

Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature

An Introduction

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Introduction

At the end of his essay, 'Hebraism and Hellenism' (1869), Matthew Arnold strikes a troubled note of concern regarding his fellow Victorians, at sea without the stability of an unquestioned Christianity for support, and desperate for a new guiding force. 'Everywhere we see the beginnings of confusion', he writes:

and we want a clue to some sound order and authority. This we can only get by going back upon the actual instincts and forces which rule our life, seeing them as they really are, connecting them with other instincts and forces, and enlarging our whole view and rule of life.¹

Arnold suggests here that society is controlled by 'actual instincts and forces', ideologies that it must seek to penetrate and then check with 'other instincts and forces'. It is on this basis that he calls for a transformation of the 'dominant idea of religion' through the re-energizing stimuli of culture and poetry.² Religion, however, is not abandoned, either in the essay or anywhere in the book in which it appears. Indeed, *Culture and Anarchy* is a collection of essays that is near indecipherable without at least some understanding of existing religious expressions, such as Presbyterianism, Unitarianism, Anglicanism, the Oxford Movement, and Roman Catholicism. For Arnold, religion remains 'that voice of the deepest human experience', at once directing the individual inwards into a process of self-examination and moral assessment, but also outwards to that 'one great whole' that is humanity (or in the words of Paul, the 'divine body').³ The tension the individual experiences between a desire to turn from oneself out to others (doing) and for inner self analysis (thinking) is explicated by Arnold through the categories 'Hebraism' and 'Hellenism'. Hebraism pertains to those rules associated with Judaic Christianity, for Arnold 'self-conquest, self-devotion, the following not our own individual will, but the will of God, *obedience*', that is, laws of right conduct governed by an earnest duty to work, action.⁴ Hindered by bodily desire, the Hebraic dictates a strictness of conscience tuned

to receive and be aware of all manner of sin, while remaining astute to the difficulties of achieving a state of perfection before God. Hellenism, however, is entirely focused on reaching such perfection through impulsive and spontaneous thought and action, 'seeing things as they really are' by stripping them down to a core of 'beauty' and 'simplicity'.⁵ Following Socrates, the Hellenic individual not only strives to perfect him- or herself, but also feels the process working, more affectively aware of the experience of life than the Hebraic individual who is forever concerned with the impact of dutiful action in the present moment. The formula constructed in the essay, then, presents Judeo-Christian Hebraism in terms of moral consciousness and right action; and Greek Hellenism as a Platonic critical intelligence productive of an 'unimpeded play of thought'.⁶

While the limited way in which Arnold demarcates the Judeo-Christian tradition is questionable, what seems to have caused concern among Arnold's Victorian readership was the premiss that the two forces he outlines are interlocked and reciprocally influential. Most readers, Arnold assumed, regarded the Hellenic as an indulgent imitation of the Hebraic, rather than the two moving along together like divergent currents of one stream. As the 'bright promise of Hellenism faded' with the advent of Christianity, so the Hebraic return to the Bible during the Reformation was eventually overshadowed by Hellenism, which in turn was checked by the Puritans. Arnold's point in mapping this uneven chronology is that the aim of both movements, whether it be sacred or secular, works to the same end: the 'salvation' or 'liberty' of humanity and the achievement of a shared feeling of 'universal order' and harmony.⁷ It is from this that Arnold developed his later definition of religion in *Literature and Dogma* (1873), namely, as a guiding light fuelled alternately by human understanding of what is right in a given situation and the translation of that conclusion into action:

Religion, if we follow the intention of human thought and human language in the use of the word, is ethics heightened, enkindled, lit up by feeling; the passage from morality to religion is made, when to morality is applied emotion. And the true meaning of religion is thus not simply *morality*, but *morality touched by emotion*. And this new elevation and inspiration of morality is well marked by the word 'righteousness'. Conduct is the word of common life, morality is the word of philosophical disquisition, righteousness is the word of religion.⁸

Here is the Hellenic and the Hebraic united, right action and intuitive thought shepherded by sensibility and forging not just a design for life

but a mode of reading: after all, *Literature and Dogma* was written to deepen readers' understanding of, and approach to, the Bible. As David Delaura argues in *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England*, Arnold sought to harmonize reason or rationalism with intuition or faith, so producing a dialectical ideal that might cancel the ongoing swing from Hebraism to Hellenism and back again.⁹ Arnold's responsible citizen, then, anchored him- or herself in a state of moral emotion produced from a dialectic of rational and faithful feeling.

