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As a keen gardener I like the metaphor of Jesus as a master gardener pruning his followers for further growth. I became a Vicar in multi-racial, multi-faith, Southall in 2001, having trained at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford (BTh) and serving a curacy in Cricklewood. Prior to ordination I worked in India for 18 months with the Oasis Trust. I find that I am increasingly interested in spiritual formation. This led me to complete an MA in Christian Spirituality at Heythrop College in 2009. My own journey has been one in which God has challenged me to give up dreams of 'success' in favour of fruitfulness. I love the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit that ministry at St George's allows. Married to Anita since 1995 (a secondary science teacher) we enjoy cycling in the sunshine as long as the destination includes sitting in a coffee shop.

Nineteenth Century Urbanisation And The Anglican Church :

An Assessment Of The Extent To Which The Anglican Church Ever Successfully

Reached The Urban Populations Of The Nineteenth Century And The Problems It

Faced In Doing So.

Christopher Ramsay. June 1995.

Abstract:

How are we to judge the Church of England in the nineteenth century city? Traditionally the verdict reached was one of failure. The inability of the church to reach the working classes and despite initial success with the middle class, a subsequent failure to hold them in the face of rising secularism. More recently this conclusion has been challenged. As M. Hennell and J. Root write "Church leaders today have been too inclined to draw comfort from that verdict" i.e. that the church failed. "In reality compared with the church of today, the nineteenth century mission in working class areas, of which Champneys is a prime example, was astonishingly effective."¹ Even in 1902 the census showed 47000 men in the East End in church and 61 000 women. In London one in five attended church. What has this to say to the Anglican church in urban areas today?

¹ M.Hennell, J.Root p.64

1. Nineteenth Century Urbanisation and Industrialisation.

Increasing break down of community, individual isolation, poor housing, social deprivation and an ever growing class divide. Thus runs the traditional view of the growth of the Victorian cities. This view believed that the “industrial revolution divided men from God”². Chadwick suggests however that this view may be misfounded. Were the city dwellers ever churchgoers anyway? Bishop J.C. Ryle came to the conclusion that they were not, unlike most of his contemporaries. The slum dweller certainly had no guilt about non-attendance and over 50% of the population of the cities even in the middle of the century had been born outside the city. In fact eighteenth century visitations show that as little as 1-2% of parishioners took communion, this perhaps being a better indication of true religiosity than attendance.³

Urbanisation actually aided the growth of the church in certain sections of society, namely the new and rapidly growing middle class. “Even its greatest success is sometimes regarded as a failure. The Church of England succeeding in capturing or maintaining the allegiance of the new urban as well as the old rural elites”⁴, suggests J. Cox. Nonetheless the church of the 1850’s began to become aware, through the writings of Dickens, Kingsley and the work of the Poor law Commission, that the working classes were largely alienated from the established church. In the 1880’s Charles Booth estimated that only 12% of the population were upper or middle class, yet they made up the majority of the church, especially the Church of England. The diagnosis of the problem by the church at that time was firstly, that there were insufficient church seats for the population. For example in 1821 the population of Sheffield was 60 000 but the number of church seats 4000, of which only 300 were unrented i.e. open for use by the poor.⁵ This was the solution proposed by Mann in 1851 after his

² Owen Chadwick The Secularisation of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century. Cambridge CUP, 1975. p.95.

³ R Currie, A Gilbert Churches and Churchgoers. Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700. L. Horsley. Oxford, Clarendon Press. 1977.

⁴ Jeffrey Cox The English Churches in a Secular Society, Lambeth 1870-1930. Oxford, OUP 1982. p.5

⁵ E.R. Wickham Church and people in an Industrial Society London, Lutterworth. (1957) Paperback Ed 1969. p. 17-166.

church census. Three million people were not attending church because there was a dramatic need for more buildings. We will return to this building strategy later on.

Social deprivation was certainly at least concentrated by urbanisation if not created by it. East of the River Lea in London for example, became the dumping ground for dirty industry after they were banned from further into London. This presented the church with a huge new challenge. Yet these problems did lead to what in effect was a huge mobilisation of resources and middle class personnel to give relief through the charitable work of the churches. The effect of this relief is debatable and will be referred to later. In the long run it may have further distanced the church from the working classes, but it was a movement unprecedented by its scale and not matched since by a voluntary organisation.

The twentieth century decline of the church in Britain has sometimes been regarded as the inevitable consequence of, as Chadwick calls it, the two 'unsettlements' of the nineteenth century. The social unsettlement of urbanisation and the mental unsettlement of secularisation as a result of scientific advance. J. Cox however thinks that decline is more to do with the way the church responded to this change than the change in itself.

