tightly controlled, as shown by their lengthy correspondence and the structure of local organizations.

The agenda to build on shared values and interests of nonconformists was evidenced by the character of the proposals. Chamberlain wrote to Schnadhorst in August 1883 to discuss the publication of the proposals outlining the importance of ‘Free Church, Free Schools and Free Land’ where the latter was essential for ‘the provision of better dwellings for the poor’. Chamberlain and Escott cooperated on a series of articles in the *Fortnightly Review* advocating these proposals between 1883 and 1885. Chamberlain had a major part in overseeing the content of these papers. Chamberlain and other leaders were eager to promote common values and interests of nonconformity, no doubt to help paper over the cracks that were showing in Birmingham’s workforce. In July 1883 there was a major strike of the Staffordshire Iron Workers as reported in the *Birmingham Daily Post*.

In September 1883, Escott spoke to Chamberlain outlining the main proposals: ‘the measures to which it will be the duty of the Radical party to address… will be conveniently ranged under the three heads, Education, Land, Taxation’. Several proposals were made including free elementary education, the more equitable purchase of land, fiscal reform, disestablishment, the extension of local government and manhood suffrage. Not all proposals carried the same weight, as some were only prospective
while others were concrete. While there was emphasis on pressing socio-economic issues, the nonconformist campaigns for compulsory education featured highest on the agenda. In 1884, during a speech at the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, Crosskey remarked that ‘free inquiry… would deliver the souls of men from grave and terrible anxieties, while it would breathe a new life into Christianity as a power for establishing the Kingdom of God upon Earth’. He continued:

Should any who are not members of Unitarian or Free Christian Churches read these pages, I trust that their sense of what is just to all classes and sections of the community will induce them to give their strong and faithful assistance in every effort that may be made to redress the wrongs inflicted upon those from whom they differ the most widely.

The importance of appealing to nonconformists was also reflected in the stress placed on disestablishment, which vastly outstripped disestablishment’s prioritization on the programme. Chamberlain outlined his support for disestablishment only on principle while compulsory land purchase and free education were imperative for election success. Chamberlain wrote to Dale, in December 1886, agreeing to chair a meeting of the Central Nonconformist Committee and on the issue of disestablishment he confided: ‘I know of no other question on which it would be possible to unite the advanced section of the Liberal party’ on the basis of its appeal to dissenters. Chamberlain had cooperated with Escott through the press, unveiling the programme in 1883 in the *Fortnightly Review*. Escott wrote an article on ‘the radical programme’ seizing on the shared nonconformist hostility to Anglicanism condemning the institution as the cradle of Conservatism. He wrote that ‘the fundamental doctrine and uniform aims of Conservatism are the preservation of class privilege’ and ‘the Church is an organization of the privilege, and the alliance between parson and publican, Bible and beer’. Escott also emphasised the evils of Anglicanism and class privilege. He claimed that social reform was hindered by the religious establishment and that ‘in a majority of parishes the landed proprietors of the district, the clergymen, the farmers, and the publicans constitute

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200 Chamberlain to Dale, 14 December 1886, JC5/20/58, CRC, BU.
a political quadrilateral, which is the main obstacle in the path of all social improvement’, concluding: ‘when the period arrives for the householders of the neighbourhood to choose between a representative who is in favour of, and who is opposed to, social reform, they make common cause and unite their efforts to return the Conservative candidate’.  

Nonconformity was promoted for its spiritual independence in contributing to the social good unfettered by the shackles of Anglicanism. Escott claimed that if the Anglican clergy were as free as the nonconformist ‘the baneful effect which they exercise in a variety of political questions will disappear’. 

One additional important proposal was land reform which featured very high on the programme. Rich landowners were singled out for criticism as Escott and other Liberals sought to build on the same language promoting class harmony through agrarian reform. In 1883, when promoting the radical programme, Escott wrote:

The greater the number of those who have an interest in the soil, the deeper will be the popular attachment to it. The conflict of interests will disappear; and our land system, instead of being as it is now, the symbol of strife – the embodiment of the privileges of the few as opposed to the rights and aspirations of the many- will become the guarantee of class concord and harmony.

Apart from Chamberlain himself, Collings was probably the most important contributor to the land reform programme. The Land Nationalization Society established the Allotments Extension Association that year. In November, Collings published an article stressing the importance of reforming the ‘antiquated structure of the English land system’. He emphasised that ‘… the happiness and social condition of the people, are bound up in an inseparable manner with the condition and cultivation of land’. In 1884, Collings in opposing unrestricted free-trade in land, wrote:

Men are recognising and accepting the various social duties and responsibilities which belong to them, and are admitting that certain blessings and advantages, which alone make life worth

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204 Ibid, p. 437.
208 Ibid, p. 83.
210 Ibid, p. 625.
living, can only be secured to the poorer classes of the community by the action of representative government, which is simply a name for organised and corporate effort.  

Throughout the 1880s Chamberlain travelled to several cities in Britain, promoting radical objectives to seize the political initiative from Gladstone. In August 1883, Chamberlain requested a list of the names of one hundred ‘leaders of advanced liberal opinion’ to send copies of the radical programme advocated in the *Fortnightly Review.* Given the important role of nonconformists within the leadership and rank-and-file, religious rhetoric remained important in promoting the initiative. The programme was also a consequence of frustration with Gladstone’s more moderate party politics and the recent passing of the Franchise Act. Chamberlain’s group in Birmingham were attempting to seize the political initiative by appealing to the popular vote as well as within the party. Throughout the 1880s, Chamberlain and other leading Liberals of Birmingham gave several speeches, echoing the rhetoric of the civic gospel. During a speech at Ipswich in January 1885, Chamberlain tried to balance out the ‘sacredness of private property’ and the interests of the poor when he announced that ‘if the rights of property are sacred, surely the rights of the poor are entitled to especial reverence. Naboth’s vineyard deserves protection quite as much as Ahab’s palace’. This was a biblical reference to the Old Testament story of Naboth’s Vineyard, and Chamberlain drew an analogy between Naboth and rural workers. This is particularly significant given the emphasis on land reform. Chamberlain also emphasised the responsibility of the state ‘to lessen the evils of misfortune and poverty’:

> We are told that this country is the paradise of the rich. It should be our task to see that it does not become the purgatory of the poor. It should be our task to strive – each according to his opportunity – to leave the world a little better than we found it.

He further announced that ‘the agricultural labourer is the most pathetic figure in our whole social system. He is condemned by apparently inexorable conditions to a life of unremitting and hopeless toil’. The same year, when promoting the extension of the

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212 Chamberlain to Schnadhorst, 6 August 1883, p. 1.
213 Chamberlain, *The New Democracy*, p. 23
214 1 Kings 21.
powers of local authority in purchasing land for ‘public purposes at its fair value’, Chamberlain remarked:

I believe that by such a proposal we should do something to fix the labourers in the country, to tie them to land, and satisfy that earth-hunger which God has implanted in all who are connected directly with that industry’. 217

Frequently in speeches Chamberlain and other radicals would play on the same religious themes, characteristic of the civic gospel, in advocating the new programme. In January 1885, Chamberlain announced several proposals to be introduced including the introduction of a more ‘equitable system of parliamentary representation’, fairer taxation and land reform. 218 Land reform was given highest priority as demonstrated by Chamberlain’s assertion: ‘however important the question of the revision of taxation may be it sinks into insignificance beside the question of the land’. 219 Chamberlain defended his proposals against critics and asked ‘you do not like my proposals; what are yours?... What gospel of glad tidings do you bring in your hands?’ and he retorted sarcastically:

they are not to excite themselves to the belief that they have any wrongs to be redressed... the working classes of this country are to continue in the future as they have in the past - to order themselves lowly and reverently to all their betters, and to do their duty in the state of life to which it shall please God to call them. I think that that is a rich man’s gospel and a barren programme. 220

The association between ‘God’ and ‘gospel’ is very pronounced here. While Chamberlain often used the term ‘gospel’, it was often employed in a religious context as demonstrated by internal evidence. While common religious identities and values helped Chamberlain to establish corporate machinery, throughout the 1880s, in introducing the radical programme, the civic gospel still remained polemically important on a national scale.

218 Bogdanor, The People and the Party System, p. 115
219 Chamberlain, The New Democracy, p. 32.
220 Ibid, p. 29.
7. Conclusion: The Legacy of Birmingham Radicalism

The cross-sectional appeals of the civic gospel, in building on corporate responsibility, were central in developing the most important organizational frameworks for the future of New Liberalism. The civic gospel enabled the formation of organizational structures that would prove invaluable to the radicals in the long term. By appealing to shared nonconformist values, they gave a much-needed impetus to the cause of marginalised radicalism enabling the establishment of a more coherent radical platform.

The radical programme provided a model for future social reforms. Jeremy Smith even suggests that Chamberlain’s emphasis on the role of the state ‘pre-figured the direction of British government for the next seventy years’. Chamberlain was not the first politician to publicly challenge the values of laissez-faire, but he was certainly the first to offer a serious threat. The tenor of his proposals was clearly directed towards the accommodation of capital and labour to preserve the values of liberal individualism. This is particularly evident in efforts to win the support of the newly enfranchised electorate. Like Edwardian Liberalism, the aim was to improve the condition of the working classes through reform to encourage individual self-elevation. This heralded the first major programme that was both systematic and adopted by a significant section of the Liberal Party. Its proposals were largely an extension of Birmingham radicalism and the programme was the first to suggest serious state interventionism to address socio-economic issues.

It served as a model for later Liberal reforms of the early twentieth century. This is evident by the significance of the proposals themselves as precursor to what later became mainstream Liberal policy. Considering the demands for social legislation and threat of labour movements in the early twentieth century, Liberal politicians naturally turned to the last example of pioneering social reform and with his importance in contemporary Edwardian liberal narratives, Chamberlain’s programme was a logical choice. It was often maintained that the loss of Chamberlain to Unionism, after the split with Gladstone over Home Rule, not only delayed the course of social reform but was in

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some measure responsible for the decline of the Liberal Party. This was the view shared by many parliamentary Liberals at the time.\textsuperscript{225}

The long-term effect of the NLF was that it strengthened the cause of radicalism in the party. The organization, dominated by a combination of radicalism and nonconformist interests, came to occupy a central role in the Liberal Party when extra-parliamentary agencies became more integrated with London. In 1886, the NLF moved its headquarters from Birmingham to the capital.\textsuperscript{226} It brought into the central Liberal agenda the most coherent national organization for the radicals and nonconformist social reformers of recent years. Outside the party, it represented a dangerous threat to Liberal orthodoxy and Whiggism, inside it was an important prop for the radical wing. In September 1886, Schnadhorst was reappointed secretary of the NLF in London.\textsuperscript{227} It was after the party came to reflect the integration of national organizations at Westminster that the NLF was able to direct mainstream Liberal Party policy. Despite his reluctance Gladstone was forced to accept this growing radical presence in high politics. The appeal of shared nonconformist identities and values was even more essential as the NLF merged with London. Nonconformists were gaining more impact within the party with the growing integration of marginalised associations and the NLF. Gladstone had established a strong nonconformist social base, but with the integration of the NLF and other associations, militant radical dissenters, hitherto marginalised, became more central in the party.\textsuperscript{228}

Without the work of Birmingham radicals, in transcending mere sectarian interests through the common religious language of the civic gospel, local initiatives would have been as piecemeal as they were in other cities. The radical programme and the NLF would have been inconceivable. In Birmingham, the gospel grew out of local nonconformist traditions enabled by its strong religious culture. This was the best example of the impact of provincial nonconformity on reshaping the Liberal Party in the long term, some three decades before their proposals came to fruition with the New Liberal programme.

\textsuperscript{227} Jennings, \textit{Party Politics Volume 2}, p. 188.
\textsuperscript{228} Bebbington, \textit{William Ewart Gladstone}, p. 183.

1. Introduction

Over time the nonconformist influence over the Liberal Party spread from local to national politics, and examining this change is essential for demonstrating the long-term causal relationship between nonconformity and New Liberalism. The two previous chapters dealt with the use of shared religious values and identities to develop cooperative platforms focusing on provincial nonconformity. This chapter considers the transformation of the Liberal Party as nonconformity grew from local radicalism to a national group in Parliament. Through this period of transition, it also considers how the party maintained its sense of continuity and cohesion, particularly as Liberal ideology was being redefined to deal with labour issues and the growing demands for interventionism in the socio-economic sphere.

There is a wealth of historical literature that examines the changing role of nonconformity in relation to the Liberal Party before 1906.1 Much historical scholarship focuses more heavily on the period of Gladstonian politics before the 1880s.2 The older model of Gladstone’s politics reflecting the balance of interests, advocated by such historians as D. A. Hamer, have been challenged by revisionists such as Jonathan Parry and Eugenio Biagini who examine the broader relationship between Gladstone and popular politics. For Hamer, Gladstone was the ultimate mediator who brought unity to high politics contrasted with the faddism outside Westminster.3 Biagini attributes Gladstone’s success to his charismatic leadership, appealing to the rank-and-file and subaltern classes in cementing mid to late nineteenth century Liberalism.4 However, historiography for the period from the 1880s onwards focusing exclusively on the

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4 Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform*. 

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relations between the Liberal Party and nonconformity is less abundant. Class and socio-economic considerations are considered more important,\(^5\) most notably reflected in the works of James Robert Moore and P. F. Clarke.\(^6\)

However, as shown in the introduction, scholarship on the role of nonconformity in politics has increased as more historians came to the view that nonconformity remained vital in various spheres of late Victorian life.\(^7\) In the later chapters of the third volume of *The Dissenters* Michael Watts examines the growing national role of nonconformists in the Liberal Party relating to issues such as education and anti-imperialism reflecting the enduring movement of nonconformist conscience and social reform before 1906. One chapter focuses on Christian socialism and philanthropy in the 1890s before tentatively focusing on New Liberalism.\(^8\)

A gap still remains in historical knowledge between provincial nonconformity and the growth of the national politics of New Liberalism. There are many areas that could be further explored, such as the role of prohibitionist polemics in the nationalisation of nonconformity. There is a lack of systematic study of the relationship between New Liberalism and prohibition through such organizations as the United Kingdom Alliance.\(^9\)

This chapter helps to address this shortcoming by showing the importance of certain nonconformist movements in maintaining the ideological continuity of Liberalism during a period when the Liberal Party’s very identity was threatened.

This chapter examines the role of provincial nonconformity, between 1860 and 1906, in relation to Edwardian Liberalism. In charting the radicalization of the Liberal Party through the growing impact on nonconformity through greater integration with London, this chapter shows that nonconformist movements helped to sustain the political force and integrity of Liberalism during a period of transition. It examines the significance of nonconformist movements relating to two central themes that characterised Liberalism at the time, namely the party’s ideological basis and sectional issues of class. The party depended on maintaining an ideological consistency when embracing more advanced Liberal reforms and on balancing out sectional support from various classes. The chapter demonstrates that groups such as the UKA provided the party with an ideological sense

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\(^7\) A few leading examples include: Parsons, ‘From Dissenters to Free Churchmen’; Bebbington, ‘Nonconformity and Electoral Sociology’, pp. 633–56; Bebbington, *Victorian Nonconformity*.

\(^8\) Watts, *The Dissenters*, pp. 231-365.

of continuity and identity in reshaping Liberalism to accommodate the changing political climate, particularly over the turn of the century.

2. From Provincial Nonconformity to High politics: The Campaigns for Compulsory Secular Education and the Role of State

The rise in parliamentary nonconformity between the 1880s and 1906 went hand in hand with the movement for compulsory education. In terms of New Liberalism, nonconformist campaigns for compulsory education are not considered ideologically important and more emphasis is understandably placed on labour reforms. The chronological focus of most historical literature on education and nonconformity rarely extends beyond 1906, including the works of Noel Richards and John T. Smith.10 The historiography examining the importance of the nonconformists’ education campaigns, such as the 1902 Education Act, emphasises the strategic importance of these nonconformist movements for the party.11 Watts dedicates his last chapter to the campaign against the 1902 Education Act, which he maintains helped to rally nonconformists behind the Party culminating in the 1906 election victory.12 But in terms of ideological significance the movement for compulsory education is not considered central in the New Liberalism programme. While legislation relating to more industrial questions or the People’s Budget constituted a clear departure from nineteenth century Liberalism, it is easy to be overly categorical about what reforms were characteristically New or old Liberal. In some cases, the party’s preoccupation with educational reform before and during 1906, has been associated with the old Liberal politics of retrenchment and reform. Duncan Tanner describes the education question as one of many ‘classic old liberal issues’ that ‘dominated Liberal politics in 1906’.13 However, education was not merely about one particular issue but encompassed a whole sphere of debate. Educational reform was neither tied to New or old Liberalism and was not an unchanging tradition,

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but needs to be understood contextually. The emphasis on compulsory education merely changed over time.

The movement for compulsory education, propelled by nonconformity, played a major role in the transformation of the Liberal Party. Along with prohibitionist polemics, the changing emphasis on compulsory education pursued by nonconformist groups was instrumental in providing the Liberals with a sense of continuity in the changing political climate of the late nineteenth century. Firstly, advances in legislation relating to compulsory education were significant in changing the parameters of political discussion on the role of the state, reflected in the necessary changes from the political language of laissez-faire to more socialistic argument. This was broadly consistent with the changing Liberal polemical emphasis from J. S. Mill to T. H. Green, and debates on compulsory education were a microcosm of this. The importance of the education question in the ideological transformation of Liberalism was demonstrated by the connection between nonconformist campaigns for civic, religious and political liberty, and questions of social reform. They often went hand-in-hand, as the different spheres of reform were often fought under the same banner, particularly as many nonconformists vented their campaigns for religious equality through the broader campaign for secular compulsory education which entailed redefining the role of the state.

There were other movements that were significant in this respect, but the education question was considered one of the most important issues of the late nineteenth century. At the conference of nonconformists in 1872 Jacob Bright declared ‘the education question has now taken a foremost rank among the political problems of our day’. School boards only became empowered to make education compulsory in their own districts. Bright was a Quaker, Liberal MP who supported full compulsory education and was often identified with the radical wing of the party. Compulsory education brought into question the role of the state at a crucial time of change in Liberal politics. In the 1870s and 1880s, there were many articles on the role of the state relating to the compulsory education of children that necessitated discussion about individual liberty. Laissez-Faire had been challenged before but not on the same practical and systematic scale that encompassed the education of children throughout the whole country. This was particularly prevalent around the time of the Education Act of 1870, which introduced a
degree of compulsory elementary education by establishing school boards. In practice it was only tentative, as the voluntary principle did not compel school boards to enforce it.\footnote{Frank Prochaska, \textit{Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain: The Disinherited Spirit} (Oxford, 2006), p. 51.}

Publications reflected a number of different perspectives on the role of the state in education, ranging from socialists like the Trade Unionist Robert Applegarth to Conservative MPs such as John White.\footnote{Robert Applegarth, \textit{Compulsory Attendance at School: The Working Men’s View}, Birmingham, 1870, Bristol Selected Pamphlets, pp. 1-4; John White, ‘The Laws on Compulsory Education’, \textit{Fortnightly Review London} Vol. 19 Iss. 114 (June, 1876), pp. 897-918.}

The role of the state was central to the issue of compulsory education for many people. Although many emphasised non-interventionism, it still brought into question the role of the state. Divisions about what constituted compulsion as either protection or a common good, led to growing acceptance of greater state interventionism. Campaigns for compulsory education constituted an important step towards redefining the role of the state in the social sphere. The significance of ‘education’ made it hard not to consider this as it encompassed such issues as obligation, individual liberty, state aid, national welfare and protection. The degree that it challenged the role of state relating to individualism can be gauged by examining the arguments of those opposed to the measure. Many politicians simply saw it as an infringement on individual liberty, particularly in the 1870s and 1880s. Although most staunch opponents were Tories, there were a number of Liberals and radicals who had major reservations. In 1869, the ex-Chartist and ardent educationalist William Lovett expressed concerns over its implications for ‘English ideas of Liberty’.\footnote{Biagini, \textit{Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform}, pp. 199-200.}

Even among its supporters, different perspectives on what constituted compulsory education were promoted, but over time the emphasis on notions more consistent with positive liberty were bound to increase. The Education Act of 1870, advocating a degree of compulsory primary education, was often defended on grounds of minimum interference with the individual. Some advocates of compulsory education could claim they were merely protecting the interests of children. This is summarised by George Brodrick’s bold assertion that primary school education was consistent with ‘the Liberal principles of Liberty, civil equality, and the confidence of the people’.\footnote{George Brodrick, \textit{Liberal Principles}, London, 1877, Earl Grey Pamphlets Collection, p. 29.} Brodrick was a historian with strong associations with the Liberal Party.\footnote{‘Brodrick, George Charles’, \textit{The Concise Dictionary of National Biography}, Volume I: A–F. (Oxford University Press, 1992).} J. S. Mill was considered polemically significant here. Mill supported compulsory primary education as a necessary
measure for the welfare of individuals and for society: ‘There are certain primary elements and means of knowledge, which it is in the highest degree desirable that all human beings born into the community should acquire during childhood’. For Mill, a degree of compulsory education was essential for intellectual autonomy. He considered opposition from parents as not only restrictive of true liberty but also a breach of duty: ‘If their parents… have the power of obtaining for them this instruction, and fail to do it, they commit a double breach of duty, towards the children themselves, and towards the members of the community generally, who are all liable to suffer seriously from the consequences of ignorance and want of education in their fellow-citizens. It is therefore an allowable exercise of the powers of government to impose on parents the legal obligation of giving elementary instruction to children’. 22 While supporting compulsory education Mill was also opposed to state interference in this sphere: ‘One thing must be strenuously insisted on; that the government must claim no monopoly for its education’. 23 Many cited Mill’s arguments on education. In 1870, the Anglican priest William Allen Whitworth argued that the notion that ‘if education is compulsory, the state must provide the schools’ was a fallacy: ‘I am only concerned to show that compulsory education does not necessarily imply such a measure. On this point, the opinion of Mr. John Stuart Mill will be listened to with respect’. 24

Compulsory education was often justified as a minimal restraint on liberty which protected the child’s welfare. In 1870, the economic historian Frederick Seebohm stated: ‘It is the acknowledged duty of the state to look specially after the rights of those classes in the nation who cannot protect themselves’. He continued: ‘It is undoubtedly the primary duty of parents to educate their children: but in the case of foundlings and paupers and neglected children: …the state is obliged to interfere and acting in loco parentis to secure children their rights’. 25

But the parameters of discussion changed by necessity as it was increasingly hard to defend further compulsory education on non-interventionist grounds. Green’s arguments were similar to Mill’s, but with different emphasis. Both promoted compulsory education as a ‘duty’, but while Mill emphasised it as a right to safeguard against ignorance and encourage autonomy, Green saw it more as a ‘moral duty’ for the common

23 Ibid, p. 667.
good. Although this broad distinction is not entirely clear, the positive role of the state in the social sphere was certainly more clearly advocated in Green’s philosophy. The problem was that once Liberals introduced some degree of compulsion, demands for a more universal education grew. There was a growing acceptance that without extending the legislation on compulsory education to make it more universal the system would be ineffective. In 1874, Jacob Bright emphasised how true universal education could not be ‘obtained except by compulsion and with general school boards.’

Compulsory education demanded large sums of public money if it was to be truly free. The National Education Union published the findings of the Report of the committee of Council on Education, which stated that £6,530,674 of school funding came from voluntary contributions. Even though this figure should be treated with some caution, significant financial expenses clearly depended on voluntary aid and thus demands for state funding only increased by necessity. The Act of 1870 did not provide full free education and only paupers could apply for financial aid. The Sandon Act of 1876 required that children be available for proper education, through the monitoring of school attendance and prohibiting full time employment for minors below the age of 10. Liberal MP A. J. Mundella had campaigned for stricter compulsory education. When presenting prizes at an art exhibition at Fitzwilliam Hall, Mundella criticised the inconsistency of school boards in ensuring compulsory education. The Mundella Education Act of 1880 made compulsory education mandatory by enforcing compliance by the local school boards and setting the minimum age to 10. Over time, it was increasingly difficult to defend compulsory education on mere protectionist grounds. In 1893 elementary education was made free which demanded greater state funding and the move towards compulsory secondary education was growing, although that would not be implemented until 1918.