This dialectic might be similarly useful for modern, predominantly secular readers, who arguably tend to isolate religious questions from other apparently non-spiritual or material discourses. Theological debate was almost inseparable from philosophical, scientific, medical, historical, and political thought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. To insist on rigid boundaries between the sacred and secular, as many thinkers have done from the eighteenth century onwards, is to demarcate religious space in a narrow and misleading manner. One of the central arguments of this book is that there is a continual slippage between the sacred and the secular. Religious thought and practice are present throughout nineteenth-century literature and culture, sometimes in surprising and unexpected places. Our book will actively destabilize the categories of the sacred and secular without dispensing with them altogether: despite the limitations and problems of this language, it was common currency among nineteenth-century writers. These categories also highlight the question of how to define religion in the period: modern scholars, like their nineteenth-century predecessors, must ask how religion entered public and everyday life, and what means were used to contain or define its influence. Arnold's broad definition of religion affords it a large expanse of territory, but it does so at the cost of sustaining religion as anything other than human culture. While human culture and religion overlap—the latter can only be read in terms of its relation to the former—they do not occupy precisely the same space. Tensions between religion and other cultural forces are evident throughout the nineteenth century, as between different religious belief systems: to ignore this and argue for an all-purpose definition of religion risks homogenizing and caricaturing beliefs.

We have chosen to focus our discussions in this book on British Christianity, specifically English Christianity, partly to help maintain focus amid the chronological range under discussion; and partly because, despite the import of non-Christian religions in the period, notably Judaism and Islam, Britain was predominantly a Christian culture. Describing

nineteenth-century Britain in this way is not an attempt to insist on culturally uniform readings: the general understanding of what it meant to be Christian obviously changed over time and the content of any shared religious beliefs was subject to vigorous disputes. Nor, in writing freely of nineteenth-century Britain as a Christian culture, are we attempting to Christianize the past: we are simply noting that, despite a divergence of belief and practice among different denominations and traditions, the majority of people in the nineteenth century perceived British culture to be principally Christian. Acknowledging this perception is vital to study of the period, even if we rightly insist on interrogating it closely. Many nineteenth-century thinkers were similarly concerned to question what a 'Christian' Britain might look like and determine where a specifically Christian influence might be found. As the subsequent chapters of this book will show, different Christian traditions sought God in different places, from the realm of feeling to the realm of rational thought, from conservative to radical politics, and from practical action through doctrinal purity to the realm of aesthetics. For some, such as Henry Mansel, the unique contribution of Christian thought was to be found in its evocation of transcendence and/or the afterlife; while for others, like F. D. Maurice, the prominence of references to the kingdom of God in the Gospel accounts was a sign of Christianity's commitment to this world and its transformation.

Despite our own theological prejudices and preferences, many of which we have deliberately chosen to keep in this subjective introduction to nineteenth-century religion, we have tried to avoid siding with a particular denomination or expression of belief and championing it as the repository of authentic Christianity. Any suggestion that, say, the Presbyterians, the Tractarians, or anyone else, exclusively embodied true religion would be to repeat the mistake many of these organizations' most passionate supporters made when they adamantly insisted that Christian religion accorded to their definition alone. However, the problem of going to the other extreme and claiming that Christianity is to be found everywhere is that our discussion of a specific and identifiable faith risks collapsing into meaninglessness. So what do we mean when we use the term Christian? In its simplest terms, Christianity refers to a body of belief centred around the person of Jesus Christ. More broadly, to speak of the Christian faith is to make reference to a particular polyphonic narrative centred around the alleged revelation of God in the person of Christ, located in historical events and sustained by the teaching of the Church over a large expanse of space and time.