2. Defining Success.

One of the problems for the church historian is finding a way of quantifying religion. A.D. Gilbert⁶ suggests using the parameters set by Glock and Stark who divide religion into - experience, belief, practice, knowledge, and secular activities occurring as a result of the former. These are not exclusive categories however, there may be overlap which makes assessment difficult. Generally historians have used 'practice' as a measure of religion. This has been mainly because records are only really available for the institutional practice of religion. Church attendance statistics are the primary source of information about the state of nineteenth century Christianity. The successful church is therefore the one which is full.

Yet of course this has serious deficiencies as a measurement criterion. It gives no account of the psychological impact of the church on society or the beliefs of any one section of society, especially if these do not coincide with the institutional criteria. Only in the last 20 years has any attempt been made to rectify this. This has been by means of oral interviews with the elderly, examining their perception of Christianity and the role it played in their families' lives at the end of the last century (for example the work of Sarah Williams in Southwark⁷). These latest studies have queried the pessimism of the earlier statistical works, finding for example evidence of much folk religious belief among those not attending church. Thus a simple measurement of who attended Anglican churches in the Victorian age is not an adequate measure of success. This is as much a theological question as a statistical one. Who defines religion, the church or the people? If people think they are Christian, are they?

Even church attendance can be a difficult indices to work with. The accuracy of the data is difficult to corroborate, and is influenced by the task of the data collector of the day. Horace Mann's significant church census of 1851 was estimated by the clergy who had an interest in overestimating their congregations and took no account of 'twicers', those attending services in both the morning and evening.

Other indices which could possibly be used are the number of buildings the Church of England built in this period, or the number of clergy and their distribution in the cities. Yet all of these depend on a point of comparison or base line against which to judge 'success'. It is change an adequate criterion for making this judgement. Up until the 1970's most commentators used the plumb line which had been used by the church of the nineteenth century ; that 'all England should be Christian'. This inevitably led to a pessimistic view of the church's impact on society. Comparison with the church today however, would cast a very favourable light on the impact of the Victorian church, both in terms of church attendance, belief, social action and across the classes. It must be remembered that despite the late nineteenth century clergy's realisation that the artisans were largely untouched by

⁶ A.D. Gilbert Religion and Society in Industrial England. New York, Longman. 1976.

⁷ Sarah Williams Religious Belief and popular Culture: A study of the south London borough of Southwark,

the Anglican church, the middle class were church goers in a way unheard of today. In addition to this there are examples of individual churches both Tractarian and evangelical in the slums of the great cities who had significant ministries to the poor in their parishes, for example W. Champneys of Whitechapel⁸.

As a result of these difficulties different historians have judged the church of the nineteenth century in different lights. Some have deemed the decline in attendance a failure of the church to reach the urban masses while others see the church holding its own in this century, if not growing. Hugh McLeod⁹ summarises the four different chronologies historians have proposed for the church's growth and decline in the nineteenth century. K.S. Inglis¹⁰ maintains that working class attendance was always low in this century whereas E.R. Wickham¹¹ believes that at least in Sheffield some church growth amongst the working classes occurred from the 1850s-1880s. Gilbert argues for a declining church once living standards start to improve from the 1830's onwards, arguing for a process of secularisation which weakened the church's grip on society. More recently revisionists, such as Alan Bartlett (1987 thesis), believe that churches only peaked in the 1890's. The consensus today is that in the latter half of the century the church did at least hold its own, if not grow in numbers, at a time when the population was growing.

It does nonetheless depend upon which indices one uses. For example Anglican marriages declined from 90.7% of all marriages in 1844 to 64.25% in 1904. Yet Baptisms in rose from 62.35% in 1885 to 65.8% in 1902. Confirmations also rose which gave the later Victorians a sense of religious revival. Archbishop Benson wrote in 1891 'It is well known that throughout the country the number of those who attend church has largely increased and is increasing.'¹²

⁸ M. Hennell, J Root 1880-1939. Oxford, D.Phil. 1993.
 Champneys of Whitechapel. Anvil, Vol 9/1/1992.
⁹ H. McLeod Religion and Irreligion in Victorian England: How Secular was the Working Class?
 Bangor, Headstart History. 1993. Chapter 2.
¹⁰ K.S. Inglis Churches and the Working Class in Victorian England.
 London, Routledge. 1963. p.21-61, 250-322.
¹¹ E.R. Wickham 1957

Evidently any assessment of the Anglican church in the Victorian era contains an element of conjecture, yet it is still a task worth undertaking for it bears direct relevance on the state of the Church of England in cities today and gives examples of strategies good and bad for reaching the inhabitants of the city.