Demands for further educational reforms were inexorably linked to nonconformist interests. Although some nonconformists were simply resistant to any funding for Anglican schools due to mere sectarian interests, a significant number also sought non-sectarian compulsory education. Nonconformists were the main driving force behind the movement for compulsory education. The Act of 1870 was overwhelmingly in favour of

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32 Prochaska, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain*, p. 51.
Anglicanism, as the Anglican Church still ran 4 out of 5 primary schools affected by the legislation. Many nonconformists channelled their frustration with the 1870 Act into campaigning for full universal secular education. Considering Anglican schools’ numerical superiority, full secular education favoured nonconformists as enforcing broad religious pluralism was an unrealistic goal. The need to redress the Act of 1870 meant that further justifications for compulsion were necessary. Many saw the principle of compulsory state education as inconsistent with any form of religious teaching. In 1872, the Congregational minister Henry Richard remarked: ‘if you give the state the right to compel one man to pay for the teaching of another man’s religion… as is done under the Education Act, compel everybody to pay for the religious teaching of everybody else; and to enforce this…by penalties of law… you pass at once into the region of religious persecution’. For many nonconformists, full compulsory education was synonymous with the drive for secular education. In 1884, Henry Crosskey of Birmingham declared: ‘when education is taken charge of and supported by the state, the system adopted ought, I contend, to be national in the widest and deepest sense. No sect ought to benefit by a national system of education’. The following year he wrote that ‘when education is supported by the state, the system adopted ought to be national in the widest and truest sense.’

While primary education was often defended by a number of Liberals of the Gladstonian era on grounds that it protected the interests of children, an increasing number from the radical wing of the party promoted its value as a national and social good. In 1870 Jacob Bright drew a comparison between the positive character of public controlled prohibition and universal compulsory education, further remarking that the education bill ‘was not passed in the interest of ignorance: It was passed on the interest of those who wish to have an instructed people… and it gives to communities of this kingdom the power to constrain the children to occupy these seats’. Bright was only discussing primary school education which was not yet fully compulsory throughout the country. However, Bright and other nonconformists had campaigned to amend the 1870 Education Act. The same year Bright’s undenominational amendment of Clause 25 was

36 Crosskey, Sectarianism in National Education, p. 4.
37 Henry Crosskey, National Education in Relation to the Principles of Religious Equality, Birmingham, 1885, Bristol Selected Pamphlets, p.4.
38 The United Kingdom Alliance: A Full Report... October 26th 1870, p. 17.
defeated in Parliament. Clause 25 specified that fees would be paid for poorer children who attended denominational schools (which were mostly Anglican) out of the rates. Bright was not opposed to every measure introduced by the Act and he saw the introduction of a degree of compulsory education as a progressive step. Two years later Bright declared: ‘I hold compulsory attendance to be so necessary that I wish to see it made an absolute law throughout the entire kingdom’. In December 1875, during an address at Charles Town British School in Pendleton, Jacob Bright reinforced this point arguing that universal education should be compulsory for the sake of the moral character of people. Two years before the Mundella Education Act John Bright declared that a school ‘may raise and bless the individual; it may give comfort to the family circle… It may check the barbarism even of the nation’. The notion of compulsory education for the benefit of individuals was ideologically synergic with Edwardian Liberal polemics. Green promoted compulsory education on the basis that it helped realise ‘the idea of perfection’ through the refinement of natural impulses. Green argued that compulsory education was a ‘moral duty’.

The movement for compulsory education only grew over the following decades. In 1885, at Oldham Miles Platting Institute, Jacob Bright remarked that the development of ‘individuals and nations’ to a ‘higher level’ depended on education. New Liberalism was promoted on the basis of ‘equality of opportunity’ by such thinkers as J. A. Hobson, but these arguments were in common currency among nonconformist radicals. Compulsory education was an important step towards removing social obstacles and enabling individuals from a variety of economic backgrounds to develop. In 1896, John Clifford wrote: ‘the Romanticist vies with the Anglican in his eager solicitude for more money for denominational schools; and at last, Free Churchmen have ceased to doubt the economy and wisdom of employing the nation’s money in training and drilling the nation’s children’.

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39 Parry, Democracy and Religion, p. 147.
40 General Conference of Nonconformists Held in Manchester, January 23rd, 24th, and 25th, 1872, Manchester, 1872, Bristol Selected Pamphlets, pp. 37-8.
42 ‘Sunday School Conference at Rochdale: Speech of Mr. John Bright’, Manchester Guardian, 20 April 1878, p. 5.
43 Green, Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation, p. 161.
44 ‘Mr Jacob Bright, MP, on Education’, Manchester Guardian, 5 February 1885, p. 8.
3. The Campaigns for Compulsory Secular Education and the Working Class

The campaign’s appeal to the balance of class interests was important for maintaining the continuity of Liberalism. Although there is some argument for its ideological significance, its role in shoring up support from various classes was essential. It represented an informal alliance between extra-parliamentary Liberals, the radical wing and militant nonconformity. Chiefly, the campaign for compulsory education enabled nonconformist grievances to be channelled into a single campaign, that over time gave way to greater denominational unity. Between the latter half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, nonconformist sectarian allegiances gave way to the greater interests in pursuing compulsory secular education. Before 1877, the NEL was the main platform for this campaign. The main goal of the NEL was to achieve non-sectarian compulsory education and its membership was predominantly nonconformist. The NEL was a local organization that affected politics on a national scale and whose influence continued within the NLF. Campaigns for further compulsory education in defiance of the 1870 Education Act only added to this. In 1870 the Manchester Nonconformist Association was established with the sole purpose of campaigning against the Education Act.47

The aims of nonconformist radicals could draw not only on support from various denominations but also working and middle-class radicals concerned with further extending compulsory education. The NEU sought to maintain religious teaching in schools and drew much of its support from Anglicans and Tories. The annual meeting of the Manchester District Branch of the NEL in 1870 resolved to promote ‘the election upon the School boards of persons determined to promote un-sectarian and Compulsory Education’.48 The NEL shared many common aims through political nonconformity. In 1872 Jacob Bright declared to a conference of nonconformists that ‘we are met as an assembly of persons with many differences of religious belief… but we are nevertheless bound together by the ties of a common principle’.49 The drive for compulsory secular education owed much more to nonconformity and the NEL than the NEU. In 1890, Henry Roscoe wrote: ‘I... attach less importance than many to what is termed the religious difficulty. What we must have are good schools, what we must insist upon is that bad

48 *Report of the Executive Committee of the Manchester and Salford District Branch of the National Education League, Including the Balance Sheet of the Treasurer, and the Resolutions Adopted at the Annual Meeting, Held in the Mayor’s Parlour, on the 17th November, 1870*, Manchester, 1870, Bristol Selected Pamphlets (1870), p. 6.
49 *General Conference of Nonconformists Held in Manchester*, p. 37.
schools are rooted out, and the inefficient ones improved’. 50 Many nonconformists could content themselves with removing Anglican privileges by supporting secular compulsory education against overly formalistic sacerdotalism. Wesleyan Samuel Cox supported secular education on the basis that ‘the Churches in these realms have not the spirit of Christ’ and that sectarian teaching was overly imposing on doctrine. 51

Nonconformist Liberals on the ground could claim a common cause in the pursuit of free compulsory and national education that appealed to both the working and middle classes. For middle-class Liberals it represented an acceptable step towards wider social legislation as demonstrated by the breadth of campaigns pursued over the issue. In 1890, Roscoe wrote that ‘until the richer classes feel that the thorough education of the poorer is the greatest possible safeguard against upheaval, and the poorer classes see that in education lies their best hope in ameliorating their condition, the full benefits of [educational] expenditure will not be realised’. 52 Liberals continued to attract working-class adherents to the cause of educational reform. Four years later the Liberal MP, M.A. C. Fenwick, addressing a local Wesleyan schoolroom in Lymm, in Manchester, appealed to the labour movements to transcend mere class divisions whilst also lambasting the injustices of the privileged classes of days past. 53 What gave education its polemical force was the urgent demands for education among certain members of the lower classes. While a significant number of workers were opposed to compulsory education for a variety of reasons, such as concern over losing a potential wage earner or being encumbered with having to pay educational rates, some still took an active interest. 54 The report for the EAS conducted by Joseph Nunn claimed that 42,000 minors were not registered on school books within the city of Manchester alone. 55

Nonconformist Liberals and working-class radicals shared common antipathies built on popular Liberalism which continued into the early twentieth century. A significant number channelled their grievances through the singular political objective of secular compulsory education. Many nonconformists continued to oppose Anglicanism on broad sectarian grounds, to promote greater denominational unity and inter-class relations. Liberal dissenters in South Manchester publicly pursued a line of religious

55 Joseph Nunn, Facts and Fallacies on the Condition of Popular Education in Manchester, with Reference to the New Education Bill, Manchester, 1866, Bristol Selected Pamphlets, pp. 7-10.
equality and Anglicanism was seen as the enemy of egalitarian education. In 1890, Roscoe wrote that ‘commission after commission recommended drastic changes in the curriculum of our elementary schools, but little or nothing has been done... and yet - to our national shame, be it said - it was strangled in its combination of Church and State’.Roscoe probably sought to channel nonconformist grievances into a single attainable goal. It was often argued that denying free compulsory education for all would rob workers of social mobility and that Anglicanism further impeded such progress. The Balfour Education Act of 1902 decreed that elementary education was to be handled by local authorities. These local authorities replaced thousands of school boards and also offered additional funding for voluntary schools (most of which were Anglican) financed by local rate payers. Nonconformists were alarmed at the proposal that all citizens should pay church rates as it further benefited Anglicanism at the expense of free churches.
The same year, a meeting was called at Manchester’s Free Trade Hall in opposition to this controversial education bill, attended by a number of Liberals from the Manchester Liberal Union, the districts Education Association, the Council of Evangelical Free Churches of Manchester, other prominent nonconformists and labour organization members.

The NEL shored up support from workers and unions throughout the late nineteenth century. Through educational reform militant nonconformists won over a number of working-class adherents to the cause of Liberalism. The NEL published 20,000 copies of Robert Applegarth’s *Compulsory Attendance at School: The Working Man’s View* in 1870. Applegarth emphasised the importance of compulsory education and the NEL when he wrote: ‘If there be one part of a plan of national education above another the working classes consider to be essential, and about which they have thoroughly made up their mind, it is that of “Compulsory attendance”. And this is the chief cause of the hearty support given to the NEL by working men’. Applegarth was a political supporter of nonconformity, but his Christian faith had declined over the years. Although feelings amongst the working classes towards compulsory education were mixed, many trade unionists and artisans were clearly in favour. Even from the Chartist period there had been an interest in the issue of education among the working classes, but

58 Ibid, p. 142.
60 Applegarth, *Compulsory Attendance at School*, p.1.
after 1870 it became a major consideration for working-class radicals. W. P. McCann considers the reactions of artisans and trade unions to the education question after 1870 and he maintains that they took a deep interest.62 There is certainly some truth in Donald Read’s assertion that ‘the intensified working-class movement of the 1880s and 1890s showed a deep interest in educational questions.’63 In the 1870s and 1880s, local trade unions throughout major cities called many public meetings on education in a sustained national campaign.64 Education was seen as an important part of self-elevation amongst aspiring artisans. Often, they were respected among their peers as scholars capable of articulating working-class grievances.65 A number of nonconformist Liberals frequented workingmen’s clubs to promote the cause of educational reform. In 1877, at the Rochdale Workingman’s Club, John Bright declared: ‘I believe that workmen have need to be taught, to have it pointed out to them how much depends their own family comfort and the success and happiness of their children on this - that they should do all they can do to give their children such education as is in their power’.66 Bright concluded: ‘you will do what is in your power to build up the fabric of the greatness and the glory of your country upon the sure foundation of an intelligent and a Christian people’.67

Education enabled dissenters to channel working class interests within existing Liberal structures. A number of Labour candidates who might have turned to an independent Labour movement could vent their grievances through an existing Liberal framework. The Trades Union Congress, established in June 1868, only constituted an important interface between Labour representation and local Liberalism for a few decades before they took a more militant approach. The NEL was more successful than the NEU at attracting support from workers given the latter’s ties to Conservatism and Anglicanism. Following the 1870 Education Act, 97 delegates from various local trade unions met in Manchester’s Free Trade Hall and passed a resolution in favour of the League.68 Throughout the North the League became affiliated with many trade union organizations, the first of which was the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners.69 The NEL’s success with the labour movements can also be attributed to the relationship between nonconformity and the working class. Chadwick’s report to the

64 McCann, ‘Trade Unionists’, pp. 139-40.
66 John Bright, A speech of Mr. John Bright, M.P., to the Rochdale Workmen’s club, January 2, 1877, Manchester, 1877, Earl Grey Pamphlets Collection, pp. 15-16.
67 Bright, A speech of Mr. John Bright, p. 16.
Statistical Society, in 1861, suggests that in Manchester, dissenting school attendance was 25,812 compared to 29,009 for Anglican schools. But this most likely reflected Anglicanism’s own denominational privilege, and workers were more likely to attend the dissenting Sunday Schools. The returns for Sunday Schools in Manchester for dissenting sects was 20,803 compared to 5,150 for Anglicans. Nationally, at least a third of Sunday Schools were under the control of Methodist connexions alone.

The local school boards helped extend popular Liberalism to incorporate Labour representatives. Despite the divisions that existed over sectarian education, they were still important in promoting the party and attracting representatives of organised labour. Board elections were mainly fought on party political grounds. In 1879, R. W. Dale had acknowledged the contributions of Scott and the Manchester Guardian for the Liberal school board elections in Manchester. In May 1880, Roscoe wrote to Scott stressing the need for Manchester school boards to catch up with other cities such as Liverpool ‘in this great work’. In 1891 the secretary of the National Liberal Union stressed the importance of school boards in the coming election: ‘the chief end and aim of this Liberal Union should be to knit together the six divisions of this city in to a brotherhood so loyal, close and enduring that none of them shall forget... that the welfare of them shall be... ardently maintained’. The whole issue of school board elections was seen as central to the success of the education movement.

School board elections had the additional benefit of providing workers with a platform of expression. For the first time, workers could stand for local school board elections and the trades council had been permitted by the Liberal Association to elect working-class representatives. In 1894, the Liberals made open offers of compromise during the events surrounding the election of school board candidates. By this time, it was primarily the Progressive Liberal Committee that managed school board elections of representatives, many of whom were from the working classes. The Liberal Party organised a conference inviting nonconformist and Catholic organizations to preside over

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72 Paz, Nineteenth Century English Religious Traditions, p. 127.
73 R. W. Dale to C. P. Scott, 22 November 1879, GN 118/16, JRL.
74 Henry Roscoe to C.P. Scott, 21 May 1880, JRL.
75 Report of the Committee Read by the Secretary of the ‘The Annual Meeting of the Union Held at the Reform Club’, 6 May 1891, Manchester Liberal Federation Archives, pp. 1-3, MCL.
the school board elections in 1894. They invited representatives from the Labour Church, the SDF and ILP.

The strength of the education campaign for free national and universal secular education increased as the various strands of nonconformity became more united towards the end of the nineteenth century. There is much truth in N. J Richards’s assertion that ‘during the nineteenth century any issue related to education tended to unify Nonconformists and motivate them politically to act as a collective force, and this remained a major concern in the new century’. Around the 1870s divisions were more pronounced. In 1867 during an address to the Congregational Union in Manchester the chairman and Liberal MP Edward Baines announced: ‘it is known that for many years differences of opinion have existed amongst us as to the right and best way of promoting this cause’. Amongst Liberals and nonconformists support for secular education was high as many saw it as the most effective remedy for removing Anglican privilege. At a meeting of the Congregational Union in Manchester, attended by 1900 delegates, a majority of militant nonconformists insisted that excluding religion from schools was the only realistic solution. Some nonconformists remained committed to the voluntary principle. Following the resolution of the NEL, the General Conference of Nonconformists in Manchester endorsed a secular platform and a number of dissenters opposed this measure throughout the country, including Dale. But education still provided a degree of unity to nonconformists in pursuit of higher objectives. In the 1890s practical steps were taken to promote sectarian unity with the Free Church Congress in 1892 and 1894 where education was a major platform.

Towards the end of the century the education movement gained momentum in unifying nonconformists. School boards served a strong political function in promoting nonconformist campaigns until they were disbanded in 1902. Nonconformist campaigns for educational reform dominated the Liberal Party’s agenda in the early twentieth century. Before the 1906 election Thomas Law co-ordinated the activities of 500 district federation secretaries and 900 secretaries of local free dissenting church councils in

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78 Ibid, pp. 223-4.
80 Edward Baines, National Education: Address of Edward Baines, Esq., MP., as Chairman of a Breakfast of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, at Manchester, on Friday, October 11th, 1867, London, 1867, Bristol selected Pamphlets, p. 3.
82 Watts, The Dissenters, p. 246.
84 Richards, ‘Political Nonconformity at the Turn of the Century’, p. 239.
support of the Liberal Party. Conferences of the NLF were held in major cities including Manchester where nonconformists were encouraged to temporarily suspend their church activities to help with the election.\textsuperscript{85} The nonconformist machine, in pursuit of a national system of education therefore played a part in the Liberal election victory of 1906.

In summary, the campaigns for compulsory education were an ideological precursor to New Liberalism, providing an existing framework of debate based on the role of the state. It was important in balancing out class interests and thus in the continuity of Liberalism during a period of transition, particularly with the rise of parliamentary nonconformity. The campaigns for prohibition were similarly significant in this respect.

4. From Provincial Nonconformity to High Politics: Temperance and the United Kingdom Alliance

As provincial nonconformity became national, temperance groups such as the United Kingdom Alliance (UKA) provided some continuity in Liberal values in a party divided by sectional interests. More specifically, it was prohibitionist movements of the late nineteenth century, focusing more on state interventionism rather than volunteer teetotalism, that provided this continuity. It represented an acceptable ideological transition from old Liberalism to positive state action through a movement which was gaining momentum well into the Edwardian era. Although it lacked the breadth of appeal to unify the Liberal Party around a single programme, the prohibitionist movement represented an important ideological step towards the Liberalism of social welfare.

Prohibition was an important movement in this respect. Although this is not considered among historians, there have been small leads which suggest it is worth examining. Literature relating to such movements as education and temperance fail to consider the long-term significance of prohibition and the UKA in changing Liberal ideologies. Although the historical literature on temperance is substantial for the period up to 1914, it is still considered to be characteristic of ‘old liberal’ preoccupations associated with nonconformity. The focus has been largely on the nineteenth century, chiefly reflected in Anthony Dingle’s and Brian Harrison’s work.\textsuperscript{86} In the 1970s Harrison suggested that temperance was ideologically associated with notions of ‘positive liberty’ in the minds of many leading advocates such as T. H. Green. He maintains that long

\begin{footnotes}
\item[85] Watts, The Dissenters, p. 361.
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before Green adopted this philosophy, similar notions of positive liberty were prevalent in temperance rhetoric. However Harrison only makes a cursory mention of this point and it warrants further investigation. In addition, the chronology of Harrison’s work does not extend beyond the 1870s and there is more to be examined in the following decades. This section explores this relationship as a precursor to Edwardian Liberalism and proposes that temperance organizations such as the UKA provided an acceptable transition from old to New Liberalism - representing important theological changes and the growth of labour movements.

Recent historians have also proposed that the temperance movement, during the period of prohibitionist rhetoric, largely represented the social turn in radical dissent - a theory originally advocated in Bebbington’s critique of the Helmstader thesis and furthered by Denys Leighton. Considering the centrality of nonconformity in Liberal ideological transformations, temperance marked an important transition in dissent from mere nonconformist politico-religious interests to an increasing concern with social reform. However, Leighton maintains that a large section of nonconformists and Liberals remained hostile to social interventionism and committed to laissez-faire. Leighton was referring to the 1880s only and state interventionism became more prevalent in prohibitionist polemics over the following decades. John Clifford was a leading member of the UKA and later an advocate of New Liberalism. A number of other advanced Liberals including Unitarian Fred Maddison, MP for Burnley in 1906 and later a Lib-Lab, were outspoken prohibitionists. But why would a seemingly faddist organization such as the UKA mark such an important transition towards New Liberalism? There were three features of the temperance movement, as led by the UKA, which were favourable to helping maintain the continuity and identity of Liberalism.

Firstly, prohibitionist polemics ideologically foreshadowed Edwardian Liberal social policy. One of the chief features of Edwardian Liberalism was social welfarism. This had existed earlier, but not with the same degree of wholehearted commitment. The whole debate about prohibition constituted an important ideological shift in evangelical theology which was extended to justify state interventionism in the social sphere. Consequently, a number of clergymen and Liberal Party sympathisers emphasised

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87 Harrison, Drink and the Victorians, pp. 348-405.
how prohibition was consistent with the politics of social reform. A notable example was Edward Lee Hicks who was an Anglican, a Liberal supporter and member of the UKA. In July 1899 Hicks criticised what was seen as the antagonism between social reform and prohibition, maintaining that they were both concerned with positive state legislation: ‘it is certain that this mutual estrangement of two great groups of social reformers was due to sheer misunderstanding, and must come to an end’, continuing: ‘it is the reverse of true to suppose that the arguments for prohibition are based on individualism’. He even maintained that ‘it would be no exaggeration to assert that the movement for permissive prohibition was the first and early blossom of English Collectivism’. The UKA actively associated its own agenda with that of social reform. In 1902, a report to the Executive, detailing an article in the Alliance News, refuted the claims in the press that it merely represented a faddist organization emphasising that ‘in connection with endeavours to enlarge the scope and interest of the paper, increasing notice has been taken by the movement towards social reform in all directions’. This demonstrates the agenda of those connected with the paper: to identify with the cause of social reform.

A microcosm of this ideological change was the debate between voluntary teetotalism and prohibition. The UKA was prohibitionist and was originally established to ‘procure the total and immediate legislative suppression of the traffic in all intoxicating liquors’. In 1859 the general council of the UKA proposed that the liquor traffic be democratically regulated by the ratepayers:

Whereas the common sale of Intoxicating liquors is a fruitful source of crime, immorality, pauperism, disease, insanity and premature death; whereby not only the individuals who give way to drinking habits are plunged into misery, but grievous wrong is done to the persons and property of Her Majesty’s subjects at large, and the public rates and taxes are greatly augmented; and whereas it is right and expedient to confer upon the ratepayers of cities, boroughs, parishes, and townships, the power to prohibit such common sale as aforesaid—Be it therefore enacted.

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94 Ibid, p. 2.
95 Address of the United Kingdom Alliance (formed June 1st, 1853), United Kingdom Alliance, London, 1854, Knowsley Pamphlet Collection, p. 1.
96 Suggestions for Bill to Prevent the Traffic in Intoxicating Liquors (As agreed upon by the General Council of the United Kingdom), United Kingdom Alliance, Manchester, 1859, Knowsley Pamphlet Collection, p. 1.
This did not merely reflect theological changes towards more communitarian values, but also the popular belief among many radicals that economic and social circumstances were partly responsible for the drink problem. The stress was increasingly placed less on the individual’s own failure against temptation, and more on reducing those temptations in the first place. This was evident in 1870 when Jacob Bright stated:

Sir Charles Trevelyan recalled to our minds the beautiful words of our Common Prayer - "Lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil." What a multitude of places of worship there are in this country; they differ in faith, in creed, and in observances. They differ in a marvellous degree, but I believe that beautiful prayer is common to the whole. But I confess when I see how temptation to do evil covers the land, and how slow, as a people, we are either to reduce those temptations, or to establish counter temptations of a better and higher kind; I sometimes wonder whether that prayer is lifted up on high in an intelligent spirit…

In this speech, Bright advocated the elimination of the liquor traffic to ‘reduce those temptations’ and by extension the remark ‘to establish counter temptations of a better and higher kind’ implied the promotion of positive legislative reforms to elevate individual character: ‘if they, (the Government and Parliament) take up this great question, they take it up because the friends of order, of morality, and of public virtue ask for a change’. Bright was using prohibitionist arguments to promote the role of the state for the welfare of individuals. The UKA was essentially an organization that advocated prohibition as the ultimate objective and the aims of prohibitionists were by no means contrary to the politics of welfarism. Unlike volunteer teetotalism, prohibition demanded a degree of municipal intervention. When Maddison declared that ‘men who call themselves social reformers, men who take upon themselves the name of Christ, and even wear his livery, are so blind that this traffic grows in industry, and that it requires every good man and woman... to take the most effective means to curtail it’ he implied that social reform and prohibition were both favourable.