Christianity is not a closed set of rigid and obscure doctrine; it is a story, imaginatively told in the books of the Bible and interpreted over the last 2,000 years by a Church that is diverse and frequently in disagreement as to what the biblical narratives mean. The Christian narrative is evidently mediated and thus not strictly essential, but it is no less essential than other categories of thought (such as class or gender) that we commonly use as a basis for thinking about and interpreting cultural history. Like all stories, the Christian one is not predetermined, but neither is it completely open-ended. Its meaning cannot be contained and yet it is not possible to reconstitute the story in any way one wishes, primarily because each new proclamation or enactment of the narrative bears relation to the preceding part of the story, which has already been written.¹⁰

It is the sense of a time-bound, continuing, shared narrative that helps explain the thinking behind the Christian creeds. The writing of all the Christian creeds exposed and perpetuated considerable disagreement within the Church. Yet just because the summaries of Christian narrative provided by the creeds are highly political, it does not follow that the inherited shape of the Christian story is entirely dictated by forces alien to that story. Creeds generated controversy because their proponents believed in the public nature of the Christian story and cared about the way in which it was understood. As with the interpretation of literary texts, creeds cannot offer a reading of the text of the Christian story that is final or authoritative (hence their proliferation); this does not mean, however, that any and every reading of the Christian chronicle possesses equal validity. The ongoing deferral of doctrinal interpretation enacted through the creeds is a process that begins in the biblical narratives themselves, as St Paul recalls in 1 Corinthians 15: 3–6:

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

St Paul's subsequent insistence that Christ also appeared to him helps legitimate his own attempts at detailing the core of the Christian narrative in his letters. The incompleteness of any gloss, however, ensured that the Early Church would continue Paul's interpretative work, offering more detailed summaries of what they believed to be the intrinsic

'gospel' message. The best known of these early summaries is probably the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
 creator of heaven and earth.
 I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.
 He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit
 and born of the Virgin Mary.
 He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 was crucified, died, and was buried.
 He descended to the dead.
 On the third day he rose again.
 He ascended into heaven,
 and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
 He will come again to judge the living and the dead.
 I believe in the Holy Spirit,
 the holy Catholic Church,
 the communion of saints,
 the forgiveness of sins,
 the Resurrection of the body,
 and the life everlasting. Amen.

While the Apostles' Creed has been used extensively in western Christendom since its development by the Early Church, some felt that it lacked the detail necessary to resolve certain key theological debates, such as the Trinity, with its belief in a God consisting of three persons in perfect and eternal communion; and the Incarnation, with its reading of Jesus as fully God, fully man, and fully both. These subjects were addressed in both the Nicene Creed, issued by the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, and in the Athanasian Creed, originally attributed to St Athanasius but now thought to have been formulated in the fifth century.¹¹

Beyond the creeds mentioned, the most recognized statement of faith in the nineteenth century was the Thirty-nine Articles. This collection of doctrinal statements had been adopted by the Church of England in the sixteenth century and was used throughout the nineteenth century as a test of theological orthodoxy, despite containing more ambiguity than some were prepared to admit. Clergy were required to affirm (and, before 1865, subscribe to) the Articles, and the dominance of the Church of England as the arbiter of religious thought was evident in the fact that, up until 1871, those wishing to enter Oxford and Cambridge universities were also expected to subscribe to them. This factor at least reveals how central the Established Church was for nineteenth-century

Christianity.¹² While many of our chapters concentrate on dissenting groups and counter-movements, expressions of faith outside the Church of England remained highly contingent on the Established Church. In many respects, the so-called secularization of religion in the latter part of the nineteenth century is best understood as a diminution of the power and reach of the Established Church rather than the decline of Christian ideas and culture.

For the majority of people in the nineteenth century, the doctrinal intricacies of the Church were experienced through texts that were unlikely to appear in a course of formal theology: hymns, tracts, poetry, and fiction. Many nineteenth-century households, for instance, owned a copy, not just of the Bible, but also of the Book of Common Prayer, the official service book of the Church of England. The version used in the nineteenth century had been revised in 1662 to accommodate Puritan grievances, and it mediated a variety of religious material through diverse literary forms. Arnold's notion of literature as a mode of religious thought opposed to the constraints of doctrinal consideration, and his aim to 'free "literature" from the "dogma" surrounding it' have been an unfortunate catalyst of the division of literature and theology in the modern university.¹³ It is, however, a division that falls apart on closer investigation, as a number of critics have successfully shown.¹⁴ The evolving relationship between Scripture and literature, for example, spurred hermeneutical innovations which impressed upon both modern linguistic and critical theory, as John Schad's work illuminates.¹⁵ And as David Jasper suggests in *The Sacred and Secular Canon in Romanticism*, while poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge claimed an authority once held solely by the Bible, critics like Ruskin, Newman, and Carlyle began to recognize the playful, contradictory, and sometimes immoral messages inherent to Scripture.¹⁶ Christianity in particular interrogated and reconstructed itself over and over as the chapters in this book demonstrate, stirred by new approaches to Scripture, doctrine, and the structure of the Church and its community. The critical hermeneutics that emerged from religious innovators such as John Wesley, John Keble, and G. K. Chesterton served at once to revitalize Christian thinking while also unmasking the use of both Scripture and other key religious texts as they had been employed for social manipulation or control. For all the harm Christianity had affected on women, Mary Wollstonecraft noted, it had also provided the terms of their liberation. As the theologian Christopher Rowland declares in *Radical Christianity*, Christianity offers people a powerful language of hope rooted in the idea