3. Who Went to Church? A Growing Class Divide.

Without entering the extensive debate about the actual figures for church attendance in the nineteenth century it is worth getting an overview of the situation however inadequate.

The first point of importance is that attendance varies both with gender and region as well as with class. The fact that attendance by women is perhaps higher is no surprise to the church today. This was true across the classes. Both for the working class and the middle class it became increasingly the role of the women to uphold the families' religious values and more importantly religious respectability. That is not to say that working class men for example were unreligious as David Hempton writes their criticism of the church "often reflected not so much irreligion or indifference as disappointed expectations"¹³. For the women however unlike the men, the church provided one of the few places they could go outside of the home.

Regional variation is a factor sometimes overlooked. As we will see it affected the Anglican church as the population moved northwards. But it also meant that where the church had historically been strong it remained so. London although the source of much historical study is actually probably the exceptional city, being the most secularised. In the 1880's for example H. McLeod estimates that 15-20% of London's working class attended a church compared with 40 % of middle class. Yet in Bristol this was probably 40 and 66% respectively. Both today would seem extremely successful figures for the state of the church in society, again qualifying the idea that the Victorian church failed the working classes.

¹² Owen Chadwick The Victorian Church I + II. London, Black. 3rd Ed 1971. p.224

¹³ D. Hempton in T. Thomas. The British their Religious Beliefs and Practices 1800-1986.

One recent theory proposed by Callum Brown is that suburbanisation not urbanisation caused the decline in the church. The church did not lose the working class, which it had never held. Rather it lost the middle class which it had won successfully as the cities grew in the nineteenth century. "It was a measure of the Evangelical achievement that for so much of the century so many members of the upper and middle classes felt bound to attend church regularly, to observe Sunday, and to censor their conversation. It was a sign of the limits of this achievement that so much of this was hypocrisy"¹⁴, writes Hugh McLeod who argues that by the 1860's most of the middle class had unconsciously become 'broad' churchmen. They worshipped propriety and respectability, one church even gave the vicar a discretionary fund for use when church members could not afford the right clothes to wear to church. Thus higher middle class attendance is not necessarily a sign of a more religious class than the working class. After all "It is perhaps a mistake to describe 'religion' as 'ubiquitous', since many people contrived to limit it to Sunday. But the problem of Sunday was difficult for anyone to escape."¹⁵ J. Cox however is not as sceptical. He believes that though respectability played its part, people were genuinely religiously motivated too. Thus the very fact that the church held onto those with power and wealth in society makes Victorian religion in the cities significant. Science is sometimes blamed for the decline in religion but those who were most educated were those who most attended church. Sermons in the suburbs were often the best way of hearing about the latest ideas or books. This was coupled with sermons on moral living in the here and now. This was comforting to the middle class who got a pat on the back for their 'moral' lifestyle.

Did the moralising of the middle class church put off the working class? Certainly the few working men's clubs set up in Lambeth could not compete with the beer and gambling of the secular clubs. It would be wrong to suggest however, that the working class were not religious. Sarah Williams has shown that hymns and prayers were an integral part of working class religion. The question is, how Christian were these beliefs, i.e. what had the impact of the church and Sunday school been? Cox is optimistic. He finds evidence of what

¹⁴ Hugh McLeod London, Routledge. 1988. p.195
 Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City.

he calls 'diffusive' Christianity, a belief in the trinity, the bible and a desire for official hatchings, matchings and dispatchings. The latter were all 'lucky' if done in the Church of England. He feels that urbanisation finished off the work of the Reformation in ridding popular religion of semi-pagan superstition, "popular Christianity was nearer to orthodoxy than it had ever been."¹⁶ S. Williams disagrees, she finds that prayers were often mixed up with lucky charms, while she agrees that undoubtedly this class were religious. The New Year Watchnight service and Harvest service were evidence of this when the church would be packed by the working class. It was simply that they were religious on their own terms and not on the institutional church's terms.

Perhaps the problem was that it was a false expectation that two classes who only ever met at work in relationships of power, could ever worship in the same church as equals.