Throughout the following decades the strategy of prohibitionists in the UKA was to promote state legislation to limit the sale of liquor rather than outlaw the consumption of alcohol. This was significant as state intervention in the economic sphere was also a

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97 The United Kingdom Alliance: A full report... October 26th 1870, p. 17.
98 Ibid, p. 17.
major characteristic of Edwardian Liberalism. Throughout the late nineteenth century prohibitionists attempted to readjust the terms of the Permissive Bill allowing localities to control the sale of alcohol. It stipulated that local tax payers could limit the sale of alcohol by imposing the local veto on drink shops. Throughout the 1860s it made little headway in Parliament but gained more momentum in the proceeding decades. Ideologically many parallels can be drawn between this approach and Edwardian Liberalism, as prohibition introduced active state legislation for the common good of the community whilst preserving a degree of individual liberty. The aim was to restrict the free-flowing traffic of alcohol but not to abolish its consumption on the consumer end. The kind of argument used by prohibitionists can be summed up by a remark made by the later Bishop of Exeter Reverend Dr Frederick Temple who presiding over a meeting of the UKA in 1869 announced:

…let it be granted that we should not so far interfere with our fellow subjects as to say that there should be any hindrance put upon a man’s obtaining that where he might ruin body and soul… it was a question whether some united and determined effort should not be made to remove out of the way of the labouring classes a temptation that seemed to pursue them through their lives, and from which it was almost impossible for them to escape.

The polemical power of prohibitionist argument lay in the implication that it interfered with the freedom of contract but not the individual liberty of the consumer. The ‘freedom of contract’, seen as an important tenet of old Liberal orthodoxy, was ideologically refuted in many polemics associated with Edwardian Liberalism and most famously by Green. The UKA was not in itself an active movement that directly promoted major social reforms. It did however represent an important ideological turning point on the role of the state. There was a progression in the use of argument in support of prohibition. In the 1870s the arguments for prohibition were already highly critical of the freedom of contract and notions of negative liberty. In 1871, in the *Alliance News* the UKA defended the Permissive Bill against criticism from opponents of temperance including John Stuart Mill: 

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The traffic tempts and seduces their children… depraves their morals, endangers and but too often destroys their lives in many ways, bankrupts their debtors and customers, depraves their election, and fearfully antagonizing everything that is good or holy… does not, then, the exercise of the natural and individual right to buy and sell intoxicants produce an enormous amount of injury to the liberties of others.\textsuperscript{105}

This line of argument continued over the following decades. Jacob Bright, addressing an Alliance meeting in 1882, defended prohibition against critics who considered such legislation restrictive of individual liberty, on the basis that it was in the greater national interest in ‘conferring a great general good’.\textsuperscript{106} In 1890 the UKA rejected the proposal for the ‘purchase of liquor licences by the county councils’ as compensation for interfering with the freedom of contract on the basis that ‘liquor licences have been held as subordinate to the public good’.\textsuperscript{107} The use of state interventionist argument here is striking as prohibitionists were concerned with restricting the publicans’ claim to free market conditions. More modest proposals for government sponsorship of the local option had passed through Parliament in 1883.\textsuperscript{108} Moreover, the brewers constituted a significant number of wealthy individuals supported by the Tories and consumers were seen as being exploited by an unhealthy monopoly. Prohibitionist supporters were hostile to government proposals for compensation. At a meeting of the NRU in 1891, the secretary lambasted ‘the rash attempt made by the government to confer an unprecedented and unjust privilege upon brewers and publicans in connection with the licensing system of the country’.\textsuperscript{109}

Many UKA members saw the free trade of ‘liquor’ as obstructive to the individual and good of society. prohibitionist discourse brought into question the role of the state. In 1871, the honorary secretary of the UKA, Samuel Pope posed the question ‘What relation shall the state assume towards the liquor traffic?’ Journalists for the \textit{Manchester Guardian}, in relaying Pope’s speech, wrote that ‘the empire should confront the question of the liquor traffic…grapple with it until a solution has been found in harmony with the

\textsuperscript{105} ‘Objections Answered’, \textit{Alliance News}, 14 January 1871, p. 24, MCL.
\textsuperscript{106} ‘Alliance Meeting at Ashton: Speech of Mr Jacob Bright M.P’, \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 17 October 1882, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Reasons Against Compensation in the Form of the Purchase of Liquor Licenses by the County Councils, as Proposed in the Local Taxation Bill. United Kingdom Alliance}, Manchester, 1890, LSE Selected Pamphlets, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{108} Read, \textit{The Age of Urban Democracy}, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{109} Report of the Committee… 6 May 1891, pp. 1-3.
claims of morality, social justice, and humanity’. They often called for active government intervention. The annual report of the UKA in 1888 stated that the UKA had ‘led a great many working men to become... thoughtful observers of the operation of the factors which in this country are most potent in bringing about the well-being or ill-being of the people’, continuing: ‘for instance, reiterated discussions as to the action of alcohol as a producer of demoralization in the nation and disease in the individual have in a large proportion of cases led to an intelligent interest in whatever affects favourably or injuriously the health of either’. Similar arguments were made by New Liberals, some of whom were either champions of political nonconformity or members of nonconformist sects, in the following decades. As a member of the UKA, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the alliance shaped Green’s views on legislative reform. He had certainly cited ‘liquor traffic’ in ‘Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract’ emphasising that liquor was a ‘wide-spreading social evil, of which society may... rid itself, to the infinite enhancement of the positive freedom enjoyed by its members’. These views were articulated by Green in 1881. Green had joined the UKA nine years earlier and became its vice-president.

The notion of interfering with individuals’ passions for their own good is almost Greenian in character and it is no surprise that he was a leading advocate of prohibition. A premise in Green’s philosophy was that the common good encouraged by social institutions helped individual self-realization beyond mere negative and spontaneous pursuit of desires. Green was also an outspoken supporter of the local veto. Green later used similar lines of prohibitionist argument to promote the positive role of the state:

a man... has been allowed...to build houses without any reference to sanitary conditions....to buy or sell alcoholic drinks at his pleasure. If laws are passed interfering with any or all of these powers, he says that his rights are being violated. But he only possessed these powers as rights through membership of a society which secured them to him, and of which the only permanent bond consists in the reference to the well-being of its members as a whole.

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110 ‘The United Kingdom Alliance’, Manchester Guardian, 18 October 1871, p. 5.
114 Leighton, The Greenian Moment, p. 117.
115 Nettleship, Works of Thomas Hill Green, p. cxiv.
The free trade of alcohol was seen here as a form of negative liberty and detrimental to the common good. Arguments made by Liberal theorists, such as Green, emphasised how this negative liberty enabled the individual to become a slave to his own passions and society empowered more positive influences on character. Similar arguments were common among nonconformist members of the UKA. In 1897, in an address to the UKA in Manchester, the Unitarian Maddison declared: ‘I know why the class to which I belong are like “dumb-driven cattle;” I know why their oppressors are able to ride roughshod over them...it is because they are the slaves to their baser appetites, and no man can be free who is enslaved to the worst half of himself’. Maddison’s speech was concerned with the common good of society and with individual freedom: ‘the drinking habits of the people of this country, as well as of other countries, are becoming more and more a serious menace to the prosperity and the welfare of the nation’.

The second feature was prohibition’s interclass appeal that helped to balance out sectional interests. The UKA was well placed to further these goals and they often stressed this continuity in Liberal ideology. There has been debate about whether late Victorian Liberalism was marked more by continuity or discontinuity, particularly between Finn and Nichols.

Nichols characterises late Victorian Liberal politics as ad-hoc and consistent with ‘strategic and episodic responses to moments of conflict and crisis in capital-labour relations.’ Neville Kirk also claims that ‘popular Liberalism lends itself to the case of discontinuity more than to that for continuity’. While the rise of nonconformity in New Liberalism was marked by continuity, the degree that this applied to the Liberal Party broadly is not clear, but Liberals were at least concerned with maintaining the appearance of consistency in balancing out class interests. Even if Nichols’ characterisation of the Liberal Party is correct, the party still could not risk alienating different bases of support or entirely abandoning previous political traditions. This suggests an internal consistency between the old and the new, which prohibition aptly provided.

This is demonstrated by the rhetoric of UKA members. In 1872, Sir Thomas Chambers, a Liberal MP and low Church Anglican, remarked that ‘... the principles of

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118 Ibid, p. 2.
the United Kingdom Alliance are in perfect harmony with the objects and powers of civil
government, political economy, and true social liberty'.

Chambers was clearly concerned with maintaining a certain degree of harmony with the Liberal Party, without
alienating other sectional interests. The annual report of the UKA the following year emphasised that ‘the crusade in which you are engaged is so important and so sacred that it must attract to its standard all true, noble, and generous souls - of whatever creed, class, party or sect’. Although for the Liberal Party, the UKA was a pressure group, they enjoyed a wider appeal on the ground where they represented the radicalism of programmatic style group politics. With an increasing number of members pressuring for government legislation in the liquor trade, interventionism was easily justified and could be extended to more pro-active social policy. William Hoyle’s comment that ‘the great end of government is to protect the lives of its people, to promote trade and commerce, to reduce pauperism... to ensure the moral, social and domestic happiness and prosperity of those under its authority’ was by no means contrary to positive state action in other spheres. Hoyle was a Lancashire manufacturer, Wesleyan Methodist and an ardent financier for the UKA. The electoral viability of the Liberal Party depended on gaining working-class adherents without losing the support of middle-class voters. The UKA appealed to a certain Liberal balance of interests. While the UKA attracted support from many traditional middle-class Liberal supporters, it also provided a strong avenue for establishing relations with aspiring workers. The UKA was established with the support of upper-class artisans and small businessmen, and grew in strength in the proceeding decades. In the 1860s, it could boast a large following of upper-working class radicals, including George Potter and George Howell. Although temperance had been a significant aspect of the working class as early as the Chartist era, what attracted many working-class radicals to the temperance movement was that it provided a social arena where they could meet other aspiring politicians. It was an inter-class organization which drew support from aspiring workers seeking a means of expression.

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made many important political connections through the UKA in the 1860s.\textsuperscript{130} What was seen as the respectable working class and the lower middle-classes were the most numerous among the UKA’s membership. With the growth of the ILP and the importance of maintaining working-class support, nonconformist groups such as the UKA were essential. Even by the late nineteenth century a significant number of Lib-Lab representatives were often linked with the temperance movement, including Lib-Lab MP Thomas Burt, who had been a long-time subscriber.\textsuperscript{131}

Working-class support was often courted by nonconformist Liberals. In 1871, on making modest gains for the Permissive Bill, addressing ‘friends and fellow-workers’, journalists for the \textit{Alliance News} wrote: ‘We seek to stop and avert an awful waste of wealth, virtue, happiness, and life now sacrificed with inflexible regularity to a system which law supports’.\textsuperscript{132} In 1873, at a UKA meeting, Green spoke encouragingly about the organization’s political prospects of success through co-operation with the working classes in defeating the publicans.\textsuperscript{133} Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, Jacob Bright had been particularly active in appealing to working-class sympathisers of temperance as the Permissive Bill became a more realistic prospect.\textsuperscript{134} Bright and other members of the UKA were careful not to pursue legislation that interfered with the individual liberties of workers, but just lessened the temptation, through municipal legislation. At a meeting of the UKA in Wigan, in 1882, Bright remarked that the UKA sought to ‘diminish the quantity of drink consumed, and without, as it appeared to him, intolerably interfering with personal liberty, put an end to a monstrous evil’.\textsuperscript{135} The working classes were seen as central to this movement and associated with parliamentary Liberalism. In January 1891 journalists for \textit{Alliance News} declared:

Temperance reform is a matter in which the working classes are deeply interested. It is in those constituencies in which there is a preponderance of working men in the electorate that the temperance question is forced most prominently forward; and it is a striking fact that whenever men are sent to Parliament as special representatives of labour, these representatives of the working classes are invariably temperance reformers.\textsuperscript{136}

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid, p. 22.  
\textsuperscript{131} Biagini, \textit{Currents of Radicalism}, p. 200.  
\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Manifesto of the Executive of the United Kingdom Alliance}, 27 May 1871, p. 328, UKA archive, Alliance House.  
\textsuperscript{133} ‘Alliance Meeting in Oxford’, \textit{Alliance News}, 18 February 1873, p. 87, UKA archive, Alliance House.  
\textsuperscript{134} Dingle, \textit{The Campaign for the Prohibition in England}, p. 29.  
\textsuperscript{135} ‘Alliance Meeting at Ashton’, p. 8.  
\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Alliance News}, January 1891, p. 9, UKA Archive, Alliance House.
The association between Lib-Lab relations and temperance is very pronounced here. There was cautious optimism that the Liberals’ approach had been successful in courting working-class support when in 1900, the report to the committee declared that ‘...the more thoughtful working classes are becoming increasingly interested in the discussion of the liquor problem’.137

The importance of the UKA as an interface with the working class was further demonstrated in a report in 1888 which heralded the *Alliance News* as a strong medium for disseminating important Liberal values on social and political questions: ‘the temperance question... through the wide dissemination of the letters and pamphlets of Mr Hoyle and others, through articles of the *Alliance News*, has led to the study of political economy, domestic economy, questions of labour and wages, and has probably done more during the last 15 years to spread sound views on economic questions amongst the masses of the country than all other agencies combined’.138 At the annual meeting of the UKA that year the executive announced that ‘the alliance has been a great educator, especially of the flower of the working classes, in practical politics and sociology and other matters’.139 In 1894, the *Alliance News* promoted a pamphlet, aimed at the working classes, to be published by T. P. Whittaker on the social and industrial problems of the drinking system: ‘This pamphlet has been specially written... at the request of the Alliance. The tract is intended to impress upon the working classes the economic aspects of the drinking system and the importance of the temperance question in the solution of these social problems which now occupy so much public attention’.140 At the annual meeting of the UKA in 1897 Maddison stated: ‘I stand here tonight as a working man. I stand here to-night as a trade Unionist. I am here as a politician; and in each capacity I am proud to stand as an abstainer’.141 He continued: ‘a sober England thus means to me, and means to the best and truest of the men in the labour movement, a great lever, a great instrument of reform, a means by which we may come to our own’.142

The third feature of the UKA was its strong nonconformist affiliation which provided its members with a common identity for transcending class interests in favour of Liberal principles. In 1871 members of the UKA sent a letter addressed to the ministers

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137 *Forty-Eight Report of the Executive Committee of the United Kingdom Alliance (1899-1900)*, 1900, p. 6, UKA Archive, Alliance House.
139 Ibid, p. 4.
140 ‘The Drinking System and Social and Industrial Problems’, *Alliance News*, 9 February 1894, p. 81, MCL.
142 Ibid, p. 3.

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of the Wesleyan Conference appealing for support in promoting cross-class relations within Liberalism. But temperance, like many other single issues, did not enjoy a wide enough appeal to sustain any Liberal unity. Many Liberals were simply indifferent to temperance concerns, while others promoted such extreme measures as prohibition. Some were even critical of the UKA’s prospects of success including William Stanley Jevons, an economist and philosopher of Science, who maintained that its advocates were zealous and uncompromising. Jevons was concerned that UKA would not succeed with their aim to ‘carry public opinion with them’. But despite these obvious divisions among Liberals, the prohibitionist lobby still remained a strong and influential nonconformist power block, particularly as they became less divided within the Liberal Party. The movement largely constituted a wing of radical nonconformity. While not all nonconformists supported the temperance movement, a majority of the latter were from nonconformist sects. Most leaders and supporters of the UKA were affiliated to nonconformist sects. Bebbington demonstrates that out of 273 teetotal leaders 232 were dissenters. Although some temperance movements were aligned to Anglicanism, the Temperance Party was coterminously linked with nonconformity.

5. The Liberal Party and Prohibition

Moreover, the influence of the temperance movement over the Liberal Party increased as nonconformist radicalism became more integrated with parliamentary politics. This was the ambition of members of the UKA who sought to use the organization to promote nonconformity and shape Liberal Party legislation. Their long-term goal was to turn the Liberal Party into a party of temperance. One-time Manchester Liberal candidate and UKA secretary Samuel Pope was one of many who pressed for the infiltration of the Liberal Party. On a national scale, temperance groups became more unified and influential in the 1880s and 1890s, particularly with the growth of the Temperance Party. In 1883 Gladstone acquiesced in a compromise on the local veto

146 Ibid, p. 248.
147 Winstanley, Gladstone and the Liberal Party, p. 31.
148 Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism, p. 268.
promoting prohibition after coming under pressure from the UKA.\textsuperscript{150} The UKA also came to represent a broader set of questions towards the end of the century. In the report of 1888 the executive of the UKA maintained that ‘questions of... sanitation, hours of labour, longevity’ were ‘eagerly studied and discussed by people whose interest in them has been aroused by the discussion of... cognate questions comprehended under the... "temperance question"’.\textsuperscript{151} Among members of the UKA this association between positive state legislation and temperance was becoming more pronounced. It was no coincidence that the increasing emphasis on positive state legislation emerged as prohibitionist campaigns became more prevalent. As temperance was on the ascendancy the Liberals also became more willing to embrace far reaching social interventionist initiatives.

The polemical force of prohibition increased as it assumed more national importance in relation to the Liberal Party. Although there is some truth that from the 1870s the ‘whole temperance movement was becoming more middle class’, it was also moving beyond the political fringe with its growing association with advanced Liberalism.\textsuperscript{152} In the 1860s Liberal temperance movements had little impact on high politics that was dominated by Whig and Anglican interests. In Parliament in the 1860s and 1870s any form of restriction on liquor traffic was very unpopular. In 1864 the Permissive Bill was defeated in Parliament by 292 votes to 35.\textsuperscript{153} However, as radical nonconformity and the UKA became more influential within more mainstream politics the prohibitionist lobby became more powerful. By the end of the nineteenth century many Liberals supported prohibition mainly to attract nonconformist support. William Harcourt, an advanced Liberal, affirmed its importance when he claimed that ‘temperance is the backbone of the Liberal Party vice’.\textsuperscript{154} George Russell wrote of Harcourt: ‘He had a generous zeal for peace, freedom and temperance’.\textsuperscript{155} Harcourt clearly favoured positive state intervention on the issue of licensing reform and in 1889 he stated: ‘When you have a great, ancient, deep-rooted evil, you cannot cure it by small, temporary, pottering measures. You must have a great and statesman-like remedy’.\textsuperscript{156}

\textsuperscript{151} ‘The United Kingdom Alliance’, \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 6 October 1888, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{152} Read, \textit{The Age of Urban Democracy}, p. 108.
\textsuperscript{153} Dingle, \textit{The Campaign for Prohibition in Victorian England}, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{154} Fahey, ‘The Politics of Drink’, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{156} \textit{The Attitude of the Liberal Party Toward the Direct Veto, Liverpool and District Direct Veto League (1891)}, United Kingdom Alliance, Manchester, 1893, p.1.
By the early twentieth century many MPs associated with New Liberalism were subscribers. This included Henry Campbell-Bannerman who had cited alcohol as a great social evil. Lloyd-George identified as a nonconformist whose early views were shaped by the Campbellite Baptists and he remained a supporter of temperance reform well into the First World War. In 1898, he publicly lampooned the plight of the publicans whilst endorsing the local option. The following year he declared: ‘I have uniformly, by voice and vote, supported every proposal, whether in the form of the Permissive Bill, or the local option’. Also the UKA and other prohibitionists were becoming increasingly concerned with social issues. The same year, Guinness Rogers wrote that ‘the friends of religious equality are also temperance reformers, and they, in their turn, are deeply interested in those questions of social reform which have attained such prominence of later years’. As the prohibition lobby gained a voice and became subsumed by the party it was necessary to adapt to its wider interests. At a meeting of the UKA, the Reverend Alexander McLaren declared that ‘a large group of questions, all of them important, and this one of Temperance the most important of all—a large group of questions are forcing themselves to the front. Take the… housing of the poor, the sanitary condition of our great towns, the relations between capital and labour… these are only specimens of the class of subjects that the new democracy are determined shall come to the front’. The NLF adopted the Local Direct Veto as a resolution in Manchester in 1889, as will be seen shortly, and this was used as a platform in the famous Newcastle Programme two years later. In 1891 the Welsh Veto Bill was passed with a majority of 7, and its supporters became some of the leading architects of Edwardian Liberal initiatives including W. V. Harcourt, H. H. Asquith, Campbell-Bannerman and A. J. Mundella.

This feeling was not merely shared by a handful of radical Liberals. The *Liberal Review*, a periodical that became a mouthpiece for New Liberalism, had increasingly urged for temperance legislation throughout the 1890s and 1900s. Hitherto the *Liberal Review* had not supported this campaign. Also, Liberals were becoming more willing to

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157 Richards, ‘Political Nonconformity at the Turn of the Century’, p. 244.
164 *The Attitude of the Liberal Party Toward the Direct Veto*, p. 4
embrace a degree of municipal control over liquor sales. Another attempt to draft a Bill on the local veto had been defeated in Parliament in 1893, but it fared better than in earlier decades.\textsuperscript{165} In May 1894 the \textit{Liberal Review} condemned the Tories and their support for the liquor traffic.\textsuperscript{166} This came as a welcome surprise to the leaders of the UKA on 25 May when, writing in the \textit{Alliance News}, they heralded this article as an ‘impeachment of the political party which the Speaker exists to oppose, on the ground of its connection with and subservience to the liquor traffic’.\textsuperscript{167} By 1895 the Liberal Party fully supported the more moderate proposal of the local option. Their resounding defeat in the election did little to halt the progress of the prohibitionist lobby.\textsuperscript{168} In January 1898, the \textit{Liberal Review} opposed the local veto for being unrealistic, but they still remained committed to some state legislation in this area:

we believe that the vast majority of Liberals are keenly conscious of the evils to which excessive drinking leads, and are earnestly desirous of promoting such legislation as may tend to diminish the temptations to an excessive use of drink…the problem... for the great majority of Liberals... is how to regulate and control the drink traffic without unfairness to anyone concerned, so as to permit stimulants to be used both freely and without abuse.\textsuperscript{169}

The Tory administration continued to promote compensation for the publicans as demonstrated by Peel’s minority report on the local veto.\textsuperscript{170} In 1901, in response to the report, Liberal journalists for the Review claimed that ‘…something urgently needs to be done to check drunkenness’.\textsuperscript{171} Two years later, a representative group of various different nonconformist sects and Liberals made a statement to the \textit{Manchester Guardian} which read: ‘It is universally recognised that the social and moral evils which flow from intemperance are enormous, and also that the present expenditure upon alcohol cannot be maintained except at a cost to the community which imperils the progress and well-being of the nation’.\textsuperscript{172}

\textsuperscript{168} Nicholls, \textit{The Politics of Alcohol}, p. 137.
\textsuperscript{170} J. Greenaway, \textit{Drink and British Politics Since 1830: A Study in Policy Making} (Basingstoke, 2003), p. 65.
\textsuperscript{172} ‘Licensing Reform: A Representative Manifesto’, \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 21 October 1903, p. 8.
The relationship between prohibition and New Liberalism was demonstrated by the campaigns of the early twentieth century. During a speech at the UKA in 1903, Campbell-Bannerman declared that the government’s responsibility was to ‘break down the discretion of the magistrates in the renewal of public-house licenses’. He further urged the publicans that ‘if trade and prosperity need to be revived amongst us, you will do more... by helping and extending the vigorous action of the magistrates, instead of curbing it’. In 1903 the prohibitionist manifesto was signed by a number of different temperance reformers, including university academics, nonconformist clergymen, social reformers such as the Quaker George Cadbury and other MPs. Most of these MPs were Liberal as well as Labour representatives such as Keir Hardie and Alderman George White. Out of 25 MPs who signed the paper, 18 were members of the Liberal Party, either at the time or after 1906. Around 12 were either ‘advanced Liberal’ or Liberal representatives of labour in varying degrees. Ten were all out ‘advanced Liberals’, the remaining two were radical Liberals with sympathies with labour representation. There were 4 signatures from Labour and 3 from Tory representatives. Among the 12, 10 were nonconformists, one was an Anglican and the other was John Hobson, a secularist. Not a single representative MP supported old Liberal non-interventionist politics that was so characteristic of earlier temperance campaigns. Out of all 25, 16 were either Labour MPs, Lib-Lab, advanced Liberal or at least had some radical leanings.


