

# EVANGELICALISM IN LATE VICTORIAN LEICESTER

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Evangelicalism in late Victorian Leicester was represented by three parishes, Christ Church, Holy Trinity and St. Peter's. Each adhered to the main tenets of the movement – biblical teaching and preaching about the sacrifice of Christ, missionary endeavour, and concern for pastoral care – but was somewhat different in the ways that their incumbents expressed their theological views and actions.

The Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century had been expressed in the growth of Methodism on the margins of or outside the aegis of the Church of England, in the considerable development of nonconformity as represented in Baptist and Congregational witness, as well as in the Evangelical movement within the Established Church. This paper is concerned with the latter, especially with its manifestations in Leicester during the later nineteenth century, when it was 'squeezed' between the Dissenting bodies whose membership was still increasing up to Edwardian times and the highly-energetic Anglo-Catholic Ritualists<sup>1</sup>.

Anglican Evangelicalism in Leicester can be traced back to Thomas Robinson's distinguished ministry at St. Mary-de-Castro between 1778 and 1813. Thereafter it was taken up at St. Margaret's, where Andrew Irvine, a scholarly Cambridge theological graduate, pursued his ministry between 1831 and his death in 1846.<sup>2</sup> During this period Leicester was growing rapidly the most noticeable population increase being in Irvine's parish and, to a lesser extent, in the parish of St. Mary-de-Castro. The town population itself increased from about 17,000 in 1801 to 48,167 in 1841. The parish church of St. Margaret was surrounded rapidly by industry and housing. Irvine noted that even after the consecration of the new additional church of St George in 1829 the number of worshippers that could be accommodated in the two churches was only 4,000, whereas the population of the parish was at least 30,000. He proposed, therefore, the raising of a subscription 'for the purpose of erecting a third church capable of containing not less than 1,200 persons'. He explained that 'those for whose benefit this proposal is made are almost wholly of the poorer classes, living in a dense mass at a considerable distance from both churches'.<sup>3</sup> By 1843 Christ Church was a functioning entity set

<sup>1</sup> D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1988). Professor Bebbington states that Evangelicalism is marked by 'conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; *Biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross'. The priority of these may change a little from one denomination to another or from one church to another, but all four characteristics are normally evident.

<sup>2</sup> G. T. Rimmington, 'The Oxford Movement in Leicester in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century', *TLAHS* 78 (2004), 126.

<sup>3</sup> *Leicester Journal*, 16 December, 1836.

on the path that would assure it of Evangelical membership for many decades. The first incumbent, Richard Fawssett, had already been an assistant curate to Irvine since 1835, and, although he ‘always resented being labelled as this or that school of thought’ his style was that of an Evangelical. All of his successors were to be acknowledged as Evangelicals.<sup>4</sup>

Robinson’s former parish, St. Mary-de-Castro, was also growing, and there was also a demand there for a new church to serve the ‘well-to-do population of the New Walk and Princes Street and ultimately the “New Town”’.<sup>5</sup> It was noted that Holy Trinity Church, opened in 1838, was intended ‘as a stronghold for Evangelicalism....built at the sole expense of Frewen Turner, Esq’. The patron was to be his kinsman, Thomas Frewen of Cold Overton, who gave an endowment also of £1,000.<sup>6</sup> Its first vicar, William Hill, was a ‘very able and eloquent preacher’, whose 27 years there were notable for ‘a stated Gospel ministry’.<sup>7</sup>

A third parish devoted to the Evangelical cause was that of St. Peter’s, opened in 1874 in the new suburb of Highfields. Its first vicar, Francis Robinson, was hand-picked by Bishop W. C. Magee. Only twenty-eight years of age, and an Oxford law graduate, just married, and having served two short curacies in the Peterborough diocese, Robinson was energetic and enthusiastic, known as an ‘eloquent and impressive preacher’.<sup>8</sup>

It was not easy to be an Evangelical minister in Leicester in late Victorian times. There was a perception that Evangelicalism had run its course, and was in process of being replaced by Ritualism. The Evangelical tide was certainly ebbing by the 1870s. Elizabeth Jay, from an Anglo-Catholic stance, has noted that the ‘dangers of a religion which regarded the Bible as its supreme source and paid scant regard to doctrinal interpretation....were increasingly visible’. She accused Evangelicalism of being ‘popular, prosperous, and, therefore, worldly’.<sup>9</sup> Although the Evangelical bishop J. C. Ryle noted in 1879 that there were ten times more pulpits occupied by Evangelicals than there had been half a century earlier, his biographers commented that ‘the Evangelicals....seemed to have lost the vision without which a nation perishes’.<sup>10</sup> S. C. Carpenter states that ‘among the Evangelicals there was much study of the Bible. It was often not what a later age would call very intelligent, and some crude apocalyptic expectations were entertained here and there’.<sup>11</sup> Their theology has been described as ‘artless and uncontroversial’.<sup>12</sup> Often they were forced onto the back foot by the Ritualist

<sup>4</sup> D. T. Wilson, *A Sketch of the History of Christ Church, Leicester* (Leicester, 1909), 7–10.

<sup>5</sup> *Leicester Journal*, 15 June, 1838.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 June, 1838.

<sup>7</sup> Anon., *Holy Trinity, 1838–1966, and its surroundings* (Leicester, 1966).

<sup>8</sup> G. T. Rimmington, ‘Bishop W. C. Magee, the Reverend F. W. Robinson and a new late Victorian parish in Leicester’, *TLAHS* 73 (1999), 61–62.