4. The Challenge Facing the Anglican Church

4.1 The 'Established' Church

Entering the nineteenth century the Church of England was threatened by a new social order, while it was definitely part of the old order. Clergy were part of the establishment and allied to the Tory party. More clergy voted Tory as a percentage from 1830-1879 than any other single secular occupation.¹⁷ Often paternalistic, they neglected their pastoral duties to the extent that many clergy were non resident in their parishes. Many clergy were magistrates which could take up a considerable proportion of their time. They exercised a role of social control Gilbert suggests; "The preservation of the existing order, the maintenance of social harmony and social tranquillity: this was the *raison d'être* of the Church of England as a religious establishment."¹⁸ As a result the Anglican church had already lost out to the non-conformists precisely because the latter had a voice of 'dissent'. Frightened by the challenge

¹⁵ H. McLeod London, Croom Helm. 1974. p.152
¹⁶ J. Cox Class and Religion p.139
 p.95
¹⁷ H. McLeod Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth Century Britain.
 London, Macmillan. 1984.

to the social order, in 1818 the government voted a million pounds to be spent on building churches in order that religion might act as a pacifier of the masses. Yet, of the four churches built in Sheffield with this money, only half the seats were free and these were in the worse positions within the churches. Neither did they provide any stipends for clergy to work there. The 1830's proved the alliance of the church and government, during the Chartist demonstrations. Rallying to the church on Sunday the vicar of one church was asked to preach on the oppression of the poor but instead spoke of obedience to the authorities. Coupled with this was a church hierarchy who had little comprehension of the nature of the city. Of the 104 bishops of 1783-1852 only 17 had ever held an urban living.¹⁹ Evidently the established church was overtaken by the changes in society. History had allowed the Church of England to become part of the rural, conservative order. History now however threw this position up in the air, as the majority of people now lived in cities and the bulk of these people were a new distinct working class, structurally removed from the Church of England by a widening cultural gap.

Demographically the Anglican church was ill-placed to meet the changes of the century. The cities of the north of England were growing fastest causing the countries population mass to move northwards. Yet the Church of England was strongest in the south. E.R. Wickham writes "For a body claiming to be the church of the nation, both the limited provision and the social restrictiveness of the Church of England is outstanding".²⁰

Reform did however take place. The 1830's did see a change in clergy diligence and the reform act of 1835 began to deal with the problems of plural livings. "The church was saved and made more efficient in the 1830s and 1840s by relinquishing or otherwise losing some of its social and secular administrative functions."²¹ This was precisely the challenge of urbanisation to the church. For no longer did the squire and parson have total influence.

¹⁸ A.D. Gilbert p.76

¹⁹ David Sheppard Built as a City, God and the Urban World Today. London, Hodder and Stoughton. 1974. P. 80-123

²⁰ E.R. Wickham p.75

²¹ A.D. Gilbert p.134

The Church of England had entered a free market. A free market for thought, a free market for authority and a free market for religion.

4.2 A Cultural Gulf

Roy Joslin quotes the sociologist David Martin's reasons for the alienation of the working class from the church.²² Firstly a cultural gap, both in the language of the bible and also in mystery, between the church and the working classes. The rural dean of Kennington quoted by Charles Booth said in the 1890's "Working men don't go to church for the same reason that I don't go to the races".²³ Certainly clergy in the east end of London were regarded as missionaries. Hugh McLeod writes "The Church of England in Bethnal Green was a missionary church, its ministers isolated by the suspicion of the natives and by the differences in language and custom that made the life of the local population repugnant to them."²⁴ Interestingly however the Tractarians tried to bridge this gap by creating a sense of 'mystery' and colour. Respectability was part of that cultural gap. The need to wear one's best clothes to church was a bar to the poor. Nonetheless it was also an attraction. Working women who went to church were 'respectable'.

4.3 Disunity

Martin's second point is the disunity of the churches. H.R. Niebuhr proposes a theory of 'class denominationalism'²⁵. Certainly the non conformists initially attracted far more working men than the established church and at times there was a distinct anti-dissenters rhetoric from the Church of England clergy. Disunity should not be over emphasised however, for there is evidence that the evangelical revival did cross denominational boundaries. Bishop Blomfield did at first disapprove of links with the pan-evangelical London City Mission but later on relaxed about this and his successor Tait positively encouraged co-operation. The Salvation Army almost became a part of the Church of England in the 1880's

²² Roy Joslin Urban Harvest. Welwyn, Evangelical Press. 1982. p.10-47.
²³ J. Cox p.105

and never saw itself as being in competition with the Church Army, both of which aimed to reach the working classes.