Nonconformist groups such as the UKA became increasingly nationalised. The rise in parliamentary nonconformity coincided with the growth of the radical wing of the Liberal Party. Questions relating to education and temperance assumed national importance. It was the continuity of these nonconformist preoccupations that helped in the Party’s ideological and strategic transition. The rise of New Liberalism coincided with the nationalization of nonconformist groups. It was not until militant nonconformity grew

173 "Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman Warn the Country", How the Government is in Bondage to the Brewers, Speech at Frare, n.p., 17 November, 1903, United Kingdom Alliance Archive, Alliance House.
174 Ibid.
175 ‘Licensing Reform’, p. 8.
176 This reflects a quantitative examination of signatures published in the Manchester Guardian through profiling. Some cases were clearer than others, John Hobson and A. H. D Acland were more pronounced in their subscription to New Liberal politics. Others such as the trade Unionist John Wilson were more problematic.
within the mainstream party that the social legislation of Edwardian Liberalism became a major feature in high politics.\textsuperscript{179} That nonconformity strategically benefitted the Liberal Party in the early twentieth century has been well established. Michael Watts emphasises how leading Liberals were able to channel nonconformist support by appealing to their interests, such as the grievances over the 1902 Education Act.\textsuperscript{180} There was a marked increase in Liberal Party interest in prohibition, education and social reform, all of which were linked.\textsuperscript{181}

Also, new organizations promoted unity between sects. As provincial nonconformity became more integrated in the arena of national politics old sectional differences faded. New organizations promoted greater inter-sectional unity. By the 1900s they operated as a more concerted parliamentary lobby.\textsuperscript{182} In 1895, in Birmingham, 3000 denominational leaders representing various nonconformist sects supported the creation of the National Council of the Evangelical Free Churches.\textsuperscript{183} The Council was established in 1896 to promote unity among nonconformist groups and grew exponentially over the turn of the century to include over 700 local Free Church councils by 1901. The \textit{Manchester Guardian} reporting on a speech given by the president of the council Hugh Price Hughes stated: ‘in our own time there had been several manifestations of the spirit of unity, but the Evangelical Free Churches had never before stood shoulder to shoulder, as they did now, in the common defence of freedom and of Protestant Truth’.\textsuperscript{184} In 1899 the Nonconformist Political Council was organised to investigate the political views of the various sects and promote a more unified platform of expression in Parliament.\textsuperscript{185}

Political nonconformity found a more coherent voice through the Liberal Party. Through multiple discriminant analysis Heyck estimates that while only 48\% of Liberals voted for what he classified as ‘radical’ legislation in 1886, this increased to around 70\% for the nine years that followed.\textsuperscript{186} Heyck also estimates that between 1886 and 1895 around 75\% of what he classifies as ‘radical MPs’ were nonconformists.\textsuperscript{187} What was considered ‘radical’ in 1890 and 1910 were very different, but it still convincingly

\textsuperscript{180} Watts, \textit{The Dissenters}.
\textsuperscript{182} Watts, \textit{The Dissenters}, p. 317.
\textsuperscript{184} ‘Ecclesiastical Intelligence: The Evangelical Free Churches Conference in Manchester Meeting at Rochdale The Free Churches’, \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 12 February 1897, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{186} Heyck, ‘Home Rule, Radicalism and the Liberal Party’, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid, p. 73.
demonstrates a marked shift away from the party’s conservatism. Heyck’s working definition of ‘radical legislation’ included those measures that Liberals increasingly adopted that ‘formerly had been the preserve of radicals’.\textsuperscript{188} His analysis considers legislation that was previously pursued by a minority of radical extremists, mostly in the Radical Party, but was becoming more popular among the Liberal left.

This also coincided with the growth of national organizations that emerged from the cradle of provincial nonconformity. This included the UKA and the NLF. The NLF, the most powerful extra-parliamentary political organization in Britain, would now shape Liberal politics from the inside. The NLF was brought under the control of the Liberal Central Association, and this integration was facilitated by its new secretary Francis Schnadhorst. The fusion of the NLF and the LCA gave birth to the Liberal Publication Department, which was active in promoting party policy.\textsuperscript{189} From the late 1880s onwards, the NLF played a major role in readjusting the party towards social and economic reforms. One such issue was land reform. There has been a wealth of literature on this topic, notably Paul Readman’s \textit{Land and Nation in England}, which examines how nationalism and patriotism became linked with the question of land.\textsuperscript{190} Although the importance of religion in the land question could be further considered, land was clearly polemically important among the radical wing of the party. In 1889, the council of the NLF endorsed the taxation of land values. In December C. A. Fyffe moved that ‘this Council declares that in any reform of the Land Laws a just and equitable taxation of land values and ground rents is an essential condition’.\textsuperscript{191} These reforms all culminated in the introduction of the Newcastle Programme, which was directly the product of resolutions adopted by the NLF at annual meetings in 1888, 1889 and 1890.\textsuperscript{192} Gladstone was forced to reluctantly accept the Newcastle Programme under direct pressure from the NLF.\textsuperscript{193} At the critical meeting of the NLF in Newcastle, in October 1891, several resolutions were moved for ensuring more accountability for owners and security for land tenants. This included increased popular control through local government over disputes and compensation for tenant farmers.\textsuperscript{194}
The importance of nonconformist campaigns for prohibition, in terms of the balance of class interests and in maintaining Liberal Party continuity, was demonstrated by their success as reflected in their growing national influence. The Newcastle Programme was strongly propelled by nonconformity, in particular the UKA and prohibitionist movement. The programme largely emerged from outside the mainstream party where nonconformity was strongest and the programme bore its imprint. The Liberal Party came into power on the Newcastle Programme platform in 1892, and the local option on the liquor traffic was officially adopted by the newly formed government through nonconformist pressure.\textsuperscript{195} This was evident from the programme’s emphasis on temperance legislation, and the aims of appealing to the grassroots of the party on ground where nonconformity was strongest.\textsuperscript{196} In 1891, Harcourt appealed to shared nonconformist grievances to the 1870 Education Act: ‘I was opposed then, as I am opposed now, to the grant of large sums of public money to denominational schools without public funds and responsible control. I resisted as vehemently as I could the scheme of Mr Forster at that time’.\textsuperscript{197} This political measure was 21 years old and Harcourt’s agenda was clearly to identify with the great bulk of nonconformists.\textsuperscript{198}

Despite its shortcomings the Newcastle Programme still represented an important change in the Liberal Party towards a more programmatic approach to politics.\textsuperscript{199} But, between 1892 and 1895, the Liberals simply failed to carry out the programme.\textsuperscript{200} One plausible explanation for its failure lay in the unwillingness of Gladstone and other senior MPs to fully support its proposals, much to the frustration of many back bench Liberals.\textsuperscript{201} The programme included the abolition of the plural franchise, land reform, triennial parliaments and the local option.\textsuperscript{202} However, it was only moderately radical and it tried to appeal to a broad section of interests. The programme only supported a limitation on maximum working hours for certain categories of labourers.\textsuperscript{203} Donald Read even

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{196}{Alan O’ Day, Irish Home Rule, 1867–1921 (Manchester, 1998), p. 145.}
\footnotetext{199}{McBriar, Fabian Socialism and English Politics, pp. 249–50.}
\footnotetext{200}{Alan Haworth and Diane Hayter, Men Who Made Labour (Oxford, 2006), p. 100.}
\footnotetext{201}{John, Gladstone and the Logic of Victorian Politics, p. 379.}
\footnotetext{202}{O’ Day, Irish Home Rule, p. 145.}
\footnotetext{203}{Ibid, p. 145.}
\end{footnotes}
describes the programme as ‘rambling’ and ‘shapeless’. It was a shadow of Chamberlain’s own radical programme from 1885.

Nevertheless, it was a truly party-political programme thoroughly endorsed by party legislators and constituted a new direction in party policy. Although the failure of the Newcastle Programme signified the decline of the NLF as a representative of local pressure group politics, this only served to increase its impact on national politics. After 1895, party bosses no longer bowed to the popular pressure of the NLF as it became even more integrated with London. It became a powerful arm of the more radical side of the parliamentary party. Unlike the LCA, the NLF had represented popular Liberalism on the ground where nonconformist sectarianism was most prevalent and its merger with London helped to re-orientate the party towards New Liberalism.

The character of Liberal Party policy in the early twentieth century heavily reflected these nonconformist interests, as demonstrated by the stress on prohibition and opposition to the 1902 Education Act. There were consistent attempts by senior MPs to appeal to nonconformist interests. Augustine Birrell, who was not a ‘convinced Christian’, sought to reverse the 1902 Education Act. While provincial nonconformists remained the most socially radical Liberals, they were now able to at least shape higher legislation. In 1900, the co-pastors of the West London Wesleyan Mission Mark Guy Pearse and Hugh Price Hughes urged MPs to include pensions in their political programmes. Pressure from other nonconformists such as Robert Morton continued over the next 5 years.

The party continued to rally behind the nonconformist campaigns for temperance reform and education, particularly the Act of 1902. In December, James Bryce announced to the Commons that ‘the bill has created intense exasperation among large and active sections of the community. This has been manifested not only among Nonconformists, but also the working classes’. In 1903, Ramsay MacDonald declared: ‘At the moment, the party may be regarded as standing for the nonconformist resistance to the Education Act’. Nonconformist unity over the education issue was largely responsible for the election victory in 1906 as they rallied around the party in opposition to the Balfour

204 Read, The Age of Urban Democracy, p. 314.
206 Emy, Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics, p. 72.
209 Hansard, fourth series Vol. 115, cols 909-1048, 2 December 1902.
Education Act of 1902. The campaign for prohibition reached its height in the early twentieth century. The opposition to the Temperance Act of 1904, which provided compensation for surrendered licenses, attracted wholehearted support from nonconformist prohibitionists which also helped to rally support behind Liberal candidates. In the election of 1906, around 75% of Liberal and Labour candidates supported an ‘amendment’ of the 1904 Act. Despite the lack of enthusiasm from Campbell-Bannerman and other leaders in response to a deputation received from over 100 MPs in April, the issue remained popular amongst many Liberals culminating in the 1908 Licensing Act. The character of policy merely changed reflecting the growing role of state, from the local option to a central control scheme for uniformly reducing licences.

Prohibition remained strongly linked with social reform, even after 1906. Social reformist MPs were often prohibitionists including Edward Lee Hicks, members of the Rowntree family such as Seebohm and Wesleyan Methodist T. P. Whittaker. Percy Alden, who later played an important part in New Liberal legislation, promoted increased public restriction on alcohol as a possible remedy for unemployment: ‘No one who has had experience at a labour bureau or with relief works would hesitate to say that a considerable percentage of the unemployed who apply for work are men who have lost situations through drink or gambling’. Prohibition was still strongly associated with the radical side of the party. So much so, that Lord Chancellor Robert Loreburn feared that if temperance reformers were not satisfied with government legislation they would ‘transfer from the Liberal Party to some school of Labour or Socialist thought’.

Moreover, the rise in parliamentary nonconformity went hand-in-hand with the growth of Lib-Lab politics. Many trade unionists from nonconformist denominations turned to advanced Liberalism when the ILP was a relatively unknown quantity, including John Burns and the president of Trades Congress Fred Maddison. In May 1906, Maddison wrote to Ramsay MacDonald: ‘It would take an expert politician to determine what has been the effect of the vague and unknown strength of the Labour Party’. After the new government was formed in 1906, the once radical fringe of provincial nonconformity was given a national voice. Hence, the period between 1886 and 1906 represented the rise in

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212 Greenaway, *Drink and British Politics Since 1830*, pp. 80-2.
216 Greenaway, *Drink and British Politics*, pp. 80-2.
217 Fred Maddison to Ramsay MacDonald, 3 May 1906. GC/3/20-1.
parliamentary nonconformity as a political and religious force, the legislative impact of which will be further considered in the final chapter.

7. Conclusion

Radical nonconformist groups such as the UKA provided a sense of ideological continuity in a party struggling to find its identity as demonstrated by two main premises. One was ideological. Nonconformist movements relating to prohibition and compulsory education pre-figured the theoretical underpinnings of Edwardian Liberalism. The prohibitionist campaigns of the UKA were an important ideological precursor to New Liberalism; the promotion of state interventionism for the individual’s good was extended to active socio-economic reforms. These movements also helped to consolidate a balance of class interests. They were well placed to appeal to both the working and middle classes in some measure. These movements were also instrumental in shoring up working-class interest in Liberalism. Connected through the shared culture of the chapel, these groups helped to cement a Liberal working-class base which was also important in both neutralising the threat of the ILP and legitimising Edwardian Liberalism. The prohibitionist lobby and the UKA had brought many workers towards the Liberal fold including a number of Lib-Lab representatives, as had the NEL.

As provincial nonconformity became increasingly unified behind the centralized Liberal Party over the turn of the century, Liberalism conversely became more radical and willing to embrace more far reaching industrial questions. Over the following decade the nonconformist radical tradition, with its programmatic approach to politics, gained a more national voice. There was a major upsurge in prohibitionist campaigns during the period of Edwardian Liberalism. Also, in opposition to the Balfour Education Act of 1902 nonconformists became a major force in the Liberal Party’s landslide in 1906.218 By 1910, a period when prohibition and other nonconformist causes held sway in Parliament, nonconformists constituted over half of all Liberal MPs.219 While it may be argued that nonconformist preoccupations with temperance and education demonstrated an alignment with old Liberalism, this would be a total misconception. Neither prohibition nor compulsory education were antithetical to social reform and constituted important precursors to the state socialism of New Liberalism.

5. Liberal Legislation and Parliamentary Nonconformity, 1906-1914

1. Introduction

The vision of truth that we have now, our intellectual expression of our relationship to the world and of our duty to it, is we recognise, imperfect: it is no key to the universe, to unlock every mystery for us, still less for others; but it may prove a sufficient lamp, and one whose rays grow ever bright, to light our footsteps onwards.¹

This statement was made by Edmund Harvey, who later became a Liberal MP, in his article ‘Catholicism of the Spirit’. The remark like many theological and idealist polemics of the time, suggested that while human agency was imperfect and individual paths diffuse, they constituted approximations towards the same end, of the realization of a common good. This emphasis on moral teleology was further demonstrated by his remark ‘…as we ascend the heavenly mountain… our paths draw nearer to each other, and so across the night between, let us listen to our fellow-pilgrims’ voices, and realise that someday we shall meet face to face’.² This was written in 1908 when the Liberal Party was introducing a number of new welfare reforms and Harvey was one of many Liberal MPs inspired by a distinctly religious vision. He was a Quaker whose interest in social reform was an extension of his religious conviction.³

While there has been growing recognition in more recent historical literature of the importance of nonconformity for the period of 1906 to 1914, it is limited and requires more focused in-depth study. The historiography of this period chiefly highlights the disconnection between New Liberalism and nonconformity. This relationship has not been subject to sufficiently vigorous evaluation. As shown in the introduction, this includes both historians who neglected to consider nonconformity in this period such as Michael Freeden⁴, and those such as Peter Clarke who in varying degrees characterised this period as marking a growing trend of secularisation in politics.⁵ Even in the late twentieth century and after, some historians still associated nonconformity with the mantle of Gladstonian Liberalism that was losing its vitality before 1914. In the 1980s a

² Ibid, p. 108.
⁵ Clarke, Liberals and Social Democrats.
some historians still linked nonconformity with older Liberal preoccupations.\(^6\) David Powell asserts that after 1906 ‘the New Liberal government embarked on a sweeping programme of reform, in which the old Liberalism of nonconformist radicalism was combined with a New Liberalism committed to state interventionist measures of welfare legislation’.\(^7\) While these historians have considered nonconformity after 1906, study into nonconformity remains aloof from more systematic engagement with Liberal Party legislation, and the quantitative approach of this chapter provides a more complete picture of the role of nonconformity in New Liberalism. George Bernstein himself considers how local dissenters were affected by New Liberalism between 1880 and 1914. Through a case study of John Clifford, he examines the limitations of the New Liberalism and Clifford’s social vision, but this constitutes only a single case study focusing primarily on provincial nonconformity.\(^8\) Clifford was a Baptist minister of the new connexion, keen social reformer, Fabian and member of the Progressive Party.\(^9\)

A sensible approach is to focus on leading historians who have done the most to overturn the secularisation model and engage more explicitly in examining the impact of nonconformity on Edwardian Liberal policy after 1906. Andy Vail considers the educational and social impact of nonconformity in the twentieth century, and he considers the Edwardian era. However, this only constitutes a single chapter of an edited collection and its focus is primarily on working-class communities.\(^10\) Ian Packer’s analysis of the Rowntree family constitutes only a singular case study.\(^11\) This could be explored further for the period after 1906 and another limitation to his work is his exclusive focus on Quakerism, neglecting other important nonconformist sects.\(^12\)

Hence, there is certainly room for more systematic engagement in examining the legislative role of parliamentary nonconformity between 1906 and 1914. While historians have actively engaged in studies into nonconformity before 1914, as shown, they have tended to be partial studies focusing only on certain narrow areas of government policy or case studies into a select number of MPs. The main historical contribution of this chapter is that it engages in a more thorough quantitative analysis of nonconformity and parliamentary legislation than exists in any current study. So far, David Bebbington has engaged in the most comprehensive statistical study of Free Church MPs in Parliament.

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\(^9\) Thompson, ‘Clifford, John’, ODNB.
\(^10\) Vail, ‘Protestant Nonconformists’, pp. 121-140.
\(^12\) Ibid, pp. 236-256.
in 1906, but neglects the period of 1910-14 and his data is not correlated with what was considered ‘radical’ at the time. Therefore the chief contribution of this chapter is a broad critical census of nonconformist denominational associations of Liberal MPs for both periods including 1907 and 1910, and a correlation of the findings with Liberal profiling and voting patterns for more radical measures.

However, unlike earlier sections which have relied on more qualitative interpretations, a quantitative approach is employed. This is logical considering that voting behaviours and politico-religious profiling is much easier to quantify when studying Parliament than the complicated and fragmentary world of local nonconformity. Moreover, this chapter benefits from access to more advanced computational tools such as SQL and through basic data mining the ability to handle data sets of parliamentary voting patterns efficiently.

This chapter directly considers the relationship between the rise of parliamentary nonconformity and the Liberal administration after 1906, thus demonstrating the continuation of radical nonconformist traditions in New Liberal legislation. In previous chapters the thesis has demonstrated the long-term impact of provincial nonconformity, such as Birmingham’s civic gospel culture, on reshaping the Liberal Party. This chapter evaluates the extent to which the rise of parliamentary nonconformity directly impacted on reshaping Liberal Party legislation between 1906 and 1914. It chiefly demonstrates that government policy did not depart from radical nonconformist traditions, but on the contrary reflected the changing nature of nonconformity as they became a parliamentary force. New Liberalism constituted a broad social liberal platform where nonconformity played an important role. This chapter firstly examines the legislative importance of nonconformists and how religious vision informed their political outlook, focusing primarily on a case study of Percy Alden, then engages in a quantitative based analysis of nonconformist sectarian affiliation with the radical wing of the party and voting behaviour.

2. The Legislative Impact of Nonconformity on Edwardian Liberalism: A Case Study into Percy Alden

The Liberal Review heralded the Commons of 1906 as ‘the first democratic parliament which this country has seen’ adding that it ‘has for its leader a statesman who

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has placed "the condition of the people" problem in the forefront of the programme. It was also declared that 'a definite Labour party, an indefinite Labour fringe, a group of radical social reformers, are all active in pushing forward examination of England’s social disease'. This was undoubtedly the vision of Percy Alden, who was as devout in his religious commitment to nonconformity as he was to solving the problems of ‘England’s social disease’. Alden was elected MP for Tottenham in 1906. That year the Liberal Party came to power with a record number of nonconformist MPs, who had propped up the party and without which the legislative reforms that followed would have been very difficult to implement. Historians have estimated that there were between 180 and 200 Liberal nonconformist MPs in Parliament in 1906.

Considering his influence on government legislation and his devout religious convictions, Alden was one of the leading representatives of nonconformity. There have been individual case studies examining the role of Liberal legislators, who were distinctly religious, in the Edwardian Liberal Party, including Packer’s aforementioned case study into the Rowntree family and Julia Stapleton’s recent article on C. F. G. Masterman exploring the centrality of Anglicanism in his New Liberal vision. But if Masterman’s Anglicanism was important in shaping his political vision, then Alden’s staunch nonconformity was no less important in shaping his own. Alden had originally trained as a Baptist minister before his studies were interrupted. He later became a Quaker. Alden was one among many nonconformist MPs who supported advanced social reforms. In the 1906 election, 59% of Liberal candidates supported the inclusion of old aged pensions, while the vast majority of the 168 nonconformists who replied to president of the Free Church Council Robert Horton’s appeal for support for old age pensions were wholehearted supporters.

Apart from the obvious electoral support, there were two identifiable ways that the surge in parliamentary nonconformity contributed to New Liberal policy after 1906. One was ideological. The theology of various nonconformists helped to legitimize new directives in social policy. Packer’s claim that, apart from non-religious politicians,

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‘active and committed dissenters also played a much more positive and important role in persuading and pushing the Liberal Party at all levels into embracing the New Liberalism’ can be extended further.\footnote{Packer, ‘Religion and the New Liberalism’, pp. 242-3.}

While the role of secular political theorists and philosophical idealists in developing new Liberal ideas was important, ignoring theological argument is erroneous considering the strong links between religion and philosophical idealism at the time. The polemics of New Liberal secular thinkers and nonconformists were not always antithetical, particularly as many political theorists underwent a crisis of faith. Although many were clearly not religious in any way like J. A. Hobson, others like T. H. Green had demonstrated a degree of religious commitment.\footnote{Leighton, \textit{The Greenian Moment}, p. vii.} It is no surprise that Alden had met Green who encouraged Alden to study at Oxford when he was 15.\footnote{Curthoys and Wales, ‘Alden, Sir Percy’, ODNB.} Alden had been deeply influenced by Green at Oxford and from there Alden had entered the Congregational Social Service, later to turn to Quakerism in 1901.\footnote{D’Alroy Jones, \textit{The Christian Socialist Revival}, p. 335.} Green and Alden therefore shared similar political views. It is unclear whether theology indirectly informed the work of certain secular New Liberal theorists given its importance in their earlier lives, but evidently there were similarities in theme and argument also demonstrated by Edmund Harvey who promoted active social legislation often on theological grounds.\footnote{Harvey, ‘The Catholicism of the Spirit’, p. 106.} Harvey was a social reformer and Quaker with strong personal connections to the Rowntree family.\footnote{Packer, ‘Religion and the New Liberalism’, p. 250.} He was also the warden of Toynbee Hall between 1909 and 1914. Harvey’s arguments were characteristically similar to Green’s, particularly when emphasising the many faces of the ‘ethical ideal’ manifest in the world: ‘We are sensible of this uniting force, however much our ethical ideas may differ.’\footnote{Ibid, p. 106.} His Christian vision was significant in shaping his politics, reflected in the large number of works he published themed on religion, Quakerism and social reform. In 1908, he wrote an article promoting Christian sectarian unity and the Christian imperative in public affairs: ‘we all unite in reverencing the good and unselfish spirit, wherever it manifests itself in human lives’.\footnote{Ibid, p. 106.}

Nonconformity provided important ideological foundations and justifications for the New Liberal programme. For the first time, they had around 198 MPs from nonconformist sects.\footnote{See appendix 3. This is extrapolated from the February 1907 list tallying 201 nonconformist MPs.} With their own numerical power, they finally had a strong political
outlet for their ideology of social conscience. Much theological justification came from those strongly connected with the Liberal Party, but who were not MPs. Writing for the *Liberal Review* in 1906, active Presbyterian and Liberal Reuben John Bryce declared: ‘Time enough to split hairs about Collectivism… but in the meantime, call it Socialism, Liberalism, or what you like, the aim should be a more secure protection for the weak and a greater equality of opportunity.’\(^{30}\) Despite his devout nonconformity and view that politics was an extension of religious duty, Alden’s published work tended to reflect practical matters of legislation and his theological views were expressed in a secondary capacity. This was no less significant, particularly when promoting important initiatives. Alden, who in 1904, wrote that ‘business must be spiritualised, the State Christianised, and religion humanised’ became one of the chief architects behind a number of key New Liberal reforms.\(^{31}\) The same year Alden addressed the Society of Friends emphasising the absolute necessity for people to recognise the need for social reform.\(^{32}\)

However, the more important area of contribution was practical – through direct legislation, social studies and political committees. Packer focuses on Arnold Rowntree and the social investigations of other family members such as Seebohm.\(^{33}\) In particular Packer demonstrates that Lloyd-George consulted with Seebohm who oversaw the land enquiry between 1912 and 1914.\(^{34}\) Packer shows that the Quaker Arnold Rowntree was a leading influence on the land campaign. However, the range considered is narrow and there were other prominent Liberal nonconformists such as Alden who contributed to social and welfare legislation after 1906 that demand investigation.