of revelation and apocalypse, unveiling social and cultural conditions and offering an 'eschatological expectation of how society might be in the future'.¹⁷ Many of the writers we address here use religion to the same end, employing or reinscribing Christian ideas and doctrines to comment on contemporary issues. The dissenting impact on the hymn, for example, sought to emotionalize a seemingly dry genre not only to reshape it in accordance with a new, mutinous theology, but also to draw more apathetic believers back into an active, communal faith. So successful was Dissent in this objective, that the Tractarians, moved by Romantic poetics, countered Dissent's popularizing move by reformulating the hymn as a private, meditative lyric that would serve as an antidote to a rapidly changing and anxiety-inducing Victorian era.

Even those writers who seem to stand against Christianity in the long nineteenth century are locked into an engagement with it, many grounded in a particular belief-system in their youths. George Eliot and John Ruskin, for example, both oscillate in their relationships to the Evangelicalism that coloured their childhoods, while Wordsworth and Coleridge move between varying religious systems as their social and domestic politics shifted according to circumstance. The unbelieving utilitarian, John Stuart Mill, for example, recognized that Christianity enabled a particular approach to the project of amending the material world, one shaped by moral responsibility and public duty. In addition to affecting even apparently secular debates in the period, Christianity was also built into the foundations of governance, Britain's Christian identity sustained by the unique bond that had been forged between Church and State. In England specifically, the State's approval of Anglicanism meant that any significant change in doctrine, liturgy, or Church structure had to be overseen and sanctioned by parliament while the monarchy were entrusted as defenders of the faith. No wonder Louis Althusser deemed religion a state apparatus, an ideological institution whose influence seeped into all aspects of the social fabric by framing life itself from birth through to marriage and finally death.¹⁸ At the same time, Foucault's theory of reverse discourse seems applicable here, Christianity's focus on who should or should not be included in the Church drawing attention to many fraught issues concerning sexuality, class, gender, and race as our chapters show.¹⁹ Yet there is something in Christianity's creedal foundation that enables writers as diverse as Christopher Smart, William Blake, and Christina Rossetti consciously to enact and then overturn religious law in creative and often radical

terms. It is this capacity of the Christian faith for renewal, reform, and even revolution, which we hope to draw out in this book.

The diversity of perspectives among nineteenth-century writers who engaged with Christianity offers considerable challenges for those interested in the relation between religion and literature in the period. In the context of this book, we are profoundly aware how much has been left out. There are a host of important writers who receive little or no attention in the ensuing chapters, including, among others, Jane Austen, Alfred Tennyson, George MacDonald, Mark Rutherford, and Mrs Humphrey Ward. Further, it is not only important writers that are missing from the chapters that follow. Several important issues, such as the debates surrounding (non)observance of the Sabbath day and the textual legitimacy of the Revised Version of the Bible (1881–4), have been excluded from our introduction to nineteenth-century religion and literature.²⁰ No ‘introduction’ can ever live up to the comprehensiveness promised by such a title, and the problem is particularly acute with regard to nineteenth-century religion. Religion was not just another aspect of the nineteenth century: it found its way into every area of life, from family to politics, sport to work, church architecture to philanthropy. The list of topics that we might reasonably have considered in this book is endless. What we have sought to do, therefore, is to offer a way into some of the nineteenth-century’s main texts, beliefs, and religious events, rather than provide a fully comprehensive guide. Moreover, our commitment to literature as a distinct textual mode has influenced our decision to explore the religious life of the period through a range of close readings. Rather than pack the book with as many references and examples as possible, we have chosen to exemplify a number of specific religious ideas in relation to select literary texts. This enables, we think, a forum in which different ways of reading the religious aspects of texts might be developed. Given our concern not to foreclose further discussion nor assert *a specific* way in which study of nineteenth-century religion and literature should be pursued, our joint authorship might be seen as something of an advantage. Certainly our experience of writing the book together has afforded us continual reminders that there is more than one way of imagining and thinking nineteenth-century religion and literature.