4.4 Lack of Positions of Leadership

Martin's third reason is the lack of positions of responsibility given to the working classes in the church. The Anglican clergy were almost entirely upper middle class, 75% of whom had degrees in 1870. Lay leadership was limited as well, in Lewisham although the church was 50 % working class they were never represented as churchwardens. There were a few attempts to change this leadership imbalance, such as the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield and the Church Army. Yet these were of limited impact and the Army officers soon became mostly lower middle class. Part of the problem is highlighted by Gilbert "Only when a religious body can recruit new members quickly enough to retain much of its original social character can 'lift' be combined with continuing recruitment from its original constituency."²⁶ This was a problem familiar to the non-conformists too. In the Church of England there was in fact a fair degree of resistance by the clergy to spread the net wider for clergy from a different background to themselves; with concern expressed over the quality of teaching and preaching (Inglis). In contrast however working class women may have been attracted to the church precisely because it gave them responsibility not found in the home. It was the only place outside the home they could be respected, and this may explain the success of the 'mothers meeting'.

4.5 'Charity'

The churches were a dam which let loose a flood of charity, Martin suggests, but never strove for justice for the poor. The legacy of this remains today David Sheppard argues, "Part of the inheritance is that the majority of adults in urban and industrial areas have always thought of the church as a kindly body that has nothing serious to say to them unless

²⁴ Hugh McLeod Class and Religion p.104.

²⁵ R. Currie et al.

they are in trouble.”²⁷ The problem was he believes that the church did much *for* the people but little *with* them. This was realised by the Victorians only later in the century. Arnold Toynbee wrote in 1883 “We the middle class I mean, not just the very rich - we have neglected you; instead of justice we have offered you charity”.²⁸ That is not to say that the changes brought about in the labour laws by Lord Shaftesbury for example did not have an impact, but that the church was too tied into the status quo to see beyond the visible evils, to the structures behind them. Christian socialism did begin to change this a little and we will assess this in the next section.

4.6 Entertainment

The ‘people be good’ attitude of the Anglican church as Martin puts it has already been discussed but it should not be overlooked that the same attitude which distanced the working class may actually have attracted the middle class. A growth in Sunday entertainment is Martin’s sixth argument. Henry Walker recorded in 1896 that though the churches were empty of them, Brick Lane was thronging with working men at the pigeon market, “Here then are the missing thousands for whom the empty churches round so amply yet so unsuccessfully provided free sittings.”²⁹ The church had now to compete with pigeon loft, rabbit hutch and bicycle as well as the pub. Oral studies have shown that 33% of non churchgoing men spent most of their free time in the pub, 25% of occasional goers and only 7% of regular church goers.³⁰ Religion was now a matter of voluntary consent.

5. The Anglican Response: Strategies to Reach the Cities

Faced with huge change and a realisation that the church was not reaching the people as the church ‘ought to’, what was the response of the church to be?

²⁶ A.D. Gilbert p.159

²⁷ D. Sheppard p.84

²⁸ D. Sheppard p.99

²⁹ Henry Walker East London. Sketches of Christian Work and Workers. 1896. Reprinted High Wycombe, Peter Marcan Pub. 1987. p.84

5.1 Church Building

The first was to make space for the growing population and to build churches where there were none before. Over 600 new churches were built between 1824 and 1884. In the period 1860-1885 alone, of the 80.5 million pounds voluntary contributions to the Church of England, 35 million was spent on building. Bishop Blomfield argued for a parish church and two clergy for every 2000 souls. The aim too was to provide sufficient seats, rent free, for all. The parliamentary commission on church building found in 1853 that given good weather people would travel upto a mile to attend church. Thus the Church of England embarked on a program which meant that no other single institution could rival it in its geographical comprehensiveness.

A building alone is insufficient however, as the Victorians soon discovered. "A number of the new East London churches have never in their history been more than half full."³¹ There were deeper structural problems within the Church of England which the church could not bear to face and so it began to blame the infidelity of the working classes rather than their own conservatism. The vicar of St. Michael's Stockwell said in 1899 "Churchgoing is almost entirely a matter of social standing, a certain class will come to church unless you positively repel them, while another class cannot be induced to come at all."³² Increasingly low churchmen came to this pessimistic conclusion in the second half of the century.

The problem meanwhile for the evangelicals in the Church of England was twofold. Firstly their emphasis on a Puritan ethic of industry, sobriety and thrift naturally appealed to the upwardly mobile middle class. This secondly created a political conservatism which alienated the working class. Christianity had become "The opium of the rich rather than the poor", unable to draw the working class not so much because of pew renting but the

³⁰ H. McLeod Religion and Irreligion. Chapter 2.