The architects of the social and welfare policy of the New Liberal administration were not all without religious devotion. In the historiography hitherto, most notably the work of Michael Freeden, emphasis is placed consistently on the same group of non-religious thinkers and politicians including Hobson, L. T. Hobhouse and Richard Haldane. This is particularly evident in chapters three, four and five of Freeden’s book.\(^{35}\) There is as much validity in citing Alden, Arnold Rowntree, Edmund Harvey and Charles Masterman as architects behind the New Liberal programme. These legislators were all

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34 Ibid, pp. 246-47.
religiously devout and committed to their respective denominations. All were nonconformists with the exception of Masterman who was Anglican.

They were prevalent in the British Institute of Social Service, which became one of Britain’s chief bulwarks behind social legislation of the Edwardian Era.\textsuperscript{36} The journal \textit{Progress: Civic, Social and Industrial} was established in 1906 by the institute and a number of nonconformist social reformers including Alden, George Cadbury and Seebohm Rowntree.\textsuperscript{37} Alden was the Chairman. Freeden examines Alden’s influence on government, in particular unemployment legislation, in the final chapter, but he makes no mention of his nonconformist and religious association, which is a major omission.\textsuperscript{38} Alden’s spiritual and religious leanings had direct bearing on his political vision. He also personified broad nonconformist sectarianism and New-Liberal sympathies with Labour. This was demonstrated by his contribution to R. Mudie-Smith’s \textit{The Religious Life of London} published in 1904, mentioned previously.\textsuperscript{39} In his chapter he asserted that ‘nothing creates greater interest in men’s minds than the subject of religion, or its twin sister politics – which, rightly understood, is only applied religion’.\textsuperscript{40} His emphasis on ‘the application of Christianity to the social conditions of our common life’ suggests that his political views were strongly shaped by religion.\textsuperscript{41} This seems reasonable, particularly considering his active commitment to religious matters, including his involvement with a number of Christian socialist organizations such as the Christian Socialist League and Christian Socialist Brotherhood. Alden was the first warden of the Mansfield Settlement, a movement that he considered to be deeply religious.\textsuperscript{42}

While Alden was concerned with the spiritual welfare of individuals, he was also concerned with the basic physical needs of human life through ameliorating poverty and tackling unemployment. In his 1904 study into religious life in London he wrote that ‘what seems to me to be important to remember is, that this care for the souls of men ought not to be in the slightest degree inconsistent with an overpowering desire for their bodily welfare’.\textsuperscript{43} This he applied directly to his own studies into urban poverty:

\begin{quotation}
\textsuperscript{36} Peter Barberis, John McHugh and Mike Tyldesley [Eds], \textit{The Encyclopedia of British and Irish Political Organizations: Parties, Groups and Movements of the Twentieth Century} (London, 2000), p. 357.
\textsuperscript{38} Freeden, \textit{The New Liberalism}, pp. 197-243.
\textsuperscript{39} Curthoys and Wales, ‘Alden, Sir Percy’, ODNB.
\textsuperscript{40} Alden, ‘The Problem of East London’, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{42} Curthoys and Wales, ‘Alden, Sir Percy’, ODNB.
\textsuperscript{43} Alden, ‘The Problem of East London’, p. 41.
\end{quotation}
It is true that the appeal of Christ was chiefly to the individual conscience; but it was his social initiative that has given impulse to the many present-day redemptive movements, and He never… neglected an opportunity of helping those who were oppressed by disease and hunger. I have urged the importance of the housing question and the question of overcrowding, because I think that evil conditions of this nature affect men and women in every part of their life.44

Alden’s cooperation with Ramsay MacDonald before 1906 demonstrated his commitment to Labour politics. He wrote to MacDonald in July 1903 stating that he ‘offered to run as a Labour candidate independent of the Liberal whips, and pledged to vote and work, with the Labour Party in the house’.45 Alden later became an official in the Labour Party under MacDonald, only to become disillusioned with the party. However, before the war he was as committed to the New Liberalism as he was to Lib-Labism.46

Through writing and campaigning through committees, Alden and other nonconformists had a major impact in reshaping legislation relating to labour issues. Alden’s contribution to Edwardian Liberalism was on the formation of social policy particularly relating to employment.47 Although Winston Churchill and William Beveridge were largely responsible for drafting the particular details of government schemes on unemployment, the role of nonconformists such as Alden was if anything more pivotal given the singular role he played in pursuing legislative reforms relating to employment issues.48 Churchill recruited Beveridge to the Board of Trade ‘to formulate arguments and schemes for national Labour Exchanges’ with a view to getting them accepted by government.49 However, by this stage, the legislation was already on the cards and the activities of Percy Alden during the preceding years demonstrates that he was the major driving force behind unemployment reforms.

His significance here was considerable, as he became secretary of the National Unemployed Committee, established by Liberals and the ILP in 1902. The same year Alden joined the Society of Friends.50 Having helped to found the British Institute of Social Service, he engaged in many statistical social projects. In 1903, in the "Liberal

44 Ibid, p. 41.
45 Percy Alden to Ramsay MacDonald, 4 July 1903, LRC 10/9, PHM.
47 Curthoys and Wales, ‘Alden, Sir Percy’, ODNB.
he stressed the importance of tackling the unemployment problem. He emphasised the important role played by the nonconformist City Temple Conference and the London Free Church manifesto in formulating proposals to tackle the problem.\textsuperscript{51} Two years later Alden published a book entitled \textit{The Unemployed: A National Question}.\textsuperscript{52} The legislative impact of Liberals such as Alden was informed by the legacy of many radical movements of provincial nonconformity. Alden’s book was dedicated to solving pressing issues of unemployment and appendix one features Chamberlain’s 1886 circular on ‘Pauperism and Distress’.\textsuperscript{53}

For many, like Alden, New Liberal legislation was an extension of religious social conscience. Alden’s views on labour questions reflected his religious vision which was particularly evident, when he wrote: ‘I regard the labour movement as a religious movement… and can honestly say that I have found more unselfishness among working men than among any other class’.\textsuperscript{54} He also campaigned for churches concerned with the material and spiritual condition of the urban working class: ‘…we must have the institutional church at any cost, with every possible form of social work attached to it’.\textsuperscript{55} He published a paper outlining the arrangements for ‘the ideal church for east London’ including Working men’s clubs, classes and benevolent societies such as the ‘Sick Benefit Society’.\textsuperscript{56} With reference to unemployment he stated in 1903 that ‘we have long since surrendered what may be called the “monadist” view of society, and in theory if not in practice we recognise the responsibility of the state towards these unfortunate victims of the modern industrial system’.\textsuperscript{57} These views foreshadowed his dedicated work on unemployment.

While Alden had clearly demonstrated his religious commitment through social service, he was also a primary architect behind labour reforms, in particular unemployment. Long before 1906, Alden was already proposing radical changes in government legislation in this area. In 1903, his suggestion that ‘the responsibility rests in the final issue with government and the local authorities must work in harmony and co-operation’ was characteristically similar to the Trades Boards legislation of the New Liberal government.\textsuperscript{58} Much of this was also expressed in his 1905 book \textit{The

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Curthoys and Wales, ‘Alden, Sir Percy’, ODNB.
\item Alden, \textit{The Unemployed}, pp. 145-49.
\item Ibid, pp. 43-68.
\item Alden ‘The Problem of East London’, p. 41.
\item Ibid, p. 349.
\item Ibid, p. 349.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Unemployed: A National Question, which was perhaps the most significant and comprehensive study in this area. He lambasted the Poor Law for making ‘no attempt to give permanent help either morally or economically to the genuine unemployed’.\(^59\) He argued for the ‘extension of insurance against unemployment’, including unemployment benefits as well as the introduction of trade boards.\(^60\) He made suggestions for the introduction of ‘Compulsory Labour Bureaux’.\(^61\) Alden’s suggestion was that local authorities should address issues of unemployment where needed:

> These bureaux [sic] must be carefully and scientifically planned for the collection of accurate statistics and for the provision of all possible information as where labour is wanted or where work can be found.\(^62\)

The book’s impact on the question of unemployment was demonstrated when Congregationalist MP H. B. Lees Smith wrote in a review that ‘We are not surprised at the large circulation which this book is enjoying’.\(^63\) For years, Alden had campaigned for these changes and in January 1905 he accepted an invitation from MacDonald to speak at a special conference on Unemployment held by the Labour Representation Committee.\(^64\) In 1906, during debates on government budgeting, Alden emphasised the need for Labour Bureaus to be established for non-trade union workers stressing that he ‘had known of men walking about for six weeks trying to find work when work was close at hand and would have been found if labour bureaux had been in existence’.\(^65\) This culminated in the Trade Boards Act of 1909, a legislative measure which he had spearheaded, as demonstrated not only by his well-received studies that foreshadowed this measure, but also his many parliamentary interventions.\(^66\)

Alden’s parliamentary work went hand in hand with his religious activities. While engaged in promoting important Liberal reforms he was also busy attending church conferences on social and labour questions. The same year the Trades Boards Act was passed Alden attended a conference on social problems organised by the Wesleyan Methodist Union for Social Service where he discussed some of the ‘causes and remedies

\(^{59}\) Alden, The Unemployed, pp. 7.
\(^{60}\) Ibid, pp. 58-62.
\(^{61}\) Ibid, p. 133.
\(^{62}\) Ibid, p. 48.
\(^{64}\) Percy Alden to Ramsay MacDonald, January 1905, LRC/19/261, PHM.
\(^{65}\) Hansard, fourth series Vol. 161, cols 352-552, 19 July 1906.
of unemployment’. He would also attend the annual Free Church Summer School every year. In August 1907 he gave a lecture on the housing problem at one of the meetings at Cambridge.

Alden also played a direct role in government legislation. Alden’s work on unemployment was largely a continuation of his own campaign long before it became government legislation. In this respect, the Trade Boards Act of 1909 was largely the product of practical legislative study. Alden, who had engaged in 2 studies into unemployment in 1905 and 1908 was outspoken in demanding direct government assistance for trade union unemployment schemes. Neither the civil service nor Labour committees were enthusiastically active in pursuing these reforms. This suggests that Alden’s role here was significant.

The role of Alden in sickness and invalidity insurance should not be underestimated either. Although Churchill was largely responsible for drafting certain aspects of the legislation, Alden had been pressing the party for urgent reforms in unemployment insurance for years. This reflected his own studies and various direct attempts at parliamentary intervention. Alden’s long-term commitment to this legislation was demonstrated in 1906 when he personally requested that the TUC give expression to this proposal of unemployment insurance, only to be met by an unenthusiastic response. Two years before the TUC finally agreed to pass a resolution in September 1908, they had rebuffed Alden’s request for their parliamentary committee to give expression to the subject of aid for voluntary unemployment schemes. For the next few years Alden pressed the government to pursue this legislation. When E. H. Pickersgill called attention to the Minority report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws ‘to develop trade union insurance against the risks of unemployment’, both Ramsay MacDonald and Alden seconded the resolution. Shortly before the legislation was finally passed, Alden declared that ‘unless the state could step in and assist the working class to compete with poverty and disease in their worst forms the state itself must suffer dissolution’.

During this legislative process, there was clearly a strong religious impetus that continued to influence policy. Alden was the most noteworthy in this respect.

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74 ‘Sickness and Invalidity Insurance’, Manchester Guardian, 21 March 1911, p. 10.
following year, Alden attended a summer school of social service under the auspices of the Interdenominational Conference of Social Service Unions connecting various Christian churches throughout the United Kingdom.\textsuperscript{75} He also remained an avid writer on social problems. In 1912 he published \textit{Democratic England}, which investigated the various areas of social disease that demanded remedy.\textsuperscript{76} Alden wrote that ‘The state avowedly claims the right to interfere with industrial liberty and to modify the old economic view of the disposal of private property’. He also saw the role of state and intervention in the private sphere as a moral duty or even an extension of Christian ethics: ‘… great wealth must be prepared to bear burdens in the interests of the whole community. Our social system must have an ethical basis’.\textsuperscript{77}

Labour and unemployment were paramount legislative measures in appealing to the working-class electorate. Alden was responsible for major fiscal reforms in the Edwardian era and had campaigned in Parliament for improvements in unemployment legislation. In 1909, along with Ramsay MacDonald he supported the findings of the Poor Laws Commission remarking:

\begin{quote}
It is, of course, an excellent suggestion that we should try to regularise the demand for labour, and that we should ask Government Departments to spread their work over the lean years as well as the years which are full of employment, and if the Government can… carry out such an idea they would appreciably lessen the evil of unemployment in times of trade depression.\textsuperscript{78}
\end{quote}

Alden constitutes a prime example of the continued importance of nonconformity and religious theological impetuses in New Liberalism. While he had been active in various nonconformist sects and advocated the importance of religion in secular matters, he had also been one of the most important visionaries behind the New Liberal welfare state, particularly in galvanizing key legislative measures.

3. A Census of Nonconformist MPs by Sectarian Affiliation

The numerical and polemical force of nonconformity continued to prop up the Liberal Party before the First World War. While the ranks of parliamentary

\textsuperscript{75} ‘A Summer School of Social Service’, \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 20 June 1912, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{76} Masterman also wrote an introduction to this book.
\textsuperscript{77} Percy Alden, \textit{Democratic England} (London, 1912), pp. 5-6.
\textsuperscript{78} Hansard, fifth series Vol. 5, cols 383-542, 19 May 1909.
nonconformists tended to occupy the back benches, they still had voting power and a large degree of political influence. Many nonconformists remained committed supporters of Lloyd-George due to his earlier commitment to Welsh Disestablishment and opposition to the 1902 Education Act. In April 1912 Lloyd-George continued to promote Welsh disestablishment arguing that ‘nonconformists are in a very considerable majority in the principality’. He also declared: ‘no nation or individual, however powerful, has the right to dictate to any other nation, or any other individual, with regard to their spiritual wants’.

As nonconformity electorally propped up the Liberal Party in 1906 and after, it is necessary to examine its impact on Liberal Party policy in the House of Commons. To what extent was the politics of welfarism attributable to parliamentary nonconformists? Historical narratives of the period, notably Clarke’s work, primarily focus on a select handful of political theorists and elite legislators. Even more recent studies by Packer or Leighton do not provide a detailed overview that can be either quantitatively or qualitatively assessed. A quantitative analysis of parliamentary religious affiliation and political opinion in relation to New Liberal policy would provide a more detailed study. In summary, despite the presence of a large number of nonconformists in Parliament from 1906 onwards they have been obscured by the heavy focus on those Liberals who abandoned their early religious convictions.

There has been some research into parliamentary religious affiliation in relation to nonconformity, but it has not been directly correlated with those who subscribed to New Liberal measures. Bebbington has analysed the sectarian affiliations of MPs throughout the nineteenth century including Baptists, Quakers and Congregationalists. He also engaged in a study into the number of ‘Free Church MPs’ in the 1906 Parliament including a breakdown of the various sects. However, Bebbington himself describes the New Liberal alliance with Labour as ‘secular’. Considering the demonstrable importance of such nonconformist sects as Congregationalism in Lib-Lab relations, this seems a questionable assumption. Bebbington’s research also neglects the second New Liberal administration after 1910.

80 Hansard, fifth series Vol. 37, cols 1211-1390, 25 April 1912.
81 Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism.
84 Bebbington, ‘The Free Church MPs’, pp. 136-150.
The statistical study breaks down Liberal MPs by religious affiliation in both 1907 and December 1910 following the election. Both lists have been compiled through detailed research. It is difficult to identify clearly which sect individual MPs belong to as some moved between sects and others identified themselves as religiously nonconformist, but not belonging to any particular sect. Another issue is the difficulty in defining what it meant to be nonconformist. Some MPs may have sympathised with their political objectives, but were not inspired by religious convictions. Bebbington’s study into Free Church MPs in 1907 is based on classifying those who were clear cut nonconformists by affiliation, such as being members of a particular church, and those he describes as on the fringe of nonconformity.\textsuperscript{86} However, there are two shortcomings to this methodology; first it fails to account for the degree of true religious practice as an MP who attends sermons, but is not technically a member of church may be more religious than someone who happens to be a member for other motives. Also, it does not make a distinction between the devout and the more passive religious follower.

Considering these difficulties, the list will follow strict criteria. The MPs considered include those who were attached to dissenting sects in at least name only where there was a clear-cut association with nonconformist denominations or were at least included in Free Church Councils annual table of free churchmen in 1907, as well as certain additions in Bebbington’s study. This is further refined to reflect those who were ‘active’ and those who were ‘devout’. The criteria for MPs deemed ‘active’ are contingent on whether they demonstrated an involvement in their respective religious denominations such as attending sermons. Outward involvement could be anything from attending church assemblies or showing some degree of outward support for a congregation. Membership of a religious society, church or chapel is the main indicator. However, not all members were active as it was possible to be a passive member of a congregation or to have remained a member long after one’s religious interest or activity had subsided, particularly if they were members since childhood. Conversely, some were active attenders but not members, so this category is expanded to include members who demonstrated a degree of religious activity who were not strictly members of a congregation. One limitation of this approach is that it cannot realistically take into consideration those who may have had a cultural attachment to a sect without any degree of internal religious faith. However, considering the emphasis by secularisation sceptics on how religious cultural mentality outstripped misleading church attendance figures and

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, pp. 136-150.
the growing worry among the clergy that middle-class religious observance was becoming lukewarm, this is not necessarily a major drawback. There is just as much argument for claiming the opposite - that there were religiously minded MPs with no outward sectarian affiliation. This chapter’s approach should still give a reasonable snapshot of religious allegiance amongst Liberal MPs. For those considered ‘devout’ the same criteria will be applied, only there also has to be clear evidence of outward religious commitment beyond mere activity such as giving sermons or displaying an outward expression of devotion. In some cases, this can be ascertained through such materials as diaries and personal letters, but for a majority, other sources will be considered.

The study only provides an estimate of the degree of religious commitment of nonconformist MPs and some cases are more clear-cut than others. While some clearly demonstrated a profound spiritual interest such as Percy Holden Illingworth, others are more problematic. In some cases, private correspondence and diaries can be revealing, particularly in cases where the degree of religious commitment is in question. John Bright’s commitment to Quakerism and religion was particularly evident in his diaries.87

There is little evidence to suggest that Henry Campbell-Bannerman, who was prime minister before and after the 1906 election and a Scots United Free Churchman, was an active member of his congregation. Political historians of Edwardian Liberalism often cite Liberal legislators as evidence of the growing secularisation of the party including David Lloyd-George, Winston Churchill, Richard Haldane and Herbert Asquith.88 Both Lloyd-George and Asquith were from dissenting sects but historians have often maintained that these politicians were not known for their religious vision. Asquith was brought up a strict Congregationalist but his religious commitment faded over time.89 Asquith often attended fellow Congregationalist Robert Horton’s lectures advocating the new social gospel, particularly in the 1880s and 1890s, but by the twentieth century he was best described as an ‘ex-Congregationalist’.90 Lloyd-George’s commitment to his Baptism was more sporadic. Stephen Koss emphasises both the strategic and religious importance of Free Churches throughout his political tenure.91 However, at certain times in his life, his Baptist spiritual convictions were in doubt. David’s father Richard Lloyd-George, who was an active Baptist and Liberal, had a major impact on the young David.92

88 Packer, ‘Religion and the New Liberalism’, p. 239.
90 Hope [Ed], T&T Clark Companion to Nonconformity, p. 616.
92 Morgan, ‘George, David Lloyd’, ODNB.
But even at an early age David expressed reservations about the Baptist faith. His spiritual commitment to Baptism fluctuated throughout the following decades. He had expressed disdain for certain rituals and superstitions associated with the chapel.\textsuperscript{93} Lloyd-George’s diary suggests a fickle relationship with Baptism.\textsuperscript{94} In this he expressed doubts about ‘the essentiality or even expediency of stickling for baptism’.\textsuperscript{95} This suggests little spiritual devotion. Yet he still remained a lifelong member of the Campbellite Baptist Church in Caernarfonshire.\textsuperscript{96} Certainly, his commitment to the wider interests of nonconformity remained steadfast. In April 1898, during a parliamentary sitting David Lloyd-George championed the nonconformist campaign for national education.\textsuperscript{97} Throughout the next eight years he dedicated much of his energy to actively addressing nonconformist grievances over education and other issues in the House of Commons.\textsuperscript{98} This in no way suggests he was wholeheartedly committed to the cause, but he demonstrated an outward commitment and attended the Baptist Church, albeit inconsistently. Hence, Lloyd-George would be listed as an active Baptist, but not a devout nonconformist owing to his religious reservations.

Quantitative analysis shows that nonconformists made up a significant section of the parliamentary Liberal Party. In February 1907, around 201 Liberal MPs were nonconformists in name, but this varied from deep spiritual commitment to a mere formal sectarian affiliation, including several on the outer fringes of nonconformity.\textsuperscript{99} This amounted to half of all Liberal MPs compared with 9.5\% in 1865.\textsuperscript{100} Out of 201 MPs the most numerous were the Congregationalists who numbered around 69 MPs including at least 54 active members.\textsuperscript{101} This does not suggest there were not more active members, but this merely reflects a list of those where there was clear evidence of a degree of religious commitment. The high numbers of Congregationalists amongst the Liberal contingent probably reflected their corporate role in civic life as many were self-made

\textsuperscript{93} Watts, \textit{The Dissenters}, p.304.  
\textsuperscript{94} David Lloyd-George, \textit{1886 Diary}, William George Papers, National Library of Wales.  
\textsuperscript{95} Travis Crosby, \textit{The Unknown David Lloyd George: A Statesman in Conflict} (New York, 2014), p. 386.  
\textsuperscript{96} Watts, \textit{The Dissenters}, p.304.  
\textsuperscript{97} Hansard, fourth series Vol. 56, cols 381-528, 19 April 1898.  
\textsuperscript{98} An examination of Hansard between the years 1898 and 1906 indicates that the subject of education in relation to nonconformity made up the majority of Lloyd George’s comments in Parliament.  
\textsuperscript{99} This list is based on a variety of sources including Bebbington’s study into Free Church MPs. Other sources considered include the ODNB, The Times obituaries and other secondary literature. Newspapers were often critically evaluated to help identify religious affiliation, for example: James Woolley Summers – Revered for his work for the Stalybridge Congregational Church during its centenary (‘Congregational Centenary: The Stalybridge Church’, \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 5 October 1931, p. 12). See appendix 2.  
\textsuperscript{100} Watts, \textit{The Dissenters}, p. 237.  
\textsuperscript{101} This also includes at least 8 nonconformists who were included in Bebbington’s study whose precise denominational associations are unknown.
businessmen, active in local politics. The Methodists were the second most numerous with 51 MPs and at least 46 were actively committed to their denomination. Out of 19 Unitarian MPs only 12 were clearly identifiable as active. Strikingly, all but three out of 21 Baptist MPs were active. There were at least 11 active Quakers out of a total of 12, 8 Presbyterians of whom 5 were active and 12 members who were attached to the Free Church of Scotland.