<sup>9</sup> E. Jay (ed.), *The Evangelical and Oxford Movements* (Cambridge, 1983), 2–3, 9.

<sup>10</sup> P. Toon & M. Smout, *John Charles Ryle: Evangelical Bishop* (1976), chapter 2.

<sup>11</sup> S. C. Carpenter, *Church and People, 1789–1889: A History of the Church of England from William Wilberforce to “Lux Mundi”* (London, 1933), 404.

<sup>12</sup> K. Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England 1734–1984* (Edinburgh, 1989), 52.

appeal to 'tradition' and by perceived threats to the authority and inspiration of the Bible in the name of natural science and German biblical criticism. Yet they stressed the importance of preaching, evangelism and pastoral concern. They believed in living in a holy manner, in justification by faith, and in the nurturing of converts.<sup>13</sup>

What made Evangelicalism in Leicester especially difficult was the strength of Nonconformity in the town. People who were attracted to Evangelicalism were more inclined to become Baptists or Methodists at a time when those denominations were increasing in membership and becoming more 'respectable'. The number of Baptists in particular had grown rapidly since 1851 when they had ten places of worship in Leicester and by 1882 an unofficial census, taken by Andrew Mearns, showed that there were twenty Baptist chapels, with 7,346 Sunday evening worshippers, more than twice that of any other nonconformist denomination and only a little more than 2,000 behind the Anglican total of 9,783.<sup>14</sup>

This meant that those Evangelicals who remained within the Anglican ranks were highly committed supporters of Church of England polity. Like Thomas Robinson at St Mary-de-Castro, during the years 1778–1813, the incumbents rigidly adhered to the 1662 liturgy but taking care nevertheless to punctuate it with stirring hymns and embellish it with biblically-inspired sermons.<sup>15</sup>

Despite competition from the Anglo-Catholic Ritualists within the denomination and the nonconformists outside it the Evangelicals were anything but united in the way that they faced the world. They were all avid supporters of the Church Missionary Society and the Church Pastoral Aid Society but in many respects were remarkably different from each other, as we shall see when examining the three principal Evangelical parishes in Leicester.

1868 was marked by the appointment of William Connor Magee as bishop of Peterborough. An Irish Evangelical whose grandfather had been archbishop of Dublin, it was expected that he would advance the cause of Evangelicalism within his diocese which included Leicester as the largest urban centre. Victor Hatley describes him as 'a man with a mission' and Geoffrey Carnell contends that he was 'the great bishop', for he rapidly concerned himself with 'the redeeming....of the arrears of a too slothful past' and 'providing for the urgent needs of the present'.<sup>16</sup> It was not long, however, before he was at odds with some of the Evangelicals who accused him of favouring the Ritualists in the making of appointments. In May 1874 he noted with regret that there was 'a split in the Evangelical ranks which

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 51–55, 118–119.

<sup>14</sup> G. T. Rimmington, 'The Baptist Churches and Society in Leicester 1881–1914', *Baptist Quarterly*, XXXVIII (7) (July 2000), 332.

<sup>15</sup> G. T. Rimmington, 'Thomas Robinson: Evangelical Clergyman in Leicester 1774–1813', *TLAHS* 75 (2001), 105–117.

<sup>16</sup> V. A. Hatley (ed.), *The Church in Victorian Northampton* (Northampton Record Society, XXXVI, 1990), xiv; G. Carnell, *The Bishops of Peterborough 1541–1991* (Much Wenlock, 1993), 77; W. C. Magee, *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy and Churchwardens in the Diocese of Peterborough at his Primary Visitation, October 1871* (Peterborough, 1873).

has since widened and deepened'.<sup>17</sup> He was not alone in this view; Lord Shaftesbury, a lifelong Evangelical, had spoken in 1869 of 'the coldness and insincerity of the bulk of Evangelicals, their disunion, their separation in place and action'.<sup>18</sup>

When Magee initiated a Church Extension Society in Northampton, similar to the one that his predecessor, Francis Jeune, had established in Leicester, he was taken aback by 'a royal exhibition of the narrowness and suspicion and bitterness of Evangelicalism on the vexed patronage of the new churches'.<sup>19</sup> Before long he was stating that, although he could not identify himself with High Churchmen, he nevertheless shrank 'with unconcealed dislike from the vulgar, bitter, ignorant puritanism' that he had encountered in some Evangelicals.<sup>20</sup> By November of 1876 he had to confess, as a result of these experiences, that 'I do not really and entirely belong to any one Church party, and as the result I am pretty evenly abused by each in turn'.<sup>21</sup> It coloured forever his relationships with some Leicester Evangelicals.