³¹ Owen Chadwick The Victorian Church p.332.

³² J. Cox p.38

prevailing “ethos of optimistic upward aspiration and successful respectability which the poorest felt beyond their grasp”.³³

The Anglo-Catholic movement was definitely part of this building program. Yet it was almost accidental that they came to be in the slums of the cities rather than by design from the movement’s conception. The ritual which stereo-types their involvement in these areas was actually positively antithetical to the Oxford Movements founders’ ideas, who believed in reserve and sobriety in worship. Their success amongst the working classes has at times been assigned to the colour and excitement it brought to the bleak slums. In fact the amount of ritual employed, would today be considered insignificant. Chadwick calculates that of 800 London churches only 10-15 used incense and only 30 vestments! The Tractarians moved into the slums partly because they were not accepted elsewhere. Here “Nobody needed to go, nobody could be disturbed by sudden changes of old custom.”³⁴ There was also an increase in the number of ordinands as a result of the movement, who had to be placed somewhere, but it is true also that their emphasis on the theology of the incarnation was appropriate to ministry in the slums. Nonetheless this should not detract from the Tractarians considerable achievements in the slums, which we shall return to later.

5.2 Clerical Manpower

As we have already seen part and parcel of the church building program was the redistribution of the clergy. The number of clergy did increase significantly through the century from 14 613 in 1841 to 24 232 in 1891. From 1863 mission clergy were designated, mostly working in mission halls within existing parishes. By 1870’s CPAS was paying the stipends of over 500 clergy mainly in the cities and the Additional Curates Society supported a comparable number. This is impressive especially as over 4000 clergy were deployed overseas by this time in foreign missions.

³³Sheridan Gilley in Terence Thomas p.23.

³⁴O. Chadwick The Victorian Church II p.316

J. Cox gives a clear picture of these two strategies in Lambeth. The population grew from 27985 in 1801 to 301 895 in 1901. Up until 1824 one parish served the whole area. In 1824 four Waterloo churches were built and by 1900 there were thirty parishes served by 80 clergy. Cox's research shows however that the size of parish bears no adverse correlation with percentage attendance at church. He also demonstrates that even though more clergy were deployed in working class parishes in Lambeth, it did not produce higher levels of attendance. Rather "Clerical effectiveness depended entirely on the social composition of the parish."³⁵ Neither was it always easy to find clergy willing to move into the poorer areas. Bishop Blomfield had enthusiastically built ten new churches in Bethnal Green but could hardly fill all the vacancies with suitable clergy. Even clergy with successful ministries in the cities found it a sacrifice. The vicar of St Matthias only took the appointment as long as his children did not have to live in the parish.

The personal attributes of individual clergy seem to be the key to 'successful', that is to say, large churches. Charles Booth in the 1880's believed that the Anglo-Catholics were most successful in the slums not because of ritual or even their social programs but because of the commitment and self-denial of the clergy. This seems to cross the party divides. "Personal factors have always been of particular importance in the Church of England...men of calibre often producing a remarkable response from quarters least expected."³⁶ Walter Hook a High churchman in Leeds developed a successful church and was involved in setting up co-operative societies as well as schools. Much of the growth of St Marys Whitechapel was due to the comprehensive organisation and visiting of Weldon Champneys. He expected to visit every home, even though the parish had 16 000 inhabitants.

5.3 Visitation

Visiting was regarded as an important strategy in reaching the non-churchgoer. District Visiting Societies were set up by Anglican evangelicals to remedy the churches neglect of

³⁵ J. Cox p.34
³⁶ E.R. Wickham p.145

pastoral care, but this approach was undertaken by all churches, for example the Anglo-Catholic St John-the-Divine Kennington visited every house in the parish regularly. These Societies recruited from among the middle classes especially women who travelled into the poorer areas during the day to visit homes. Initially evangelistic in thrust they inevitably became a channel for the relief operations of the churches. This often crippled the religious message they hoped to convey. It did however give an awareness of the needs of the poor and promote home mission in an age when foreign mission was a major interest of the evangelical church. It may never have achieved its aims but it was still in the words of Donald Lewis “the most influential religious crusade to affect the Victorian working classes.”³⁷ The problem was not that the people were irreligious he suggests, but “sodden by the gospel and not saved by it” as a contemporary Baptist minister put it.