This suggests that Nonconformity was not merely of a technical numerical strength, but that there was a large number who were actively religious. Out of a total of 201 Liberal Nonconformist MPs, at least 151 were active nonconformists and this is a very conservative estimate. Out of all Liberal MPs at least 171 were broadly religiously active; this also includes Catholics and Anglicans. There was a minimum of around 19 Anglicans in total in the parliamentary Liberal Party and around half showed clear evidence of being active. Nonconformity in no way declined in 1910. The Liberal government from December 1910 until the outbreak of war constituted a defining period of New Liberal legislation and nonconformity remained the most prevalent force in Parliament. If New Liberalism represented the abandonment of nonconformist traditions, their impact in Parliament would have faded. However, they remained numerous and influential. Out of a total of 272 MPs, around 140 were nonconformists in name, of which a minimum of 108 were religiously active and around five were on the nonconformist fringe. The Congregationalists were still the most numerous comprising a minimum of 37 MPs. Overall, the percentage of nonconformist MPs in the Liberal Party in February 1907 was around 50% and at least 52% in December 1910. This represents only a minor increase but in no way constitutes a secular trend in Liberal politics.

4. Nonconformist Sectarianism and Hansen’s List of Radical MPs

In addition to demonstrating the political significance of nonconformity in the Liberal Party, the study benefits from a direct correlative analysis with Liberal MPs whose Liberalism was associated with the radical wing of the party. There have been some quantitative attempts to identify and class ‘radicals’ in the early twentieth century. P. Hansen has compiled a list of MPs whom he describes as ‘radical’ between 1906 and 1914 according to strict criteria. Identifying what constituted a radical is difficult as the

103 Dod’s Parliamentary Companion: 1907 (Hailsham, 1907).
104 See appendix 2.
105 Dod’s Parliamentary Companion: 1911 (Hailsham, 1911).
concept can be applied to different spheres of politics such as foreign policy, constitutional or social reforms. Hansen’s list has a certain definitive flexibility as his criteria rests on what was considered a radical at the time and who sought some measure of reforms within a democratic framework: ‘Those considered or contemporarily labelled as radicals held left wing views, being politically somewhat just left of centre. They were not revolutionaries or communists. They wanted change through reforms carried out in a democratic manner’.106 Hansen’s criteria applied to that which was considered left of centre in the political vocabulary of the time, and this would have largely reflected those supporting New Liberal social legislation. What was considered ‘radical’ in the Edwardian period was largely correlated with the kind of socio-economic reformist politics of what was termed ‘advanced Liberalism’. Hence this section cross-references Hansen’s list of radical MPs with a compiled list of nonconformist MPs in 1907 and 1910 to get a more accurate picture of ‘radical’ MPs by sectarian affiliation.

A comparative analysis suggests that nonconformist affiliation was prevalent among the more radical wing of the party.107 This is unsurprising considering that provincial nonconformists developed a politics of state interventionism in the social sphere, during the social turn in radical dissent, between the 1860s and 1890s, which no doubt was adopted by many MPs who grew up when these ideas were disseminated. While many Lib-Lab MPs emerged from interclass cooperative platforms of nonconformity as shown in chapter 2, many had been laymen in the late nineteenth century including Albert Spicer who was president of several Congregational organizations including the National Congregational Union.108 Hansen’s list reflected what was often termed at the time ‘advanced Liberalism’ and the comparatives should provide a reasonable representation of the prevalence of nonconformist MPs who occupied the back benches and senior cabinet positions. If New Liberalism was primarily a secular movement one might expect them to make up the minority, but there is a clear positive correlation between the more radical section of the party according to Hansen and nonconformist sectarian affiliation.

Overall, the proportion of nonconformist MPs included in Hansen’s compilation increased as the party’s political agenda became more radical in terms of social and labour reforms. The assumption that the interests of nonconformity gave way to a class-based politics is an oversimplification. The historiography suggests that while class and religion

107 See appendix 1.
were both important in Liberal-Labour relations, the period in question largely constituted an abandonment of the latter in favour of the former, as embodied in the works of P. F. Clarke and James Robert Moore.\(^\text{109}\) While the early twentieth century was dominated by a marked division of class with the rise of the ILP, this in no way suggests that the Liberal Party was strictly pursuing class legislation. Nor were the interests of political nonconformity necessarily at odds with either the interests of the working class or an active state social policy. More likely the two were linked since provincial nonconformity had helped to sustain a relationship with certain artisans as hitherto shown. There was if anything a growing nonconformist influence in Liberal politics during the period after 1910, not a decline.\(^\text{110}\)

Edwardian Liberal legislation, that was committed to social and labour reforms, was more programmatic after 1910 than it had been earlier. Despite the persistence of moderates, the more radical wing of the party became more influential for the years following 1906 particularly after the next election. After 1906 there were the rumblings of a social welfare policy and there was a massive influx of nonconformists after the election. The same year the Liberals introduced the Workmen’s Compensation Act which constituted a mere extension of previous legislation so it could provide compensation not only for accidents in the workplace but also for illness.\(^\text{111}\) However by 1908, they introduced the Old-age Pensions Act, which was touted, in the words of Liberal MP Oswald Partington as ‘a great measure of social reform’.\(^\text{112}\) The following year, the People’s Budget, with its graduated income tax, provided more revenue for social reforms.\(^\text{113}\) After 1910, whether in reaction to Labour’s electoral gains or the need for ‘national efficiency’, the interest of welfare and social policy assumed even more importance. The National Insurance Act introduced in 1911 was perhaps the most significant work of Liberal legislation which set up compulsory health insurance for all workers and benefits for the unemployed.\(^\text{114}\)

Also, the number of nonconformist MPs increased among the ranks of radicals in the party. Out of a total of 119 of Hansen’s radicals that were Liberal MPs in 1907, 61 were from nonconformist sects of which a minimum of 46 were active in their respective

\(^\text{110}\) *Dod’s Parliamentary Companion: 1911*.
\(^\text{112}\) ‘Old-Age Pensions: Mr Partington, MP, At Belle Vue The Old Age Pension Act’, *Manchester Guardian* (19 October, 1908), p. 4.
\(^\text{114}\) Ibid, pp. 151-2.
denominations. The most numerous were the Congregationalists with 25 MPs followed by the Methodists with 19 MPs. The list also included 3 Quakers, 4 Unitarians and 5 Baptists. More than 74 belonged to a religious denomination including at least 53 who were active. These figures are if anything conservative and there were probably more. There were 8 nonconformists who were Lib-Lab MPs and 3 of whom were devout, namely William Abraham, William Johnson and Arthur Richardson. While some Lib-Lab MPs later abandoned the Liberal Party in favour of Labour including Abraham, others including Burt remained loyal due to strong nonconformist associations. Even Abraham himself was very reluctant to abandon Liberalism and many other members of the Miners Federation including John Wilson and Charles Fenwick blankly refused to stop appearing on Liberal platforms, all of whom were ardent Methodists.

When further cross-referenced with Hansen’s list there was a rise in the overall percentage of nonconformists among radicals after the 1910 election. The Liberal government after 1910 was if anything more radical than it had been during the previous 4 years. They continued to implement the same level of labour reforms despite having a significantly reduced majority. In 1910 they had far greater obstacles to overcome than in 1906. It is therefore no surprise that the percentage of radicals within the party increased from 31 to 35%, of which a majority remained nonconformists. Out of a total of 93 MPs identified as radical, at least 51 were nonconformists including a minimum of 40 who were active members, and more than 30 were devout. These estimates are very conservative, but this still constitutes an increase from 52% to 55%. As in 1907, the Methodists and the Congregationalists were the most prevalent with 14 and 15 MPs respectively. This is not surprising considering the importance of Congregationalists in the social turn of nonconformity and corporate role in provincial life in cities such as Birmingham. Methodists were strongly associated with working-class radicalism and this no doubt reflected New Liberalism’s association with labour politics. The raw number of Quakers doubled since February 1907. There were two Presbyterians and five Baptists. This suggests that the majority of nonconformist MPs were affiliated with denominations that more closely represented inter-class relations between artisans and middle-class radicals, further evidence that New Liberalism owed much to the inter-class

115 Several sources were consulted including David Bebbington’s own study into Free Church MPs in 1907. Bebbington was also kind enough to share some of his own private research in his study.
117 Ibid, p. 79.
119 Parsons, ‘From Dissenters to Free Churchmen’, p. 106.
shared religious identities as demonstrated in chapter 2. The New Liberal Parliament of December 1910 welcomed in a number of religiously devout ministers who saw politics as an extension of their religious social vision. This included Charles Silvester Horne, who was a Congregational Minister in Kensington and whose primary work was religious, not political.\textsuperscript{120} He was heralded as ‘the first minister in charge of a church who had sat in Parliament since the days of Mr Praise-God Barebones’.\textsuperscript{121} In 1910, shortly before the December election, he gave a sermon on the ‘parable of the good Samaritan’ at the Central Hall in Manchester.\textsuperscript{122} Many were inspired by a genuine religious vision. Over 61 MPs were from religious denominations of some kind including a minimum of 45 who were active.

Liberal legislators in the cabinet were not the only architects of Edwardian Liberalism. Those seeking more radical measures in dealing with such problems as unemployment and low wages emerged from below, many from the backbenches. Many backbench Liberals were growing frustrated with Campbell-Bannerman’s administration and perceived failure to tackle the issue of unemployment.\textsuperscript{123} This pattern is reinforced by Hansen’s list of radical MPs, which suggests that the percentage of radicals in the cabinet rose from 46\% in 1907 to 50\% in December 1910. In 1907 there were 28 radicals in senior positions within government, of which 13 were nonconformists. In 1910 the proportion rose to 11 nonconformists out of 22. This is significant. The most numerous were the Congregationalists, of whom 5 occupied cabinet positions including Reginald McKenna and Thomas McKinnon Wood. This is not surprising considering their general numerical strength in the party. Around 76\% of senior MPs belonged to some religious denomination, of which at least 9 were active out of 21.

### 5. Nonconformist Voting Behaviour and New Liberalism

While the correlation between nonconformist MPs and those deemed radicals is revealing, it is limited to biographical profiling and does not sufficiently consider their actions in shaping government legislation. How far was there a correlation between nonconformist affiliation and voting behaviour on New Liberal legislation? In assessing voting behaviour, the issue of motive is a central consideration. A number of

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\textsuperscript{121} Watts, \textit{The Dissenters}, p. 213.

\textsuperscript{122} ‘Rev. C. Silvester Horne and The Good Samaritan’, \textit{Manchester Guardian}, 2 November 1910, p. 3.

\textsuperscript{123} Tanner, \textit{Political Change and the Labour Party}, p. 46.
nonconformist MPs often backed the government, particularly Lloyd-George, for practical as much as ideological reasons. However, a combination of both voting behaviour and radical profiling should give a good indication of their contribution to Edwardian Liberalism.

This study considers the correlation between nonconformist sectarian affiliation and voting behaviour in a number of bills proposed in the Commons between 1907 and 1912.\textsuperscript{124} Many legislative acts popularly associated with Edwardian Liberalism did not meet with stiff opposition in the Commons. The 1908 Pensions Act for example was not opposed by a large number of MPs, even from the Tory Party. Often when Liberal measures were finally passed, opposition was not numerous enough to give any kind of indication of nonconformist voting behaviour. Also, proposals where there were larger discrepancies were often too inconsequential to the New Liberal programme. Therefore, in selecting voting sessions there are two main considerations: one that there was sufficient voting discrepancy amongst Liberals and two, that it had legislative importance.

This demands further elaboration considering the complexities of parliamentary legislative voting procedures, and there are two main methodological issues. First is the matter of voting discrepancy. By the time New Liberal reforms were passed through the Commons the votes were usually convincingly in favour of government legislation. The majority of Liberals would simply back the government line. This was often after many revisions and caveats in legislative details that it was not always clear who supported the legislation in principle, or under what conditions. For the sake of clarity, the analysis will reflect two data sets of voting behaviour including major legislative reforms that shaped government policy and those areas of detailed refinement on proposed legislation where the discrepancy was high.

The second lies in the problem of parliamentary attendance. Were nonconformists more or less likely to attend Parliament and vote than other MPs? Were they more likely to vote on certain legislative measures? An analysis of parliamentary voting attendance relating to five distinct pieces of legislation suggests that nonconformists were simply more likely to actively vote in Parliament than others. Out of the sample group, 43\% of nonconformists attended on average to vote for a legislative measure compared with 40\% of other Liberal MPs. Of the percentage who actively voted in the House of Commons, out of all who attended, 53\% were nonconformist compared to 47\% for other MPs. One explanation could be that nonconformists were more likely to just prop up Liberal

\textsuperscript{124} See appendix 2 and 3.
legislation as representatives of their political and religious interests. As demonstrated earlier, Liberal leaders would often rally up support from nonconformists.

However, were nonconformists more likely to actively vote on measures which concerned them? The evidence suggests that they were more likely to attend for social and municipal reformist legislation, but even this is inconclusive. On votes relating to municipal affairs, nonconformists were more likely to attend, such as the London and District Electricity Supply Bill 1908, where 62% of Liberals who voted were nonconformists. This reflected 47% of the total number of nonconformist MPs compared with 29% of others.\textsubscript{125} A vote on the Expiring Laws Continuance Bill in 1908, relating to loans for public works, was a ratio 54:46 for nonconformists.\textsubscript{126} This constituted around 32% of all parliamentary nonconformists, compared to 27% for other MPs. However, on legislation relating to such issues as defence, the breakdown was almost even. On legislation relating to national interest including a vote on the Army Annual Bill of 1909 the ratio was actually 49% for nonconformists compared to 51% for other MPs.\textsubscript{127} For the Territorial Army Bill in 1907, the breakdown was a ratio of 47:53 respectively.\textsubscript{128}

However, there are myriad considerations, and in some cases parliamentary attendance was sporadic. It would be inaccurate to strictly correlate attendance with enthusiasm for a specific issue. In a vote over elementary education in December 1908, out of 192 Liberal MPs who voted 99 were nonconformists, which was little under 52% to 48%.\textsubscript{129} Given their preoccupation with the education issue, one might expect a larger discrepancy. While attendance often reflected interest for a particular measure, proceedings of the house were not always so predictable. Often new proposals would emerge spontaneously. There were also a number of incidental factors that could affect parliamentary attendance, including other commitments and accessibility to the house.

On the other side, it would also be strictly inaccurate to ignore the relationship between attendance and voting enthusiasm. In some cases, many MPs knew in advance what would be discussed in a session. It was plausible that a number of MPs shied away from voting against their own government lines, or others were not eager to pursue legislation. The evidence suggests that while there was some correlation between attendance and voting interests, there were also many sporadic and unpredictable results. Thus, the methodology employed attempts to account for these complicated variables by

\textsuperscript{125} Hansard, fourth series Vol. 198, cols 1209-1416, 14 December 1908.  
\textsuperscript{126} Hansard, fourth series Vol. 193, cols 805-1068, 27 July 1908.  
\textsuperscript{127} Hansard, fifth series Vol. 6, cols 681-802, 14 June 1909.  
\textsuperscript{128} Hansard, fourth series Vol. 173, cols 1299-1466, 6 May 1907.  
\textsuperscript{129} Hansard, fourth series Vol 197, cols 1233-1392, 1 December 1908.
examining three distinct data sets of voting behaviour. One reflects the percentage of those who voted in support of New Liberal legislation who were nonconformists. This is still an important statistic as despite the problem of attendance, it still constituted positive action in support of legislation which contributed to Edwardian Liberalism. Second, the percentage of those who voted in favour of an act of government legislation out of the total number of nonconformist MPs in the Liberal Party overall will be considered. Lastly, it examines the percentage of nonconformist MPs who voted in favour of a measure out of the total number who were present and voted at the session. This is the most accurate means of assessing support for legislation as it factors in vote and attendance, but still has its limitations.

The legislative measures examined have been selected on the basis that they constituted major reforms aimed at appealing to working-class interests and were sufficiently divisive. Labour legislation also included amendments which attracted high levels of opposition. Labour legislation tended to be a more divisive amongst Liberals than other social reforms such as pensions. Hence, five separate Bills will be considered including the Eight Hours Coal Mines Act of 1908, the Finance Bill of 1909, the Unemployment Workman’s Bill of 1909, the National Insurance Bill of 1911 and minimum wage legislation of 1912. This gives a good representation of voting behaviour in both Liberal administrations.

From this, the overall pattern of voting behaviour suggests that nonconformists were slightly more likely to vote on these reforms than the remainder of MPs. The more advanced the proposal the more likely it enjoyed support from MPs with varying degrees of nonconformist affiliation. They were strong supporters of social reforms, in particular in relation to issues of labour.

In the Finance Bill, the voting patterns suggested that nonconformist MPs voted slightly more in favour than other MPs. The Finance Bill was a major work of government legislation and part of the People’s Budget. The significance of the Bill was that it constituted a major fiscal reform which demanded various sources of revenue including progressive income tax. In particular it proposed to raise income tax and the taxation of land values, with a specific aim of funding social reforms. This represented a major threat to laissez-faire and economic non-interventionism. It was the People’s Budget of 1909 that spearheaded further social reforms by providing the needed public funds. Some

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of the measures were considered controversial, including the land and super taxes introduced by Lloyd-George.\textsuperscript{131}

The first and second readings did not suggest any particular correlation with nonconformist voting behaviour. The first reading of the Finance Bill attracted little debate apart from voting on sources of revenue, such as alcohol duties, to fund the budget.\textsuperscript{132} In the second reading, out of 336 Liberals around 169 nonconformists voted to pursue a second reading, which represented a half of all those in favour (see Fig.1).\textsuperscript{133} The total percentage of nonconformists who voted was 87\% compared with 86\% for others. Those active in their religious affiliation numbered at least 128 MPs. Only 6 Liberal MPs, including 3 nonconformists, voted to delay the reading 3 months. However out of all nonconformists that were present and voted, 98\% were in favour which was equal with other MPs. On the final reading in November 1909, out of 349 Liberal MPs who voted in favour, 175 were nonconformists in name and 136 were active (see Fig. 2). This was a little over 50\%.\textsuperscript{134} However around 99\% of Liberal nonconformists who voted in the House supported the budget compared with 97\% of other Liberal MPs. Around 91\% of all parliamentary nonconformists voted for the legislation. All active nonconformists voted in favour. There was only one nonconformist MP who opposed the Bill, namely Presbyterian Leslie Renton. Renton was not a radical and existed only on the fringes of nonconformity.\textsuperscript{135} These results show only minor discrepancies, but the great bulk of the Liberal Party was behind the budget.

Fig. 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finance Bill, 2nd Reading, June 10th 1909</th>
<th>Nonconformists</th>
<th>Others:</th>
<th>Total:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raw votes</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total vote in terms of Ayes:</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of all NCs/others in Parliament:</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of ayes out of all NCs/others who voted in session</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finance Bill, Final Reading, November 4th 1909</th>
<th>Nonconformists</th>
<th>Others:</th>
<th>Total:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raw votes</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total vote in terms of Ayes:</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of all NCs/others in Parliament:</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of ayes out of all NCs/others who voted in session</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{131} Self, \textit{Evolution of the British Party System}, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{132} Hansard, fifth series Vol. 4, cols 465-632, 29 April 1909.
\textsuperscript{133} Hansard, fifth series Vol. 6, cols 441-616, 10 June 1909.
\textsuperscript{134} Hansard, fifth series Vol. 12, cols 1973-2154, 4 November 1909.
\textsuperscript{135} Bebbington, ‘The Free Church MPs’, pp. 141-2.
The correlation was more pronounced for labour legislation, which was a slightly more divisive issue. This was demonstrated by the debates over the Eight Hours Coal Mines Act. In the original second hearing in May 1906, the devout Congregationalist Compton Rickett made an impassioned plea in favour of the motion stating that it was ‘not simply a question of overstrain or inconvenience, but of the life and limbs of men, the happiness of families and the safety of one of the greatest industries of this country’.136 This reform was aimed at reducing the number of hours spent underground to eight hours for miners, and there was some doubt among the Liberal leadership about its viability. It was discussed in Parliament for the next two years. Throughout December 1908, the debate stretched over several sessions where detailed amendments were either rejected or accepted – none of which were revealing of the degree of support for the legislation in principle. Nevertheless, as the bill was passed at the third reading in December the results were strongly in favour (see Fig. 3). While 216 of the Liberal MPs who were present voted in favour only five voted against. Out of the 216 around 121 were nonconformists, of which at least 90 were active in their congregations.137 Only two out of five Liberals who opposed the measure were nonconformists, both of whom were religiously active, namely the Wesleyan Methodist Clifford John Cory and the Unitarian Arnold Lupton. Neither were considered radicals according to Hansen. Clifford Cory certainly did not represent the bulk of nonconformists when he argued that the measure would be detrimental to the mining industry, on the basis that it proved such a failure across the channel: ‘in France the eight-hours scheme was practically inoperative; there was a conspiracy among all parties - miners, owners, and the government, to ignore it’.138 Overall out of all who voted in favour 56% were nonconformist MPs, compared with 44% for other Liberal MPs. Out of all nonconformists who actively voted in the session, 98% supported the final reading compared with 97% of other MPs. Percy Alden was conspicuously absent for this vote.139 Out of all nonconformist MPs, 62% turned up and voted in favour compared with 49% of other MPs.

137 Hansard, fourth series Vol. 198, cols 1209-1416, 14 December 1908.
138 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
Fig. 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eight Hour Coal Mines Bill, 3rd Reading, 14th December 1908</th>
<th>Nonconformists</th>
<th>Others:</th>
<th>Total:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raw votes</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total vote in terms of Ayes:</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of all NCs/others in Parliament:</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of ayes out of all NCs/others who voted in session</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a similar pattern of voting behaviour after 1910. This minor correlation, at the very least, was further evidenced in the National Insurance Act of 1911. In December 1911, Henry Forster called for further amendments to the wording of the Bill, while Ramsay MacDonald pressed for an immediate third hearing. Asquith in appealing for expediency announced: ‘I hope the house will brush aside, this Amendment, this halting, faltering, paltering Amendment’ and that ‘I say the House, in reading this Bill a third time, are conferring upon millions of our fellow countrymen by the joint operation of self-help and of state help, the greatest alleviation of the risks and sufferings of life that Parliament has ever conferred upon any people’.\(^{140}\) In the end 224 Liberals voted to immediately pursue the legislation without further amendment, including 117 nonconformist MPs and 107 others, which amounted to 52% to 48% (see Fig. 4). This reflected 85% of the total number of nonconformists in the party, compared with 81% for others. However, out of all those present who voted in favour the difference was insignificant, 100% to 99% respectively.