Of the three churches – Christ Church, Holy Trinity and St. Peter's – it was Christ Church that was to trouble the bishop the most. Although Christ Church, whose building was an edifice of brick and stone in the early English style, had been opened in 1839, it was already in need of restoration in 1873. At that time a new vestry was constructed, a western gallery added and a new organ and pulpit set up.<sup>22</sup> That it had been possible to do this in a very poor area of the town was testimony to the popularity of the vicar, Albert Augustus Isaacs, who had begun his ministry there in 1866. Isaacs, had graduated from Corpus Christi College, Cambridge in 1851 and was ordained priest by the bishop of Peterborough in the same year, subsequently serving as assistant curate for sixteen years at Peterborough Parish Church before his preferment to Christ Church.<sup>23</sup>

One suspects that, despite a keen intellect, Isaacs's career was held back by two factors. Firstly there was his Jewish background. He had served for a time as secretary to the London Jews' Society and was the author of *The Dead Sea* and *A Pictorial Tour in the Holy Land*. He was also to write a *Biography of the Rev. Harry Aaron Stern, D.D.*, a fellow convert, during his Leicester ministry. In that book, as if to underline his own problems, he wrote feelingly about converts from Judaism who 'knew that they were mourned over as those who were dead. They had truly forsaken father, mother, and kindred....in order that they might obtain knowledge of Him, whom to know is eternal life'.<sup>24</sup> Despite his admirable and deeply held faith, his continuing association with people of Jewish background and his obvious pride in his Hebrew ancestry and upbringing probably made him

<sup>17</sup> J. C. Macdonnell, *Life and Correspondence of William Conner Magee*. 2 vols. (1896), II, 6–7.

<sup>18</sup> L. E. Elliott-Binns, *Religion in the Victorian Era* (London, 1936), 204.

<sup>19</sup> Macdonnell, *Life and Correspondence of W. C. Magee*, II, 13.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>22</sup> *Kelly's Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1891), 600.

<sup>23</sup> J. A. Venn (ed.), *Alumni Cantabrigiensis*, Part II (1752–1900), Vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1947), 528. See also Wilson, *Sketch of the History of Christ Church, Leicester*, 15.

<sup>24</sup> A. A. Isaacs, *Biography of the Rev. Henry Aaron Stern, D.D.* (London, 1886), 20.

suspect in the eyes of patrons. This suspicion almost certainly ruled him out of contention for most rural benefices.

There was, however, another factor, perhaps a more important one. Isaacs, who was as zealous in the Christian cause as a latter day Saul of Tarsus after his experience on the road to Damascus, became associated with the Church Association. This had been formed in 1865, as Owen Chadwick notes, 'with the object of resisting innovations [by Ritualists] in ceremonial by legal action'.<sup>25</sup> However popular such Evangelical vicars were among their own parishioners in taking Ritualists to court they were not popular among bishops, even those who, like Magee, had originally sympathised with Evangelicalism.

Isaacs organised a meeting in Leicester at Thomas Cook's Temperance Hall in 1867 at which Hugh McNeile (who was soon to become Dean of Ripon) lectured on 'Christian Worship versus Ritualism'. It was followed by the formation of a local branch of the Church Association. Isaacs read a petition to the House of Lords for an anti-Ritualist bill. In 1873 Isaacs and his friends accused Bishop Magee of favouring Ritualists when vacancies in livings occurred, the prelate replied robustly that he had tried to be even-handed; out of twenty-one appointments he had awarded seven (valued at £3,200) to the Evangelicals, and fourteen (valued at £3,900) to non-Evangelicals.<sup>26</sup>

Isaacs' accusation of Magee in 1873 was part of a national response to the petition in May of that year to Convocation by 383 Anglican priests with the aim of promoting some of the Ritualists' doctrines and practices, including auricular confession (an issue which was to be hotly contested over the next two decades). A further response in Leicester was a 'large public anti-confessional meeting', in which Isaacs took a prominent part. As auricular confessions continued to be heard by priests at St Andrew's and St Paul's, there was a further public meeting organised by Isaacs in the Temperance Hall in April, 1874, with C. H. Frewen of Cold Overton, described as 'an ardently Protestant Leicestershire squire', in the chair. Sharing the platform with him were Isaacs himself, Edmund Davys, vicar of Holy Trinity, G. W. Straton, rector of Aylestone, and Walter Tyrell, Davys's assistant curate. Isaacs, described by Ritualist opponents as the 'accredited generalissimo of the united ultra-Protestant forces of the borough, and an extremist', spoke with great force and eloquence about the general situation. He also persuaded the people at the meeting to send 'a rather lengthy letter to the bishop of Peterborough, begging his lordship to "utterly discountenance" the clergy who hear confessions, to secure from them a promise never to do so any more; and to support the anti-Confessional Bill in Parliament'.<sup>27</sup>

Because he was the most extreme and the most articulate of the Evangelical incumbents in Leicester, Isaacs attracted adherents of a similar mind. Among them was Walter Walsh, who was to write the highly partisan book *The Secret History*

<sup>25</sup> O. Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*. 2 vols. (London, 1987 edition), II (1860–1901), 319.

<sup>26</sup> D. M. Thompson, 'The Churches and Society in Leicestershire 1851–1881', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1969, 246.

<sup>27</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 18 April, 1874; see also J. E. Hextall & A. L. Brightman, *Fifty Years of Men and Things at St. Paul's, Leicester, 1871–1921* (Leicester, 1921), 46–51.

of the *Oxford Movement*, published in 1899 with the support of the Church Association. He helped Isaacs with the leadership of a Bible class for young men.<sup>28</sup> The advancing of Walsh's extreme views within the parish was influential in keeping Isaacs on his chosen path.