5.4 Sunday Schools

Laqueur³⁸ estimates that in 1851 over 2 million working class children attended Sunday schools. He argues for a sympathetic view of the Victorian Sunday School, which were, he believes, popular with parents, who both enjoyed the freedom from the children and the thought that they were being brought up ‘Christian’. This has become known as ‘religion by deputy’. Other historians have not been so complementary. Notably E.P. Thompson called the Sunday Classes ‘religious terrorism’ set up to create a generation of docile factory workers. Others have seen their attractiveness simply as a result of the bribery in the form of trips away. Alternatively perhaps they were actually resented by the children who subsequently created disturbances in the classes. Cox suggests that they were enjoyable, but largely ineffective at religious instruction. This is an important point because much of the argument about how Christian the working class were revolves around their residual knowledge of Christianity from Sunday school. If nothing else they did maintain the notion that Christian belief was normal. This is despite the intelligentsia’ attacks on the Christian

³⁷ Donald Lewis Lighten their Darkness. The Evangelical Mission to Working Class
London 1828-1860. Westport, Greenwood Press. 1986. p.276

³⁸ T.W. Laqueur Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture.
New Haven. 1976.

mind set through secularism. Largely it would seem that the working classes were untouched by these ideas.

In the second half of the century uniformed organisations proliferated, such as the Boy's Brigade. It is possible that these clubs were a reaction to the increasing domination of the church by women. 'Muscular Christianity' was the antidote. Many of the Tractarian churches ran football clubs for the local boys, but how much these were attempts by public school clergy to impose their own culture of discipline and order on an informal culture is open to examination.

The Sunday school movement despite its numerical success unfortunately never fed those children into the church as mature adults.

5.5 Relief

"Inevitably working class evangelicals could be accused of being on the make"³⁹ such was the effect of the relief the churches offered. At first relief was offered directly through the district visitors, but this led to resentment on the part of the poor at the visitors condescension, and a subsequent resentment by the visitors at the peoples' ingratitude. Criticism about the scatter-gun nature of this relief led to the issuing of mendicity tickets from the 1880's onwards, which could be redeemed for specific goods at a set shop. Originally soup kitchens had been popular but by 1900 these had largely been abandoned as being too indiscriminate, yet interestingly clergy reported that it was much harder to raise funds from the rich for other forms of relief.

Mothers meetings were not set up to provide relief but did do so indirectly. Aimed to reach working class women unable to attend church on Sunday they consisted of a few hymns and a homily. The women paid a small fee which was used as a kitty to buy coal and clothes especially before Christmas. This was generously supplemented by the church which

inevitably led to accusations of bribery. It is interesting that this perception may well have been misconceived. Currie, Gilbert and Horsley show that there is no correlation between increased church attendance and trade lows i.e. the soup kitchen and other relief had little impact on church going. Cox argues that the women who attended were largely deferential better off working class women rather than the real poor. The most important thing they gained from attendance was respectability.

Some churches realised the need to provide medical services. Parishes such as St John-the-Divine employed a nurse on their staff. Others provided thrift societies, which principally enabled women to save as they were met by the District Visitors. Yet despite the immense amount of activity and effort the Victorian church poured into philanthropy, second in cost and manpower only to church building, it did little to encourage the working classes to attend church. Were the church's efforts ineffective or perhaps mismotivated? "Ideologically the philanthropic auxiliaries were more important to clergymen, patrons, and ordinary churchgoers than to participants, for good works supplied a major rationale for the church's existence."⁴⁰ It was in the churches interest to paint a bleak picture of life in the slum. This was chief means of raising money amongst the middle class suburbs. Having built huge churches it was discovered that large amounts of money were necessary for their upkeep. Poverty and criminality were easily associated in the eyes of the middle class and thus the church was able to mix piety with anxiety in its fund raising and philanthropy.⁴¹

Certainly towards the end of the century the church's social role began to be replaced by professional institutions. This process of 'functional differentiation' was caused by the setting up of a state school system and social work institutions. "Many individuals decided that the churches were not up to the task, or what is more important, that their definition of the task had become irrelevant or nonsensical."⁴² Cox has called this the 'disintegration of the civilising mission', yet this can be seen in a positive light if one regards it as the spreading of Christian values and influence into society at large.

³⁹ Hugh McLeod Class and Religion p.72
⁴⁰ J. Cox p.101

5.6 Socialism

The Christian socialists however saw the problem differently. The church was not willing to face changes in the structure of society, only to paper over the cracks. They proposed more radical solutions and they believed the church could play a role in this change.