Fig. 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vote to pursue immediate legislation (National Insurance Act, 6th December 1911)</th>
<th>Nonconformists</th>
<th>Others:</th>
<th>Total:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raw votes</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total vote in terms of Ayes:</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of all NCs/others in Parliament:</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of ayes out of all NCs/others who voted in session</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another notable reform was the introduction of a minimum wage for workers in coal mines in 1912. At the first hearing, in March 1912 Bonar Law attempted to delay the reading of this proposal for six months, but lost 348 to 225 votes. Out of 232 Liberals who voted to pursue a second hearing, 118 were from nonconformist sects amounting to 51% of Liberal MPs present (see Fig. 5). At least 93 were religiously active. The 118 MPs constituted around 86% of the total number of Liberal parliamentary nonconformists. A

\(^{140}\) Hansard, fifth series Vol. 32, cols 1379-1554, 6 December 1911.
total of 133 were from religious sects in name, of which at least 103 were active.\footnote{Hansard, fifth series Vol. 35, cols 2037-2222, 21 March 1912.} Only Wesleyan Clifford Cory voted against. This was a recurring name in opposing New Liberal legislation, but he was a wealthy businessman and a committed nonconformist.\footnote{Cory, Sir Clifford John, (10 April 1859–3 Feb. 1941). Who’s Who & Who Was Who. Ed. Retrieved 23 Oct. 2018.} The third reading of the Bill took place on 26 March. Only one nonconformist voted against the Bill, namely the Primitive Methodist John Wilson. Out of 213 MPs who voted in favour 166 were Liberals which included 85 nonconformists (see Fig. 6). This constituted around 51\% of the party’s MPs who supported the legislation. In both cases the percentage of nonconformists who were present and voted in favour was no higher than other MPs.

*Fig. 5.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coal Mines Minimum Wage for Workers, 2nd Hearing, 21st March 1912</th>
<th>Nonconformists</th>
<th>Others:</th>
<th>Total:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raw votes</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total vote in terms of Ayes:</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of all NCs/others in Parliament:</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of ayes out of all NCs/others who voted in session</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Fig. 6.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coal Mines Minimum Wage for Workers, Final Hearing, 26th March 1912</th>
<th>Nonconformists</th>
<th>Others:</th>
<th>Total:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raw votes</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>166</td>
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<tr>
<td>% of total vote in terms of Ayes:</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
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<tr>
<td>% of all NCs/others in Parliament:</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of ayes out of all NCs/others who voted in session</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall trend from these results certainly suggests a minor correlation between New Liberal legislation and nonconformity. Out of those who actively voted in favour of all these measures 53\% were nonconformist MPs compared with 48\% for others. Over 74\% of all nonconformists in Parliament voted in favour of these measures compared with 70\% of other MPs. The percentage of all nonconformists present who supported New Liberal legislation was around 99\% and the same for other MPs. This demonstrates only a minor discrepancy. However, most major Liberal reforms attracted a major consensus among Liberal MPs. There were only a small number of Liberals, including only a handful of nonconformists, that opposed these measures, so these patterns taken on their own, say very little. These few nonconformists tended to be wealthy businessmen and were not considered particularly radical. However, given the
legislative importance of these reforms, it still convincingly demonstrates that support for these measures, in real terms, came more from nonconformists than other MPs. Relative to their percentage of the party, in terms of raw numbers, more nonconformists contributed to passing these reforms through active voting than other MPs.

However, on more divisive legislative proposals the pattern is more pronounced. Nonconformist MPs were more likely to support certain detailed revisions of major legislation often pursued by Labour members. Although there was a solid but small positive correlation between New Liberal legislation, and voting behaviour where voting discrepancy was smaller, there were many other more detailed proposals which revealed more stark results. In the third reading of the Coal Mines Minimum Wage Bill, Keir Hardie, representing Labour pushed for a specific amendment on the bill which was also actively promoted by Arnold Rowntree. Hardie sought to define an absolute set minimum wage for miners without any caveats. Kellaway also supported the amendment declaring that ‘It is a serious responsibility that we take, as Liberals, and as Members of the House of Commons, if we deny to this great body of men, whose love of order has been so magnificently demonstrated during the past few weeks, and who day after day take the risks that a miner takes, what is a fair subsistence wage’. Only 83 voted in favour while 326 opposed these stipulations. The majority of the Liberal Party opposed this amendment. Only 48 Liberals voted in favour which included 29 with nonconformist attachments, almost all were religiously active (see Fig. 7). This was nearly 60% of all Liberals who voted for the amendment, a significant number of whom were religiously devout. This included the Baptist Percy Alden, Quaker Arnold Rowntree, Wesleyan Ernest Henry Lamb and Congregational minister Charles Horne. Alden’s position on this legislation is not surprising considering his sympathies with Labour and his correspondence with Ramsay MacDonald. This suggests that on unpopular political labour proposals on the political fringe, nonconformist MPs were more likely to show support.

Fig. 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific Amendment proposed by Keir Hardie for Coal Mines Minimum Wage Bill, 26th March 1912</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raw votes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of total vote in terms of Ayes:</td>
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<tr>
<td>% of all NCs/others in Parliament:</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

143 Hansard, fifth series Vol. 36, cols 185-410, 26 March 1912.
144 Ibid.
145 Percy Alden to Ramsay MacDonald, LRC 10/9.
In itself, this is not conclusive, however further analysis complements this trend. Another notable act of Liberal legislation was the Unemployed Workman’s Bill of 1909, which was vigorously pursued by MacDonald and Alden. In the final vote, most Liberals supported the legislation and the discrepancy was small. On the 30th of April there was a vote on whether to bring forward the legislation immediately or postpone for further refinement. Labour members such as MacDonald and W. P. Beale argued strongly for this measure. MacDonald claimed that the existing poor Law was a burden to ‘the working-class wage-earner’ and that ‘the working men of this country would be gainers if this Bill became law of the land’. Out of 55 Liberals who voted in favour of pursuing the legislation, 33 were from nonconformist sects which amounted to 60%, out of which 22 were active including Alden and Methodist Earnest Lamb (see Fig. 8). Out of 141 Liberal MPs who voted against, only 52 were from nonconformist sects. This amounted to only 37% - a significant difference. Overall out of all nonconformists who actively voted 17% chose to pursue the legislation, compared with only 11% for other MPs.

Fig. 8.

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<th>Unemployment Workmen Bill stipulation, 30th April 1909</th>
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<tr>
<td>% of total vote in terms of Ayes:</td>
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<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>% of all NCs/others in Parliament:</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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Clearly nonconformists were more eager to drive forward more radical social reforms than other MPs. Although on significant measures, the correlation was only minor owing to strong liberal support for government legislation, this is sufficient to demonstrate that nonconformity remained a strong force behind the social welfarism of the Edwardian period. They were also more likely to occupy the political fringe in voting for detailed revisions of proposed legislation proposed by Labour members. This in combination with Hansen’s list of radical MPs is more than sufficient to demonstrate the continued importance of nonconformity in New Liberal politics.

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146 Hansard, fifth series Vol. 4, cols 633-710, 30 April 1909.
147 Ibid.
6. Conclusion

The period of Edwardian Liberalism between 1906 and 1914 was not marked by the abandonment of nonconformity, as it played a pivotal role in government legislation. It is erroneous to consider the spheres of nonconformity and New Liberal politics as separate; the two were connected very strongly. The assimilation of a large number of nonconformists in Parliament, many of whom had been radical activists on the ground, enabled the new direction of Liberal politics. They played a major legislative role between 1906 and 1914, as demonstrated by their prevalence amongst the more radical wing of the party and voting behaviour. A number of nonconformist Liberals, such as Percy Alden, were also active in formulating policy. New Liberalism was not merely a secular class-based ideology but the continuation of a broad party of consensus where nonconformity played an increasingly active role. In many respects before 1914, nonconformity was the heart and soul of Liberalism.
Conclusion

In the *Prolegomena to Ethics* Thomas Hill Green wrote that ‘No individual can make a conscience for himself. He always needs a society to make it for him. A conscientious heresy, religious or political, always represents some gradually maturing conviction as to social good, already implicitly involved in the ideas on which the accepted rules of conduct rest’.¹ Green saw religion, like politics, as part of the process of the realisation of social good. There were discernible parallels between this and the words of the Congregationalist Dale who wrote: ‘Apart from civil society some of the noblest and most generous virtues could never be developed. Through the Municipality and the State, as well as through the family and the Church, the infinite righteousness and goodness and mercy of God have provided for the discipline of human perfection’.² Despite obvious subtle differences, both Green and Dale stressed the importance of social obligation and the community for the realisation of moral ends. Both emphasised the teleology of ‘human perfection’ through the community. However, while Green represented Oxford intellectualism, Dale represented a theological shift in nonconformity and the practical engagement with the world through municipal socialism. Dale’s words echoed the civic gospel of Birmingham which bore direct relation to civic life, corporate responsibility and radical Liberal initiatives.

While theological arguments, particularly those emphasising notions of brotherhood, were demonstrably as important as the work of Oxford intellectuals, provincial nonconformity encompassed so many areas associated with Edwardian Liberalism several decades before it made an important contribution at a parliamentary level. New Liberalism owed a large part of its soul to nonconformity, considering the polemical importance of ‘Christian brotherhood’, the importance of the civic gospel in Birmingham’s radical platforms, the ideological significance of prohibition and the legislative impact of a record number of nonconformist MPs in Parliament after 1906. To summarise, there are several identifiable ways in which provincial nonconformity shaped Edwardian Liberalism, both long term and short term.

In the long term, much of what characterised New Liberalism can be traced back to the traditions of provincial nonconformity. First, the emphasis on labour questions and building co-operation during the terms of Edwardian Liberalism had definite parallels

with the extra-parliamentary co-operative relations that were encouraged by the work of radical nonconformists in the provinces throughout the late nineteenth century. The enduring relationship between labour and organised Liberalism was largely the product of nonconformity, its rhetoric and the shared culture of the chapel. This was important as New Liberalism was strongly linked with social and labour reforms, Lib-Lab relations and the necessity of gaining support from the working-class electorate. Liberal-labour relations encouraged by the rhetoric of Christian brotherhood, promoted by radicals such as Howell and Potter to encourage co-operation over divisions of class, helped to sustain these relations. Potter’s remark that ‘we look hopefully to the future of the working classes being a great future; and if they use the political power… wisely, for the benefits of the whole country, and not merely for the selfish interests of any one particular class, then their future will be great and glorious’ was aimed at transcending these divisions. Moreover, through promoting common identities with the cause of labour movements, they also sought to build on shared antipathies towards the establishment, the Tory Party and the Anglican Church. Religion was as important as class and nation in understanding the rise of Edwardian Liberalism.

Second, the civic gospel was a major component of the radical movement in so far is its rhetoric emphasising corporate responsibility, in transcending faddism and class division, was essential in maintaining Birmingham’s leadership. Long-term platforms such as the NLF emerged out of Birmingham, a culture stooped in the traditions of nonconformity. Values of Christian duty, advocated by Dawson and Dale, became polemically essential in promoting radical legislation and cementing organizational structures that fed into New Liberalism. Birmingham’s leaders appealed to the rhetoric of the civic gospel to instigate programmes of reform through effective corporate leadership, built on shared nonconformist values. This was through long-term platforms such as the NLF and the radical programme. As demonstrated many historians emphasise the importance of secular political theorists, but in Birmingham there was a working practical example of social legislative proposals. Chamberlain and other local elites, offered the first programmatic approach that sought to galvanise the radical wing of the party.

Third, as nonconformity became increasingly unified in the arena of high politics, campaigns for prohibition and compulsory education provided Liberals with a sense of continuity as the party struggled to find its identity in the face of sectional differences and

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growing working-class demands. Nonconformity was a broad multi-sectarian movement representing the interface between high and low politics, the middle and working classes, the old and the new that was well placed to provide such continuity in the changing political climate. Campaigns for prohibition and educational reforms helped the party to adjust to the transition from old to new Liberalism, as reflected in such organizations as the UKA. Liberal nonconformity provided a link between the old and the new, between growing ties with labour movements and traditional middle-class supporters. This was chiefly demonstrated in the last two chapters. The prohibitionist movement and the UKA were important in the ideological adjustment towards government intervention in the social sphere. Nonconformist preoccupations with education and prohibition were not at odds with the politics of Edwardian Liberalism that emphasised social and labour reforms, of which parliamentary nonconformists were keen advocates. These nonconformist interests did not simply constitute old liberal traditions, but represented important changes in perceptions of the role of state.

Finally, in the short term, nonconformity continued to be an influential force in Parliament during the Edwardian period. While the Liberal governments of 1906 to 1914 mirrored nonconformist interests in educational reform and prohibition, there was also a positive correlation between nonconformist sectarian affiliation and the advanced wing of the party. A broad quantitative based analysis of nonconformist MPs suggests that nonconformity in no way declined after 1910. Their impact was not merely strategic, but ideological and legislative. The data mapping of Hansen’s list of radical MPs and nonconformist sectarian affiliations suggests that nonconformists were numerous among the more advanced wing of the party and this only increased after 1910. While Edwardian Liberalism is directly associated with legislators and political theorists who abandoned their faiths, nonconformists, many of whom were active in their congregations, became more influential on advanced Liberal policy. Parliamentary voting patterns on advanced Liberal measures also complement this trend and in particular nonconformist Liberals were more likely to sympathise with labour reforms such as minimum wage legislation. The correlate in voting patterns was not striking, but certainly enough to demonstrate that New Liberalism was far from a secular movement which abandoned nonconformist traditions. Nonconformist Liberals, such as Percy Alden, played an important part in formulating policy, relating to unemployment and pensions. They were also active in social studies which indirectly helped to shape the policy of government.

The main thesis that New Liberalism constituted the continuation of local Liberalism rooted in provincial nonconformity has rested on demonstrating the
importance of nonconformity in cities such as Birmingham, the strong role they played in the Liberal administration after 1906 and the causal link between the two. From the civic gospel of Birmingham, the formation of the NLF to the legislation of government, it is hard to ignore this sense of continuity, particularly considering the striking correlation between New Liberalism and provincial nonconformity. In the Edwardian period, Liberal nonconformity was national, just at the time when welfarism and advanced social policies were being introduced – initiatives which had been suggested by radical Liberals and nonconformists outside Parliament in the preceding decades. The thesis has explored the kernel of the Liberal Party’s radical wing, who were more likely to exist on the provincial fringe, where nonconformity was more strongly ingrained, rather than looking externally to Oxford intellectuals for other ideological imperatives far removed from grassroot Liberals. In the late nineteenth century, it was provincial Liberalism and nonconformity that led the vanguard in social initiatives, programmatic politics, inter-class co-operation and popular democracy. It could be argued that Green, Hobhouse and Hobson symbolised Liberalism from above, while provincial nonconformity constituted grassroot radicalism from below and from within, which enabled the party to slowly readjust towards the politics of welfarism.

It was perhaps ironic that Gladstone wrote that nonconformity was ‘the backbone of British Liberalism’ at a time when nonconformists were largely extra-parliamentary. This comment was if anything more applicable in the Edwardian period. The most programmatic Liberal social initiatives emerged from the provincial fringe where nonconformists were active in preaching the civic gospel and they emerged as a major force in national politics during the period of New Liberalism. When high politics was dominated by Gladstonian Liberalism, provincial Liberalism had more independence, particularly Liberal Nonconformists with a shared antipathy to the Anglican Church. It was their pro-activity, freedom of manoeuvre, strong links with artisans such as Howell and theological notions of brotherhood that made provincial nonconformists the most powerful group to effect change in the Liberal Party. During the period of Gladstonian Liberalism and after, important roots for radical socio-economic reform were sewn in the provinces where nonconformity played a major role, both legislatively and theologically.

These political attributes characterised extra-parliamentary Liberal nonconformity when the mainstream party remained distanced from programmatic politics, nonconformist groups and labour movements. New directions of social reform,

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4 Watts, The Dissenters, p. 257.
interclass relations between Liberals and workers, and important transitionary movements were born out of local Liberalism where nonconformity assumed importance in provincial life. High politics was far removed from these developments which frustrated the radical wing of the party, as demonstrated by a remark by G. W. E. Russell: ‘Session after session passed… and a noble majority steadily declined, while Radicals stood by in speechless discontent, bidden, not seldom, to vote for what they disapproved, and urging in vain the initiative of reforms to which they were deeply pledged’. As nonconformity assumed a position in the high political arena, it strengthened the radical wing of the party.

In this respect, the main contribution of the thesis to historical knowledge is that it demonstrates that nonconformity and religion more broadly were more important in the development of Edwardian Liberalism than has been shown hitherto. This thesis has demonstrated that New Liberalism developed hand-in-hand with nonconformity, from the social gospels of municipal politics to a higher role in the Edwardian Liberal government. New Liberalism was not simply a secular class-based ideology, a model which has been implicit in the many historical narratives of the period in varying degrees. There was an element of secularisation, as many legislators had abandoned their early religious convictions. But the change in Liberal politics that marked the early twentieth century was not one dimensional, it also constituted a continuation of these traditions while embracing new ideas in response to the growing demands of the working classes. What this thesis has demonstrated is that religion and the growing influence of nonconformity, were important in this transition. While Liberals were concerned with appealing to the growing working-class electorate, they were also conscious of the need to maintain the support of the middle classes and maintain important links to certain older values of the nineteenth century. Under the banner of ‘nonconformity’, class distinctions were obscured by sectarian distinctions, from Methodism to Congregationalism, which became more unified on a national level through New Liberalism.

Appendix 1: Nonconformists included in Hansen’s List of Radical MPs:
Those where precise denominational leanings are unknown (but included in Bebbington’s study into Free Church MPs) are simply listed as ‘nonconformist’.

**February 1907:**

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Appendix 2: MPs by Religious Affiliation February 1907 and December 1910

NOTES:
Those simply listed as ‘nonconformists’ are those who were included in Bebbington’s list of free church MPs, but whose precise denominational leanings are unknown.

KEY:

**Beb** – This refers to a meticulously gathered list of free church MPs compiled by David Bebbington, ‘The Free Church MPs of the 1906 Parliament’, *Parliamentary History* (February, 2005), pp. 136-150.


**ODNB** – As listed in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.

1907

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¹ See also, Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 274.
³ Adkins was an ardent member of the Congregational Union; *The Annual Register of World Events: A Review of the Year Volume 167* (London, 1926), pp. 119-20.
⁵ According to Bebbington, he attended a Unitarian church in Cleator Moor.
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He is cited as a prominent Quaker on many occasions and was a trustee of the Society of Friends; *New Mills Social History Archive*, December 2011, p. 340, D1389.

According to Bebbington’s study he was included in the 1907 Free Church Council’s list of free church MPs. This is also supplemented by other evidence: *The Congregational Year-book* (Boston, 1901), p.15.

Bebbington lists him as a Baptist in his list of Free Church MPs, although in his other study into twentieth century Baptists in Parliament he cites him as possible Wesleyan. What is clear however is that he was a broadly active nonconformist. He had attended Congregational Church in London, but had also been governor of Yorkshire Baptist College. Despite his inter-denominational leanings, the evidence from Bebbington’s study of Baptist MPs in the twentieth century suggests he was probably religiously devout.

He was active in many Congregational meetings (‘About the Churches’, *The Western Times* (Exeter), 9 October 1893, p. 2). This in combination with a character sketch suggests he had a degree of commitment to nonconformity (‘The New House of Commons-IV’, *Pall Mall Gazette* (London), 8 July, 1892, pp. 5-6).

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18 According to Bebbington Birrell was a Baptist who had somewhat lost contact with religion. Although he became an agnostic, he was not an atheist and he still described himself as a ‘nonconformist’ at this time. He is best described as existing on the fringes of nonconformity (Edward Jewitt Wheeler, Frank Crane, Current Literature... Volume 2 (New York, 1907), p. 394).
19 Bebbington’s study into Free Churchmen suggests he was Wesleyan Methodist. He is recorded to have attended many Methodist meetings and conferences so he was probably active; see, Proceedings of the Fifth Ecumenical Methodist Conference, Held in the Central Hall, Westminster, London September 6-16, 1921 (1921), p. xiv. However, he was also listed in the Who’s Who in Methodism in 1933; see, Who’s Who in Methodism? (London, 1933).
20 He was well known for his commitment to the Congregational Church; see, ‘Branch, James’, Who Was Who, Oxford University Press.
21 He was a deacon in the Congregational Church; see, Green, Religion in the Age of Decline, p. 294.
22 He was prominent member of the Society of Friends (Copies of various letters and advice by John Bright, MS BOX E2/3 Library of the Society of Friends Catalogue).
23 He was a lifelong Unitarian and was once a Unitarian minister (‘Stopford William Wentworth Brooke’, Unitarian Year Book (Boston, 1937), p. 153).
24 He was president of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association 1914-16 (John Venn and J. A. Venn [Eds], Alumni Cantabrigienses: A Biographical List of All Known Students, Graduates and Holders of Office at the University of Cambridge, From Earliest Possible Times to 1900 Volume 2 Part 1 (Cambridge 1940). p. 424).
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26 He had been a member of a Unitarian church, but by 1907 was still considered an ‘outside member of the denomination’; see, Jaffe, *The Struggle for Market Power*, p. 140.
28 Campbell-Bannerman was a lifelong advocate of disestablishment and showed a degree of religious activity. There is insufficient evidence to suggest he was devout however.
29 Bebbington’s list of Free Church MPs suggests he was a Wesleyan. This is further confirmed by other evidence. He was active in Methodist events and one example includes ‘Prestwich Church Bazaar’, *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (Manchester, England), 11 April 1907, p. 11. Also see, ‘Bazaar at Blackley’, *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (Manchester), Friday, 12 November 1909, p. 5.
30 Bebbington’s study suggests he was a Congregationalist. He was active in many committees and therefore was probably an active member. He was also honourably mentioned for his connections with the Congregational Church at the Congregational Centenary (‘Congregational Centenary’, p. 12). There is enough evidence for him to be listed as active.
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31 He was active in Bible classes, Wesleyan conferences and at a meeting of teachers at the Steeton Wesleyan School. It was said of Clough that ‘he has been a teacher and officer of this Sunday school and we have every confidence in his Christian character’; ‘Mr. W. Clough, M.P, and Steeton Wesleyan Sunday School’, Manchester Guardian, 6 April 1911, p. 11.
32 According to his obituary Collins was a committed Congregationalist and an active member of many associated organizations. ‘Sir Stephen Collins’, Times Newspaper, 16 March 1925, p. 17.
33 Compton-Rickett was also treasurer of the National Free Church Council; see, Watts, The Dissenters, p. 302.
34 He was a lifelong Methodist, teetotaller, churchman and was even once a churchwarden. This suggests a degree of devotion (John Austin Jenkins, The History of Nonconformity in Cardiff (Cardiff, 1901), pp. 191-93).
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35 Including evidence from Bebbington’s study, he was noted as a ‘generous helper of Welsh education and nonconformity’. As a noted Calvinistic Methodist he was often a benefactor (‘The Churches: The Commission on Church Disorders’, Manchester Guardian, 30 March 1906, p. 4). He was also a Sunday School teacher (Watts, The Dissenters, p. 116). A combination of factors suggests he was probably devout.
36 He showed a commitment to Calvinist Methodism as he had been the Moderator of the South Wales Calvinistic Methodist Association (‘Temperance Work; The Calvinistic Methodist Church’, Manchester Guardian, 11 April 1928, p. 12).
38 He was not only active but advocated the application of Christianity in dealing with international disputes, Keith Robbins, History, Religion and Identity in Modern Britain (London, 1993), p. 130.
40 According to Bebbington, he was a member of Rutland Presbyterian Church in Dublin.
41 James had been president of the United Methodist Free Church Assembly; see. Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism, pp. 56-7.
42 As well as being included in Bebbington’s list of Free Church MPs, he was strongly involved in Congregational Union events (‘The Churches: Congregational Union’, Manchester Guardian, 18 September 1908, p. 4).
43 According to Bebbington, Dunn was a deacon of Southernhay Congregational Church.

He was a Methodist some years earlier, before turning to Congregationalism; see, Morgan, *Rebirth of a Nation*, p. 34.


He is included in the 1907 list of Free Churchmen, but there is no clear evidence of his specific denomination. He probably existed on the fringes of nonconformity.