Isaacs did not have an easy life. The 1871 Census Returns indicate that he was a widower, aged forty-five years, with a daughter aged seven and a four year old son, for the care of whom it was necessary to employ two servants. Christ Church's endowment was worth only £32 per annum, supplemented with £22 from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, with the remainder of his income coming from pew rents, which in one year amounted to no more than £8. By making the church a centre for Evangelicalism Isaacs was able to benefit through the payment of pew rents by former parishioners who had moved out of the area as their incomes improved. Many of them, attracted by the preaching, continued to attend. Even so, the churchwardens noted that, before a substantial grant was awarded by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1888, it had been necessary to make up the vicar's income by annual collections.<sup>29</sup>

Despite the constraints imposed by an impoverished parish, Isaacs was able to persuade his parishioners to give strong support to the Church Pastoral Aid Society (which helped with the supplying of assistant curates), the Church Missionary Society and the London Jews' Society. Isaacs was clearly very popular with his working-class parishioners. On April 9, 1889, John Mitchinson (rector of Sibson, archdeacon of Leicester, and assistant bishop) confirmed 81 candidates and referred to the 'excellent addresses given by Mr. Isaacs to Confirmation candidates', many of whom were adults. When Isaacs' successor, Thomas Roberts, was inducted on All Souls' Day, 1891, by the new bishop, Mandell Creighton, Christ Church was referred to by Mrs Creighton as 'the great Evangelical Church'.<sup>30</sup>

Not all Evangelicals, however, were characterised by the extremes of Isaacs and his Church Association. The development of Christ Church was matched by Holy Trinity, which opened its door in 1838. Before the church was built it was intended that it should become a stronghold of Evangelicalism, serving the 'well-to-do population of the New Walk and Princes Street and ultimately the 'New Town', the fashionable suburb known as Southfields, which was not yet in existence'.<sup>31</sup> The first vicar, William Hill, who later became the incumbent of Peterborough Parish Church, was not among those who railed against the Ritualists but preached on 'the power and wisdom of God'. The congregation, composed of 'persons driven by various causes from other places of worship' who found shelter there, appear to have appreciated Hill's 'solid and faithful preaching'.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson, *Sketch of the History of Christ Church, Leicester*, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Thompson, 'Churches and Society in Leicestershire', 269. By 1891, when Isaacs left the parish the net yearly value of the living was £280. See *Kelly's Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1891), 600.

<sup>30</sup> L. Creighton, *Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton*. 2 vols. (London, 1904), II, 25.

<sup>31</sup> Anon., *Holy Trinity*...

In 1865 Hill exchanged livings with Edmund Davys, son of a former bishop of the diocese, and a Cambridge sixteenth wrangler. He was less successful in his ministry there despite remodelling the church building at his own expense. He was much troubled by worshippers who were 'in the habit of going to different places of worship instead of confining themselves to one'. He became friendly with Isaacs and joined the Church Association but did not play a leading role. Ten years into his ministry his wife died in childbirth, aged thirty-eight years, and his own health gave way.<sup>32</sup> Probably the most intelligent vicar was James Faithfull, the son of a cleric. He had not matriculated at Oxford until he was twenty-six years old in 1873 but thereafter graduated with first class honours in theology in 1877. Only a year later he was appointed to Holy Trinity.<sup>33</sup>

With a young man's brashness in effecting changes without the approval of his people, Faithfull appears to have experienced the loss of some church members.<sup>34</sup> During his brief four years in the parish he insisted on public baptism, celebrated holy communion each Sunday and introduced children's services on the third Sunday of each month. Because of the middle-class nature of the parish he had special Bible classes for servants at 3.00 p.m. each Sunday and Young Ladies' Bible classes at 3.30 p.m. on Thursdays.<sup>35</sup>

Yet Faithfull, whose income consisted of £30 per annum from endowment income and £550 from pew rents, was uneasy about his 'fashionable Evangelical Church'.<sup>36</sup> He was conscious that, contiguous with his own parish, on the other side of the nearby Aylestone Road, there was a large artisan population in sections of the parishes of St Mary and St Andrew so he agreed to a change in the parish boundary which brought into his own parish about 2,000 working-class people and organised pastoral work among them from among his middle-class parishioners.<sup>37</sup>

In 1888 Faithfull was invited to preach at his former church when it celebrated its golden jubilee. He was conscious that he was one of five vicars who had ministered there throughout the fifty years. It was noted that 'in all essentials we have been one' and that 'few churches anywhere have had so *many* clergymen of one mind and heart'. He continued on to say that 'amidst all our personal diversities we have endeavoured to maintain that "unity of the Spirit which is the bond of peace"'.<sup>38</sup> None of them had been extremists like Isaacs and only Davys had been known to be a member of the Church Association.

The situation at St. Peter's was similar to the other two Evangelical churches in that there was an initial dedication to the Evangelical cause. The first vicar was undoubtedly of that persuasion. There was a difference, however, in that the patronage was in the hands of a bishop who was not himself an extreme

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> J. Foster (ed.), *Alumni Oxoniensis*, Vol. 2 (1715–1886) (London, 1888), 444.

<sup>34</sup> J. A. Faithfull, *A Short History of Holy Trinity Church, Leicester* (1888), 12.

<sup>35</sup> Anon., *Holy Trinity*....

<sup>36</sup> Thompson, 'Churches and Society in Leicestershire', 269.

<sup>37</sup> Anon., *Holy Trinity*....

<sup>38</sup> Faithfull, *Short History of Holy Trinity*, 7.

Evangelical. Francis Robinson was appointed by Dr Magee at the beginning of 1874, three and half months before the church was consecrated on April 16. There was already an active and vigorous congregation meeting at the Upper Conduit Street School, where William Targett Fry had been at work as an assistant curate in a building that had been erected as a result of the efforts of his father, Canon William Fry, secretary of the Archidiaconal Board of Education.