F.D. Maurice was the founding influence on Christian socialism. However his attempts to found some co-operatives failed because they had no market for the goods they produced. His primary impact was rather through his teaching and the influence of his thinking on churchmen. The Anglo-Catholic Stewart Headlam began to reassess social issues in his east end parish, in the light of the incarnation and as a result founded the Guild of St Matthew. This gained support amongst high churchmen and was committed to the better distribution of wealth, giving the people a voice in government and the abolition of 'false standards of worth and dignity'. The influence of these movements on the church can be seen by Bishop Westcott's support for the Christian Social Union in the 1890s and by 1897 it had 2600 members. Yet its acceptance by the hierarchy also perhaps meant the failure of the movement to bring about substantive change. The union was primarily a think tank, 'Here is a social problem lets write a paper about it', became the contemporary socialists derisive verdict. "For all their agitation they remained progressive liberals at heart, concerned for charity and improvement, rather than committed socialists...committed to radical changes in the structure of society".⁴³

⁴¹ J. Cox

p.50

⁴² J. Cox

p.182

⁴³ B. G. Worrall

The Making of the Modern Church. London SPCK. 1988. p.61

5.7 Settlements

Some clergy such as Samuel Barnett vicar of St Judes, Whitechapel did realise that part of the problem was the failure of the middle class church to understand the working class. This gained some support in Oxford with men such as Arnold Toynbee. Thus in 1885 they opened a settlement called Toynbee Hall in the east end of London. The idea was to get young men after graduation to live in the settlement for a year amongst the working class in order to promote class understanding and cross class mission. This became a model for a number of other settlements and the inspiration for the Mayflower centre which still exists today in changed form. They seem however to have lost their mission emphasis fairly quickly becoming relief and social agencies. Nonetheless their influence on those who went to live in them was profound. It was not however the answer to the church's problems in the cities.

Parallel to this movement were the Anglo-Catholic communities centred on the Tractarian churches in the slums. Pusey encouraged these as a means of spiritual development. Largely made up of celibate curates they did enable ministry on a scale otherwise impossible. St John-the-Divine, Kennington for example in 1900 had ten curates. This church had over 500 children in clubs while running soup kitchens and had a comprehensive visiting program. There were over 150 school visitors alone. Church attendance also rose from 1455 in the years 1886-88 to 1802 in the year 1902. This is outstanding because the parish and church were nearly all working class. It is all the more illuminating to make a comparison with the next door 'low' church parish of St James. This church, which was majority middle class, suffered a 76% decline in this period. Was success then dependant on churchmanship? Or was it rather a product of effort, motivated and mobilised people-power. Greater lay involvement seems to have sprung out of increased clergy commitment.

6. Success or Failure?

So how are we to judge the Church of England in the nineteenth century city? Traditionally the verdict reached was one of failure. The inability of the church to reach the working classes and despite initial success with the middle class, a subsequent failure to hold them in the face of rising secularism. More recently this conclusion has been challenged. As M. Hennell and J. Root write "Church leaders today have been too inclined to draw comfort from that verdict" i.e. that the church failed. "In reality compared with the church of today, the nineteenth century mission in working class areas, of which Champneys is a prime example, was astonishingly effective."⁴⁴ Even in 1902 the census showed 47000 men in the East End in church and 61 000 women. In London one in five attended church.

Not least the nineteenth century church made the church an inescapable and intrusive part of the urban landscape. Individual clergy made heroic efforts to identify and communicate with the local community. The High churchman Osborne Jay of Jago took up boxing in Shoreditch, Champneys gave weekday lectures in a school where he felt it was less off putting for the working man than the church and he supported the coalwhippers fight for justice over employment.

The impact of the church on popular thought should not be underestimated either. This necessitates as we have seen an assessment of the non-institutional religious beliefs of the working classes because as the Brixton Free Press said 'The nearer to church the further from God'. The Sunday School movement was on a huge scale and maintained a notion that the Church of England was 'our church'. At Christ Church, Gypsy Hill, the one poor street in the parish provided 10 % of all baptisms.

The Anglican church did have internal structural obstacles to reaching the entire urban populations and inevitably failed to attain this target. Yet its attempts to do so were not insignificant. "May the evidences of the great social and religious progress which he has brought together help to lighten the burden and animate the spirit of present day workers."

wrote Henry Walker in 1896 looking back over the previous forty years⁴⁵. May his sentiments and the evidence of efforts and success we have seen from the nineteenth century be a similar encouragement today as well as learning from their failures.

⁴⁴ M.Hennell, J.Root p.64
⁴⁵ H. Walker p.5

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