Essex was active in Methodist circles. He was also a delegate at a Methodist conference in 1911 (*Proceedings of the Fourth Ecumenical Methodist Conference held in Metropolitan Methodist Church, Toronto, Canada, October 4-17, 1911* (Toronto, 1911), p. xviii). He also wrote articles for *The United Methodist* (*Admiral Lord Fisher*, *United Methodist*, 15 July 1920, p. 344).

According to Bebbington Evans was a Congregationalist. He has also been described as ‘militant nonconformist’ (Raymond Grant, *The Parliamentary History of Glamorgan, 1542-1976* (Swansea, 1976), pp. 63-4).

He was also a preacher.

He was actually a Methodist preacher for a time; see, Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 272.

According to the ODNB he was also considered a devout Methodist and Sunday school teacher.


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58 Although he often supported nonconformist causes, technically he was a high churchman (ODNB).
60 He demonstrated a commitment to Anglicanism at University and after; see, Richard J. Evans, *Cosmopolitan Islanders: British Historians and the European Continent* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 112.
61 He was an outspoken agnostic, who wrote on the subject: Sir Granville George Greenwood, *The Faith of an Agnostic; or, First Essays on Rationalism* (London, 1919).
62 As well as being listed as a Free Churchman in Bebbington’s study Gulland was involved in church-related social work; see, James Kennedy, *Liberal Nationalisms: Empire, State, and Civil Society in Scotland and Quebec* (Montreal and Kingston, 2013), p. 181. He also wrote *John William Gulland, Christ’s Kingdom in Scotland, or the Social Mission of the United Free Church* (Edinburgh, 1906). This suggests he was most likely active in the Free Church.
63 He was a deacon for the Camberwell Green Congregational Church (“Biographies of New Members”, *Times Newspaper*, 17 February 1906, p. 14).
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65 He was a Primitive Methodist local preacher; see, Watts, The Dissenters, p. 273.
67 Historiographical analysis suggests Hazel was strongly committed to his religion. For example, see, Austen Morgan, Harold Wilson (1992), p. 31.
69 Clarke, Lancashire and the New Liberalism, p. 57.
71 He was well known as a Roman Catholic who mixed in those social circles, but there is not sufficient evidence to suggest genuine spiritual devotion, Ronald Haycock, Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916 (Ottawa, 1986), p. 48.
73 He was said to be ‘prominent in Congregational circles’ (Post Magazine and Insurance Monitor, Volume 71 (London, 1910), p. 323). These findings are consistent with Bebbington’s own study into Free churchmen.
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74 He had been a Free Church MP, but by this time he had moved to Anglicanism; Schweizer, ‘Free Church MP’s of 1906’, p. 141.
75 He also gave a speech at the Yorkshire Congregational Conference Church held in Leeds in September 1903 (Green, Religion in the Age of Decline, p. 223). This was not an isolated incident, and he was also active in the Congregational Union (‘Congregational Union: Autumn Session of the Congregational Union’, Leicester Chronicle and the Leicestershire Mercury, 23 September 1893, p. 2).
76 Isaacs demonstrated a commitment to the cause of Zionism. He was also the first Jew to become Lord Chief Justice. (David Bridger and Samuel Wolk [Eds], The New Jewish Encyclopedia (West Orange, 1962), pp. 400-1).
77 There is evidence to suggest he attended Methodist services and had been a preacher (Aldersgate Primitive Methodist Magazine, Vol. 88 (Leicester, 1907), p. 494). He was a significant trade unionist who was involved in the Primitive Methodist connexion (E. J. Hobbsamw, Primitive Rebels: Studies in Arabic Forms of Social movement in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (Manchester, 1959), p. 138).
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84 He was president of the World Sunday School Association and referred to as a ‘well-known and respected figure’ among Methodist circles. He also supported Methodist missionary efforts in India (The Christian Advocate, Vol. 90 (New York, 1915), p. 1525).
85 He was vice president of the Methodist Church and the British Council of Churches; see, Charles Kidd and Christine Shaw, Debrett’s Peerage & Baronetage 2008 (Surrey, 2007), p. 1209.
86 Quarterly Meetings: Thorne Memorial Methodist Circuit’, North Devon Journal (Barnstaple), 21 March 1946, p. 3.
87 Langely was considered one of the most prominent Congregationalists in Sheffield. He was president of the Yorkshire Congregational Union, appointed in 1896; see, J. H. Stainton, The Making of Sheffield (Sheffield, 1924), 1865-1914, pp. 355-6.
88 He was mentioned in The Methodists Who’s Who? (London, 1915) and was also known as a benefactor to the church. He also presided over many Wesley Church meetings (‘Wesleyanism: Sir Francis Layland Barratt at Torquay’, 15 January 1913, p. 2).
89 Lever was considered a ‘high profile member of the Congregational Church’; see, Paul Calderwood, Freemasonry and the Press in the Twentieth Century: A National Newspaper (Oxford, 2016), p. 142.
91 He was described as ‘more or less closely related to Wesleyan Methodism’ in the Pall Mall Gazette (Stephen Koss, ‘Wesleyanism and Empire’, The Historical Journal XVIII I (1975), p. 116). On its own this would be insufficient, but he was also described as an ‘earnest Wesleyan’ in Sketch: A Journal of Art and Actuality, Vol. 57 (London, 1907), pp. 270-1.
92 He was listed as a Unitarian member of Parliament in The Unitarian Register, Vol. 85 (Boston, 1906), p. 302. Various sources suggest that Lupton was a devoted and outspoken Unitarian; for example, see, ‘Mr Arnold Lupton Shouted down: America’s Action Criticised’, Manchester Guardian, 31 May 1917, p. 8.
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93 Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 136
97 He was president of the Cardiff Free Church Council and member of a Presbyterian church in England (‘The Popular Guide to the House of Commons’; *Pall Mall Gazette* “Extra”, February 1906, p. 48).
98 He attended many Congregationalist Churches such as Herne Hill Congregational Church, but was not a member. His consistent attendance should be considered however; see, Stephen Taylor, David L. Wykes, *Parliament and Dissent* (Edinburgh, 1 July 2005), p 141.
99 *Annual Register* (London, 1915), p. 82.
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101 Like his older brother who was a theologian he was a life-long committed Congregationalist (‘Funeral and Memorial Services: Nathaniel Micklem’, *Times Newspaper*, 25 March 1954, p. 10).
105 Morse was described as ‘devout’ in his obituary (‘Levi Lapper Morse’, *Times Newspaper*, 11 September 1913, p. 9).
106 Also see, Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 268.
111 Although he gave up on his religion as a career in his earlier life, there is no evidence he remained a Unitarian. (‘Obituary: Sir Henry Norman’, *Manchester Guardian*, June 5 1939, p. 7).
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113 His commitment to Methodism was well known and he was also considered a Methodist layman; see, Denis J. Conlon, *The Collected Works of C.K Chesterton: Collected Poetry Part II* (San Francisco, 2008), p. 429.

114 He is included in Bebbington’s 1907 list of Free Church MPs but his precise denominational leanings are unknown. He probably existed on the fringes of nonconformity.

115 He was also listed as a member of the Wesley Club, Manchester (‘Wesley Club: Central Hall, Westminster’, *Primitive Methodist Leader* (3 June, 1915), p. 947).

116 He was a Congregational minister. His commitment to Congregationalism is further confirmed by S. Usher, *Volume of Proceedings of the... International Congregational Council* (Boston, 1908), pp. 152-3.

117 According to Bebbington’s study he was also a member of Thornton Congregational Church and was on its ‘management committee’.
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118 According to his obituary he was a ‘member of the committee of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and an elder of the Presbyterian Church’ (‘Dr Rainy, M.P’, Advertiser, 29 August 1911, p. 7).
121 ‘Mr Herbert Roberts: A Baronet’, Cardiff Times, 4 July 1908, p. 3.
122 Robinson was a member of Winsor Place Presbyterian Church, and there is evidence of activity in many Church related events; for example, see, ‘Presbyterians Outing’, Bath Chronicle (Bath, England), Saturday, 28 July 1923, p. 7. Also, see, ‘Newsboys’ Memorial: Ceremony at Trinity Presbyterian Church’, Bath Chronicle (Bath, England), 13 October 1923, p. 10.
124 He was well known for being a devout Wesleyan Methodist. He was described as a ‘Wesleyan layman’ by the journalists for the Spectator (‘The Wesleyan Conference: To the Editor of the Spectator’, Spectator, 15 July 1921, p. 12).
While technically a Jew, Samuel had become an atheist after he abandoned his earlier faith. He often maintained a charade of interest to please his wife; see, Ritchie Ovendale, *The Origins of the Arab Israeli Wars* (Essex, 2004), p. 21.

He had been a Jew but converted to Unitarianism.

Schweizer, ‘Free Church MP’s of 1906’, p. 141.

As well as other strong indicators, according to Bebbington’s study, Sears was a deacon and school superintendent for Hendon Baptist Church in 1906.

He was probably a Unitarian. He is also listed as a trustee in Alan. R. Ruston, *The Hibbert Trust: A History* (London, 1984), p. 78. However, this is circumstantial, and only refers to early 1920s.

He was a speaker at the Congregational Union (‘Congregational Union – Autumnal Assembly at Liverpool’, *Manchester Guardian* (19 October, 1908), p. 9). In combination with evidence presented in Bebbington’s study into Free Churchmen in 1907, this is enough to class Shaw as active.


He was a Congregational church treasurer (*United Kingdom Church History Society Journal Vol. 4, Iss 7-10* (United Reformed History Society, 1990), p. 512).

He was a Congregationalist according to Bebbington’s study into Free Churchmen. He was said to have been brought up in the ‘cradle of radical dissent’, ‘John Simon’, *Manchester Guardian*, 12 January 1954, p. 6. This in itself means very little but he was also a speaker at many Congregational conferences (‘Congregational Conference: Guildhall Banquet’, *Manchester Guardian*, 12 July 1930, p. 20).

He was president of the Congregational Union in 1893; see, D’Alroy Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival*, p. 418.
Although he was never ordained a minister, he strongly followed in his father’s commitment to Congregationalism.

He has been described as a ‘practicing Jew’; see, Harry Defries, *Conservative Attitudes to the Jews 1900-1950* (Oxford, 2001), p. 20.

He has been described as Congregationalist in many sources and Edwin Welch emphasises that his ‘religious beliefs were sincerely held’, Edwin Welch, *The Peripatetic University: Cambridge Local Lectures 1873-1973* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 14.

Bebbington suggests that ‘he took no part in denominational affairs’ which is not unusual for a Unitarian, but he still was sufficiently active in Unitarian circles. He has also been described as a ‘convinced Unitarian’.

He had been technically an Anglican for a brief period, and also committed to Congregationalism. However, at this point he was a member of the Baptist Church and had demonstrated an earnest devotion to religious worship; see, V. Vyrnwy Morgan, *Life of Viscount Rhonda* (London, 1918), p. 32.
| * | Torrance | Andrew Mitchell | Congregationalist | 1 | 1 | 0 | Beb |
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| * | Ure | Alexander | Congregationalist | 0 | 0 | 0 | Beb |
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| * | Waterlow | David Sydney | Unitarian | 0 | 0 | 0 | Beb |
| Watt | Harry Anderson | Unknown | 0 | 0 | 0 | |
| Wedgwood | Josiah Clement | Unknown | 0 | 0 | 0 | |

144 He was a member of ‘Highbury-Quadrant’ Congregational Church, super-intendent for the Sunday School and ‘took an active part in church work’ according to ‘The Free Churches’, *Dover Express*, Friday 10 May 1901, p. 8. This demonstrates some dedication.


146 He is included in Bebbington’s 1907 list of Free Church MPs, but his precise denominational leanings are obscure.

147 He became an Anglican clergyman (“Mr. F. W. Verney”, *Times Newspaper*, 28 April 1913, p. 10).

148 He was an Anglican clergyman (“Villiers, Ernest Amherst”, Cambridge Alumni Database. University of Cambridge).


150 Not only was he the son of a prominent Wesleyan minister, but he is described as an ardent Wesleyan, Harford Montgomery Hyde, *Lord Reading: The Life of Rufus Isaacs, First Marquess of Reading* (New York, 1967), pp. 19-20.

151 According to his obituary he was active in Wesleyan Methodism throughout his life (“Joseph Walton”, *Times Newspaper*, 9 February 1923, p. 12).

152 He attended the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. He also attended many Unitarian meetings and the Newcastle meeting House regularly (for example: ‘Unitarian Meetings: Mr John Ward, M.P, on Labour and Religion’, *Manchester Guardian*, 11 June 1908, p. 3).
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154 He is described as a ‘fervent Congregationalist’; see, Greg Patmore, Worker Voice: Employee Representation in the Workplace in Australia, Canada, Germany, the UK and the US 1914-1939 (Liverpool, 2016), p. 70.
155 Bebbington, The Nonconformist Conscience, p. 49.
157 He gave many speeches at Church Unions and was noted as a ‘Presbyterian’ and ‘office-bearer in Sefton Park Church’ (‘Northern Candidates: Sir Archibald Williamson’, Aberdeen Daily Journal (Aberdeen, Scotland), 7 January 1910, p. 3).
158 Susan Thorne, Congregational Missions and the Making of Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England (Stanford, 1999), p. 54. While he was a Congregationalist, he also had pronounced Quaker leanings; see, David Bebbington and Roger Swift [Eds], Gladstone Centenary Essays (Liverpool, 2000), p. 16.
159 See, Watts, The Dissenters, p. 272.
161 Bebbington lists him as a Congregationalist. He was referred to as a ‘Christian journalist’ at the time (The Continent Volume 54 (McCormick Publishing Company, 1923), p. 1551). He was a member of the council at the same Congregation as Silvester Horne; see, Bebbington, The Nonconformist Conscience, p. 125.
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165 Addison was an active Presbyterian; see, Koss, *Nonconformity in Modern British politics*, p. 135. He was a benefactor to the Presbyterian Church and committed to the nonconformist cause.
167 John Barran converted to Anglicanism.
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| * | Dalziel | James Henry | Unknown | 0 | 0 | 0 |

169 Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday*, p. 140


172 He is described as a ‘practicing Baptist’, which is sufficient evidence to suggest he was at least ‘active’; see, Fiona Reid, *Medicine in First World War Europe: Soldiers, Medics, Pacifists* (London, 2017), p. 123.

173 He was a devout Congregationalist who was treasurer of the Free Church Council; see, Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 302.
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178 He was known as a devout Quaker and he also published; Thomas Edmund Harvey, *The Rise of the Quakers* (London, 1905).
179 His father was, for a time, a Baptist member and was personal member of the Baptist Union; see, D. W. Bebbington, ‘Baptist Members of Parliament: A supplementary Note’, *Baptist Quarterly* 42 (2), p. 148. His son’s denominational leanings are unclear however.
182 He was President of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association (*Papers and correspondence of Richard D. Holt*, The National Archives (920 DUR/14)). Also, see the ODNB.
183 He was a Congregational minister; see, David Bebbington, ‘Calvin and British Evangelicalism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries’, in Irena Backus and Philip Benedict [Eds], *Calvin and His Influence, 1509-2009* (Oxford, 2011), p. 290.
184 His father was a Wesleyan clergyman which does not suggest he followed in his religious convictions, but in his obituary was written ‘Both in his writing and speeches he had a happy gift for Biblical allusion – a characteristic he perhaps acquired from his father’, ‘Mr. S. L. Hughes, M.P’, *Manchester Guardian*. 228
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23 February 1920, p. 6. Also, internal evidence from his writing suggests he was religious however it is not clear he was devout (Spencer Leigh Hughes, ‘Memorial Sketch of the Rev. James Hughes’, Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine (March, 1891), p. 165). He was certainly a Wesleyan and a nonconformist; see, A. J. A Morris, Edwardian Radicalism, 1900-1904: Some Aspects of British Radicalism (London, 1974), p. 48.

185 Grant, The Parliamentary History of Glamorgan, p. 71.
186 While two of his brothers were Congregationalists there are strong indicators that he was a committed lifelong Presbyterian, whilst also active in Methodist Circles; see, ‘To Hold the Flag, Sir Henry Haydn Jones 1863-1950’, Journal of Liberal History 50 (Spring, 2006), p. 24.
187 He was an Anglican but converted to Baptism. He was described as ‘a Lewisham Baptist’ and ‘Nonconformist Progressive’ (‘Our London Letter’, Citizen (Gloucester, England), 4 January 1907, p. 4).
188 ‘Ecclesiastical Intelligence’, ManchesterCourier and Lancashire General Advertiser (Manchester, England), Monday, 4 October 1897, p. 6.
189 He was a Congregational Minister (Watts, The Dissenters, p. 286).
190 Catterall, Labour and The Free Churches, p. 172.
191 Koss, Nonconformity in Modern British Politics, p. 112.
Marshall was the son of a Methodist minister and he originally intended to join the ministry himself but turned to law and politics instead (The Law Journal, Volume 45 (London, 1910), p. 829). Also, he gave a speech at a Methodist Bazaar advocating Christian principles (‘Sheffield’, United Methodist, 25 March 1915, p. 141). He was also described as an ‘ardent Methodist’ (‘Young People’s Demonstration at Manchester’, United Methodist, 28 September 1911, p. 747).

He was included in a list of MPs connected with the governing body of Pont-Street Presbyterian Church and many times expressed a firm commitment to religion in many church related events (‘Echoes from Town’, Nottingham Evening Post, 9 November 1931, p. 4).

The evidence suggests that while he was most likely a Methodist, he was not a devoted one (‘My Methodist Boyhood’, United Methodist, 14 June 1928, p. 282). Religion often featured very highly in his writing (for example, see, Charles A. McCurdy, MP, To Restore the Ten Commandments: The Basis of a Permanent Peace for Europe (London, 1918)).

McLaren was chairman of the Methodist Crescent church anniversary event, in 1911, where he spoke of ‘the great principles of Christianity’ (‘Spalding: Visit of the president’, United Methodist, 23 February 1911, p. 222). It is highly likely he was a nonconformist.

He has been referred to as Quaker in secondary historiography several times, for example, see, J. A. Pease, A Liberal Chronicle (London, 1 Jan 1994), p. 154.

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199 He was active as a Methodist preacher (‘The Polls’, Times Newspaper, 24 January 1910, p. 6).
200 Jenny Hazelgrove, Spiritualism and British Society Between the Wars (Manchester, 2000), p. 22.
201 He was an active nonconformist, but there is insufficient evidence to suggest he was religiously devoted; see, Catterall, Labour and The Free Churches, p. 151.
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202 He was referred to as a member of the ‘United Free Church’ and keen advocate of disestablishment: Rolf Sjolinder, *Presbyterian Reunion in Scotland, 1907-1921: Its Background and Development* (Edinburgh, 1962), p. 348. His degree of commitment to the United Free Church is unclear however.
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203 He was the son of a prominent Free Church minister which does not mean that he necessarily followed his father in his religion. However, evidence from the press, particularly British Library Newspapers online, suggests that he enjoyed a strong association with the Free Church of Scotland. He was also involved with the ‘United Free Church Young Men’s Union’ (‘United Free Church Young Men’s Union’, *Edinburgh Evening News*, Tuesday, 20 December 1904, p. 2).

Appendix 3: Log of Changes in Liberal Party Composition 1907 to 1912:

Between general elections many seats changed hands for a variety of reasons including the death of an MP, elevation to peerage or other appointments. This list logs the changes that occurred from the lists in the last appendix. This is necessary to ensure the Hansard results of chapter 5, correlating nonconformist religious affiliation with voting patterns, are as accurate as possible. A significant number of the nonconformists listed below have already been profiled in the previous February 1907 and December 1910 lists in Appendix 2.

FEBRUARY 1906: Nonconformist MPs: 198, Total Liberal MPs: 399

Changes between Election of 1906 and the February 1907 list in Appendix 2

Left: - James Annand (Unknown), Alexander W. Black (Unknown), Henry Broadhurst (Methodist)1, Francis Seymour Stevenson (Unknown), John Bryn Roberts (Calvinist Methodist)2, Thomas Agar-Robartes (Unknown), Wilfrid Lawson – 2nd Baronet (Nonconformist)3, Samuel Moss (Unknown), James Woodhouse (Unknown), Thomas Bolton (Unknown), Robert Wallace (Unknown), James Bryce (Unknown)

Newly Elected: James Murray (Congregationalist), Walter Waring (Unknown), Franklin Thomasson (Unknown), Harold Pearson (Unknown), Ellis William Davies (Calvinist Methodist, active), Freeman Freeman-Thomas (Unknown), Edward Hemmerde (Unknown), Arthur Sherwell (Methodist), W. E. Harvey (Methodist), Robert Pullar (Free Church of Scotland, active, devout), George Esslemont (Nonconformist)

FEBRUARY 1907: Nonconformist MPs: 201, Total Liberal MPs: 399

Registered changes from Initial List (February 1907 in Appendix 2) to December 14th 1908


3 He is included in Bebbington’s list of Free Church MPs, but his precise denominational leanings are unclear.
Newly Elected: Redmond Barry (Catholic)\(^4\), Richard Durnig Holt (Unitarian – devout & active), Albert Stanley (Primitive Methodist – active and devout)\(^5\), Guy Greville Wilson (Unknown), Thomas Agar-Robarts (Unknown), William Middlebrook (Wesleyan Methodist – devout & active), Arthur Murray (Unknown), George Rennie Thorne (Baptist – devout & active), Robert Harcourt (Unknown), Arthur Ponsonby (Atheist), Walter Roch (unknown), Archibald Corbett (Presbyterian, Active, Devout)

**DECEMBER 14TH 1908:** Nonconformist MPs: 196, Total Liberal MPs: 391

Registered changes between December 1908 and April 1909:

Left: - John Sinclair, Andrew Mitchell Torrance, Thomas Shaw, George McCrae

Newly Elected: + James Falconer (Free Church of Scotland),\(^6\) John Barran (Anglican), James Gibson (United Free Church of Scotland, active)\(^7\)

**APRIL 1909:** Nonconformist MPs: 195, Total Liberal MPs: 390

Registered changes between April and June:

Left: - J. Batty Langley, Thomas Kincaid-Smith

**JUNE 1909:** Nonconformist MPs: 194, Total Liberal MPs: 388

Registered changes between June and November 1909:

Left: - George Cooper, James Alfred Jacoby

Newly Elected: + John George Hancock (United Methodist Free Church)\(^8\)

**NOVEMBER 1909:** Nonconformist MPs: 193, Total Liberal MPs: 387

**DECEMBER 1910:** Nonconformist MPs: 140, Total Liberal MPs: 272

Registered changes from Initial List (December 1910 in Appendix 2) to December 1911:


\(^5\) He remained a preacher throughout his life (*The Aldersgate Magazine*, 1907, pp. 727-28).

\(^6\) There is evidence that Falconer was involved with Carmyllie United Free Church (‘By the Way’, *Evening Telegraph and Post* (Dundee, Scotland), 27 December 1915, p. 4).

\(^7\) There are many references in the press to the activity of Lord Provost Gibbon in church related events. He was said to be an elder of ‘St Mary’s United Free Church’ (‘Ecclesiastical News: Edinburgh Minister’s Jubilee Celebration’, *Aberdeen Daily Journal*, Saturday, 23 October 1909, p. 7).

\(^8\) Bebbington, ‘The Free Church MPs’, pp. 136-150.
Newly Elected: Geoffrey Howard (Unknown), Henry Webb (Unknown), James Duncan Millar (Unknown), John Deans Hope (Unknown), Godfrey Baring (Unknown), Ian Macpherson (Unknown), James Dundas White (Unknown), Maurice De Forest (Unknown), Cecil Harmsworth (Unknown), William Gladstone ( Anglican), Thomas Wallace Russell ( Presbyterian – active & devout),9 Stanley Owen Buckmaster (Unknown)

| December 1911: Nonconformist MPs: 137, Total Liberal MPs: 269 |

Registered changes between December 1911 and March 1912:

Left: - Andrew Anderson, William Hunter, James Gibson, Arthur Haworth

Newly Elected: + Daniel Holmes (Unknown), James Hogge ( Free Church of Scotland – Devout and Active (ODNB))

| March 1912: Nonconformist MPs: 136 Total Liberal MPs: 267 |

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