Robinson was not known to be a member of the Church Association. He was a keen Evangelical, but not an extremist. Although the son of a gentleman, Francis Kildare Robinson of Whitby, he appears not to have had private means and described himself as a poor man. He was certainly notable as a preacher. Magee, at the consecration of the church, stated that Robinson had been 'sent to preach the Word'. Bishop and vicar were at one in regarding the sermon as a means of evangelising the masses as well as 'feeding the flock'. It was impressed upon the young vicar that if he was 'to win his people....he must seek them diligently in their homes, and teach them to know and love him there that he might draw them with him to the House of God'.

Robinson was distressed by the divisions within the Established Church; he would have liked there to have been a *rapprochement* between the factions. As an 'eloquent and impressive preacher' he attempted through his only published sermon to bring about an understanding between the different strands of churchmanship. Taking as his text Paul's contention (in Romans, viii, 28) that: 'We know that all things work together for good to them that love God', he maintained that the High, Low and Broad Churches were 'not exponents of rival theories of Christianity....but instruments in the hand of Providence for teaching different sides of one great truth'. As a sermon it was topical, well-constructed, and gracious in spirit.<sup>39</sup> One could not imagine Isaacs either preaching it or sympathising with its sentiments. Whereas Isaacs never maintained a satisfactory relationship with his Episcopal leader, Robinson was given considerable support by Magee. This support was continued by Bishop Mandell Creighton, who, on learning that the vicar was on the verge of a breakdown following his wife's death, made sure that on his first visit to Leicester he attended 'an eight o'clock celebration at Mr. Robinson's church'.<sup>40</sup> Creighton was later to arrange an exchange of livings that enabled Robinson to minister in the much smaller Paston parish on the outskirts of Peterborough.<sup>41</sup>

Magee's relations with Holy Trinity are not documented, but Creighton's relationship with one of Faithfull's successors, Edward Grose Hodge (1892-1894) was one of great warmth.<sup>42</sup> When Hodge left for London only two years into his incumbency Creighton thanked him for his 'constant kindness and unflinching

<sup>39</sup> Rimmington, 'Bishop W. C. Magee, the Reverend F. W. Robinson and a new late Victorian parish in Leicester'.

<sup>40</sup> Creighton, *Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton*, II. 25.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Hodge was later to become rector of Holy Trinity, Marylebone, a post which he combined with a professorship at the London College of Divinity. See Venn (ed.), *Alumni Cantabrigiensis*, Part II, Vol. 5, 394.



loyalty' as well as 'the support [which] made my work in Leicester comparatively easy.... I hope that our personal friendship will remain unbroken'.<sup>43</sup> For his part Hodge made it clear that he understood the difficult task faced by a bishop who had to keep the peace between the Anglican factions, stating that, 'It is perhaps due to his wide grasp of the Church's work as a whole that he was never absorbed in any one section of it. He could always see the other side'.<sup>44</sup>

It was obvious that Creighton and Hodge would be on different sides when it came to a Holy Trinity proposal to use unfermented grape juice in the celebration of the holy communion as the Nonconformists did. Creighton did not approve but appreciated the dilemma for a teetotal clergyman and suggested that Hodge 'should administer the bread and give the cup into the hand but be satisfied with a symbolical action of drinking'.<sup>45</sup>

Evangelicals were very keen on elementary education. After all, reading was a prerequisite to Bible study. At all three churches there were parish schools, most of them initiated by Canon William Fry, a keen Evangelical, who was honorary secretary of the Leicester Archidiaconal Board of Education from 1856 to 1877. Since 1839 he had lived in Leicester without a paid position, working to establish schools that would serve as springboards to new parish churches. When he was elected to the first Leicester School Board in 1871 he was joined by Isaacs. He was also accompanied by Davys in the elections of 1877.<sup>46</sup> Robinson was too busy with his new and rapidly expanding parish to seek election to the Board.

There is no evidence, however, that the Evangelicals were interested in extending education for the poor beyond the elementary stage. Despite the changes in society that education was encouraging, they were all becoming alienated from some of the consequences. Society was beginning to shift away from them. Traditionally the Evangelicals had deprecated, for instance, entertainment and sports that had no specific religious significance, especially as the only day available for participation or spectatorship was Sunday. At Derby the races had been abandoned in 1835 and football in the streets suppressed in 1845 because of pressure from Evangelicals. At Cheltenham Francis Close was leader of a campaign against the theatre and the local races. George Eliot noted that 'Evangelicalism had cast a certain suspicion of plague-infection over the few amusements which survived in the provinces'.<sup>47</sup>

By the 1880s, though, the situation had begun to change. A Saturday half-holiday for most people meant that games could be played without offending strict sabbatarians. In Leicester formally-organised sports began to flourish. The town football club employed its first professional players in 1888. By 1891 the club had gained access to the Midland League. Leicester (Rugby) Football Club, which had played mainly at Victoria Park in the 1880s, was able to acquire the Welford Road

<sup>43</sup> Creighton, *Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton*, II, 43.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>46</sup> G. T. Rimmington, 'William Fry: Educational Pioneer and Anglican Priest in Leicester, 1839-1877', *Leicestershire Historian* 43 (2007), 23-26.

<sup>47</sup> Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 132.

ground in 1892. Leicestershire County Cricket Club became a first-class county in 1895. There were also musical and dramatic performances. The Theatre Royal, opened in 1836, was the venue for ‘comedies, tragedies and the “blood and thunder” melodramas that were extremely popular with the audiences’. By the end of the nineteenth century there were five professional theatres in the town.<sup>48</sup>

Evangelicalism was slow to respond to these societal changes. There were complications; the forerunner of Leicester City, known as Leicester Fosse, was founded by a group of youths, mainly former pupils of the Wyggeston Boys’ School (founded in 1877), who were members of the same Bible class, and it was, therefore, difficult to disapprove openly.<sup>49</sup> Yet many Anglican Evangelicals, like most Nonconformists, continued to maintain their pietistic attitudes. J. H. S. Kent has observed that their essential characteristic was to ‘set up a barrier of prohibitions and customs of things done and not done, between the withdrawn religious group and society in general’. They had always disapproved of mixing with others at theatres, ballrooms and card parties. They became strong temperance supporters and tended to disapprove of sports clubs because of the association with alcohol.<sup>50</sup> It is fair to say that the clergy were particularly hard on themselves. As Brian Heeney notes: ‘Relaxation itself was suspect and often equated with indolence. Even morally innocent amusements such as botany, geology, and gardening might encroach on the pastor’s clerical labours’.<sup>51</sup>

In Leicester it was Albert Isaacs who was the most outspoken on the subject. He felt that it would give offence if he were to be seen at a theatre or a fancy dress ball or ‘a large convivial entertainment’ or ‘in the hunting field’. He confessed that:

‘Some time ago I entertained the idea of forming an association by which the recreations, especially of the working class might be improved.... I, however, gave it up...., I found that too much of their time and their money were already employed in recreations of various kinds, both evil and good; and I concluded that it would be in the highest degree rash and undesirable....to accelerate any movement of that kind’.<sup>52</sup>

Other incumbents were less explicit but there was nothing to suggest that Evangelicals in Leicester were treated to lectures on Blake, Browning, Tennyson, Hardy and Ruskin or performances of Gilbert and Sullivan operas, as were Joseph Wood’s congregation at Wycliffe Congregational Church.<sup>53</sup> Robinson, however, became a member of the Leicestershire Architectural and Archaeological Society in 1877, at a time when its chief object of study was the architecture associated with the Oxford Movement, suggesting that he was less constrained than his

<sup>48</sup> D. Nash and D. Reeder (eds.), *Leicester in the Twentieth Century* (Stroud, 1993), 199, 213.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>50</sup> J. H. S. Kent, ‘Hugh Price Hughes and the Nonconformist Conscience’, in G. V. Bennett and J. D. Walsh (eds.), *Essays in Modern Church History: in memory of Norman Sykes* (London, 1966), 185.

<sup>51</sup> B. Heeney, *A Different Kind of Gentlemen: Parish Clergy as Professional Men in Early and Mid-Victorian England* (Hamden, Conn., 1976), 12.

<sup>52</sup> D. J. Vaughan (ed.), *Report of the Church Congress, Leicester, 1880* (Leicester, 1880), 612–613.

<sup>53</sup> G. T. Rimmington, ‘Joseph Wood: Preacher of “Sweetness and Light”’, *Leicestershire Historian* 39 (2005), 22–25.

fellow Evangelicals.<sup>54</sup> At Holy Trinity, however, the Reverend G. Edwards, lecturing at a meeting of the Trinity Church Young Men's Society, urged 'the necessity of sincerity in their Christian duties, and, after condemning the fashion too prevalent of studying light literature in preference to God's word, exhorted his hearers that whatsoever they found to do, they should do it with their might, as unto the Lord'.<sup>55</sup> Parishioners at Christ Church and Holy Trinity were more inclined to a style of worship that stressed 'the sufficiency and supremacy of the Bible in its totality as the sole rule of faith and practice', and justification by faith. Their ministers tried to ensure that their parishioners became part of 'a closely-knit company of like-minded believers....a primary medium for building up and establishing their faith'.<sup>56</sup>

In general the Evangelical approach to the Bible was literalistic. There was a tendency 'to class all Bible critics together....as enemies of religion'.<sup>57</sup> There was little recognition of changes in perception brought about by, for instance, Darwin's *Origin of Species*, published as early as 1859. Nevertheless, as Carpenter states, the greater part of their Bible study 'was redeemed from the danger of being mechanical or fantastic by its intense and simple earnestness'.<sup>58</sup> Biblicism certainly repelled some people; there were many who deserted the Evangelical ranks because of it.<sup>59</sup> Despite this, however, the three main Evangelical churches in Leicester were extending their membership through teaching and mission enterprise.

At Holy Trinity the vicar conducted Bible classes from the Epistle to the Galatians every Thursday afternoon during 1884, with an attendance of thirty ladies. There were two classes for men every Sunday afternoon. It was noted that in the confirmation classes 'for the last three years the average age of both males and females has been getting higher and on this last occasion there were 25, and many of the candidates were very much older', an indication that the church was attracting converts rather than relying on intake from Sunday school classes.<sup>60</sup> It was noted that another congregation of about 180 people was being gathered at the parish room. Most of these were 'working people, who have not been in the habit of attending regularly anywhere'. It was also reported that the vicar had arranged Thursday evening lectures on 'Old Testament Characters', at which there was 'an average attendance of 56 persons of the very class we are anxious to reach'.<sup>61</sup> At Christ Church the confirmation service in 1889 was for 81 candidates, many of whom were mature candidates.<sup>62</sup> Robinson at St. Peter's invited in a team

<sup>54</sup> *Leicester Journal*, 23 February, 1877.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 March, 1877.

<sup>56</sup> Hylson-Smith, *Evangelicals in the Church of England*, 53, 55, 118–119.

<sup>57</sup> M. A. Crowther, *Church Embattled: Religious Controversy in Mid-Victorian England* (Newton Abbott, 1970), 23.

<sup>58</sup> Carpenter, *Church and People*, 403.

<sup>59</sup> Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians* (London, 1976), 23.

<sup>60</sup> Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland (hereafter ROLLR) DE1543/58/1 (Holy Trinity, Leicester, Pastoral Address and Annual Report for 1884). In 1884 there were 130 baptisms, of which 28 were of adults.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Wilson, *Sketch of the History of Christ Church, Leicester*, 20.

of four missionaries, led by Canon Reynolds Hole of Lincoln, to conduct a mission in his parish, as a means of reaching unchurched adults and young people. The sessions at Upper Conduit Street School, in the poorest part of the parish, resulted in the room being 'filled to overflowing'. The congregation of St. Peter's grew day by day, so that the 'ordinary number of candidates for Confirmation has been almost doubled'. At the following Easter services that was a record number of 597 communicants at St. Peter's and 102 at the temporary church of St. James.<sup>63</sup>

Pastoral work was rigorously organised and assiduously worked on in all three parishes. Robinson, with the assistance of two assistant curates, found it difficult to cope with the largest parish in Leicester, where the population reached 22,000 by 1891. He complained that 'three cannot do the work which really calls for ten'; yet he still managed to see the completion of another daughter church, St. Hilda's, before he was preferred to Paston parish in Peterborough in 1892.<sup>64</sup> At Christ Church Isaacs tended to his relatively small parish with great care. He paid regular attention to the baptism of whole families. There were many occasions when three, four, five and six member families were baptised together. On January 6, 1879, seven members of the Payne family were baptised.<sup>65</sup> At Holy Trinity Faithfull had had the parish divided into twelve districts each with its own team of visitors.<sup>66</sup> By 1884, when Martin Reed was the vicar, there were 32 visitors all of whom were women.<sup>67</sup>

Curiously, the Evangelical parishes made little use of lay readers, who could be licensed to officiate at services in church halls or other premises outside the parish church. Lay readers were first recorded in the London diocese when a 'lay helpers' association was established in 1865. Bishop Harold Browne at Ely began to license them in 1869. Magee was enthusiastic, and wanted to see them become a valuable evangelistic instrument. Yet by 1891 although the diocese of Peterborough had 64 lay readers licensed, only seventeen were in Leicester parishes.<sup>68</sup> In 1881 there were twelve readers in Leicester, eight at St. Matthew's, one at St. Leonard's but none at any of the Evangelical churches.<sup>69</sup> There is no documentary evidence that Isaacs ever had any readers at Christ Church. Robinson at St. Peter's employed readers but tended to use them only when there was no assistant curate available. Holy Trinity had two licensed readers in 1884 but from then to the end of the century they were absent from the most significant Evangelical church in Leicester.<sup>70</sup>

It is likely that the question of lay readers was something the Evangelical vicars associated with the Anglo-Catholic Ritualists, who had taken them up with great

<sup>63</sup> Rimmington, 'Bishop W. C. Magee, the Reverend F. W. Robinson and a new late Victorian parish in Leicester'.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> ROLLR/3D71/4 (Baptismal register for Christ Church, Leicester, 1877-1884).

<sup>66</sup> Anon., *Holy Trinity...*

<sup>67</sup> G. T. Rimmington, 'Bishop W. C. Magee and the Town of Leicester 1868-1891', *Midland History*, XXIII (1998), 121-135.

<sup>68</sup> *Peterborough Diocesan Calendar* (1881), 35.

<sup>69</sup> ROLLR/DE1543/58/1.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

enthusiasm. As M. A. Crowther says, Evangelicals tended to be 'opposed [to] a great deal of much-needed organisation in the Church through suspicion of ritualists'<sup>71</sup> For the same reason they opposed meetings of rural deanery meetings, pointedly boycotting them. None of them ever attended a meeting of the Leicester Clerical Association either. In the election for representatives from the rural deanery to the diocesan conference in 1873, the rural dean, T. Jones, regretted that there was no-one from the Evangelical party. Edmund Davys is known to have refused nomination.<sup>72</sup>

The attitude to lay readers and membership of the rural deanery chapter was in contrast to Evangelical representation at the unofficial Church Congresses. All three incumbents took part enthusiastically in the Church Congress at Leicester in 1880. Faithfull and Robinson were listed among the clerical secretaries, while Isaacs not only served on the Subjects Committee, but also delivered a paper on his attitude to popular recreations.<sup>73</sup> No doubt this was precisely because it was unofficial, and not seen to be dominated by Ritualists.

There was also some support for voluntary parochial councils. In a number of parishes they had begun to replace vestries, which had functioned as all-purpose local government bodies up to the 1880s. As early as 1871 Bishop Browne at Ely was encouraging parishes in his diocese to develop councils that would concern themselves with purely church matters rather than local government. Some clergy were opposed because they felt they might be obstructive or would at least seek to diminish the role of the clergy.<sup>74</sup> However, as many Evangelical incumbents were in parishes without substantial endowments it was generally in their interest to seek the help of laymen in the administration and financing of the church.

There were moves among both clergy and laity to abolish pew rents as they were socially divisive. It meant that middle-class people had the best seats, while working-class people were in less advantageous seats, resulting in them feeling less welcome at services. Incumbents at Holy Trinity, where most of the clerical income was derived from pew rents, had little choice but to retain the pew rent system. At Christ Church also a significant amount of the clerical income was from pew rents. Robinson's income, however, was derived entirely from grants supplied by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Accordingly he opposed the installation of pews at St. Peter's, so that there would be no possibility of pew rents being charged. Nevertheless it was necessary to finance the parish by other means. Initially there was a need to complete the building, which was not finished until 1878. He was also in need of money to employ several assistant curates. Furthermore there was also a plan to erect two daughter churches. There were also two church schools. Although freewill collections were adopted as the main source of income there were times when that income was insufficient to meet the needs. Fortunately there was already a local committee, formed in 1871, which coped

<sup>71</sup> Crowther, *Church Embattled*, 23.

<sup>72</sup> Thompson, 'Churches and Society in Leicestershire', 247.

<sup>73</sup> Vaughan (ed.), *Report of the Church Congress, Leicester, 1880*, xi, xii, 612.

<sup>74</sup> Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, II, 200.

with the raising of funds through bazaars.<sup>75</sup> It was this committee which was to grow into the parochial church council.

There are no surviving records of the situation at Christ Church but the Vestry Minute book at Holy Trinity indicates that by 1888 there was a church council which had originated as a meeting of pew renters forty years before. Its members were appointed by the vestry. Even in 1895, when the question of election was being discussed, there was a disinclination to have direct elections for membership. It was agreed that two-thirds would be elected by the vestry and the other third appointed by the vicar.<sup>76</sup>

In fact the Church Council tended to fill vacancies itself, an indication that it was a fairly powerful body within the parish.<sup>77</sup> Even though it was stressed that the Council had 'no legal standing whatever, and was only consultative', it was by no means inclined to give its support to the vicar without question. In 1883 Vicar Martin Reed was asked 'as to the reason why the Athanasian Creed was not read on Easter Day'. The following year it was noted that 'the Vicar was strongly urged by Messrs. Odell, Lloyd, Butler, H. P. Brown, Champion and Gibson to read the Athanasian Creed whenever ordered in the Prayer Book'. However, several members dissented from the appeal and Reed replied that 'while not doctrinally objecting to the Creed....it caused a great lack of unanimity in the service and its use three times a year affected all necessary purposes'.<sup>78</sup> Later, there was a more serious disagreement about the introduction of an early Sunday Eucharist service, which was considered by the Council to be 'unnecessary by the fact of the Mid-day, Afternoon and Evening communions providing ample accommodation for those who wish to partake of the Lord's Supper'. The vicar felt that there should be an early service at the 'great church festivals' and that 'if 30 regular attendants....wished for an early communion they should have it once a month'. A vote of confidence in the vicar was carried only by ten votes to seven.<sup>79</sup> It resulted in a more cautious incumbent, who did not continue with his plan to celebrate frequent early communion services but stated nevertheless that 'on Easter Day at 8.30 one hundred and sixteen persons communicated'.<sup>80</sup> When Reed left in 1890 he mentioned, somewhat ruefully, that 'he had made no change whatever in the services'. The Council, while thanking Reed for his 'faithful teaching', stated without hesitation that there would be no change in the services during the interregnum, not even providing opportunities for the chanting of the psalms for which some parishioners had been petitioning.<sup>81</sup> On purely local church matters it is clear that relations between the departing incumbent and members of the Council were strained. In other matters, outside practices within Holy Trinity,

<sup>75</sup> Rimmington, 'Bishop W. C. Magee, the Reverend F. W. Robinson and a new late Victorian parish in Leicester'.

<sup>76</sup> ROLLR/DE1543/52/1 (Holy Trinity, Leicester, Vestry Minute Book), 16 April, 1895.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 April, 1888.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 April, 1884.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 April, 1885.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 April, 1886.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 April, 1890.

Council and vicar were at one. For instance, the Council sent a resolution to the Prime Minister and the bishop. Since they deplored 'the present revival of medieval and superstitious usages within the Church of England', the vicar at the time, Jeffrey Thompson, stated that he was 'quite in harmony with these resolutions'.<sup>82</sup>

The three most significant Evangelical churches in Leicester were successful in promoting elementary education, in providing Biblical teaching, in supporting mission, and in organising pastoral care for their parishioners. There can be no doubt that they were earnest in their endeavours. Yet their attempts to counter changes in the prevailing culture that brought more leisure opportunities to working-class people and their opposition to Ritualism had much more limited appeal.<sup>83</sup> A. D. Gilbert comments that, although Evangelicalism had come close to dominating both Anglicanism and English society, it had a 'dynamic, other-worldly theology' that was manifestly at odds with the growing secularity of late Victorian culture'. By the late nineteenth century, he concluded, 'evangelicalism was declining as an influence in Church and Society alike'.<sup>84</sup> In Leicester the Evangelicals felt themselves to be an increasingly downtrodden, if noisy, minority. There were to be other Evangelical foundations in the early twentieth century, like Holy Apostles', but Ritualism was more successful in responding to the Edwardian situation.

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 April, 1899.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 April, 1890.

<sup>84</sup> A. D. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: a history of the secularization of modern society* (London, 1980), 143.