Instead of structuring this book according to a strict chronology, we have built each chapter around a particular religious movement or tradition. The difficulty with this arrangement is that it implies, quite wrongly,

that certain religious movements were exclusive to certain periods—Evangelicalism and the mid-nineteenth century, for instance—when this is blatantly not the case. All structures provide a narrative, whether they like it or not, and our decision to order our focus on different religious movements according to the broad chronology of the long-nineteenth century will almost certainly encourage readings that we readily acknowledge as problematic. We do not wish, for example, to suggest that Catholicism is the epitome of religious development, nor to imply that Dissent is a movement that one grows out of over time. Our hope is that, in spite of these pitfalls, the decision to combine a thematic and chronological structure facilitates the clear introduction of complex theological ideas while simultaneously pointing to constructive and suggestive threads that cross over localized Christian traditions. We have no wish to lock any writer, or his or her work, into a particular belief-system or religious ideology, nor are we concerned to shut down what Christianity signifies, either doctrinally or culturally. Our approach to William Blake provides a case in point. A writer fiercely struggled over by critics intent on claiming him as the standard bearer of a Christian, humanist, or secular politics, his work refuses to be categorized even as it is steeped in biblical rhetoric, Pauline theology, and social radicalism. Our discussion of Blake in Chapter 1 alludes to several religious lenses that might be used to view his work: Moravian, Swedenborgian, Anabaptist, and Antinomian. We also stress, however, that read outside of these movements, Blake's work remains prophetic, apocalyptic, homiletic, and poetic, assuming an art form which consistently makes reference to, and is invested in, a body of belief represented by Jesus Christ. Jesus is an artist for Blake because he creatively imagines ways of compassionately responding to human suffering: debates which lie outside of the redemption of humanity are simply not 'Christian' for him. As Blake declares at the start of *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (1810): 'The Last Judgment when all those are Cast away who trouble Religion with Questions concerning Good & Evil or Eating of the Tree of those Knowledges or Reasonings which hinder the Vision of God.'²¹ Those who seek to muddy God's redemptive Christian vision by reducing it to moral dichotomies or fixed laws, Blake suggests, are guilty of reasoning it away or paralysing its meaning.

Endeavouring to find a way into the fluidity of Christianity in this period, however, necessarily involves some contextual work and we position many writers in relation to religious traditions they at once acknowledged and resisted. In recognition of the fact that nineteenth-century

religious belief and culture did not emerge from a vacuum in 1800, our two opening chapters make extensive reference to eighteenth-century religious debates. Chapter 1 outlines the influence of dissenting culture in the eighteenth century, asking what it might have meant to be a Dissenter or nonconformist. We establish what the Dissenters sought to move away from, outlining their rejection of ceremonial ritual and orderly worship for a public and spontaneous form of communal prayer marked by express intimacy with God. Differentiating 'old Dissent' from 'new', the chapter explores the development of the three main nonconformist bodies in the period, Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, and the Baptists, identifying those areas where they overlap and break from each other. In understanding the significance of these movements, the chapter also considers the profound impact of the Evangelical Revival, both on the development of Christianity and on the emergence of a new, private lyric later reworked by the Romantics. Discussing the hymnal innovations of Isaac Watts and John Wesley, for example, the chapter addresses the more unorthodox writing of Smart and Blake, both accused of a religious mania or 'enthusiasm', as well as the equally animated religious writing of Hannah More and Emily Brontë. We also turn to the influence of dissenting academies on writers like Anna Barbauld and Joseph Priestley, who both related to Dissent as a movement able to re-sensitize the emergent Enlightenment Christian, in order that he or she approach God with his or her heart, rather than head. Similarly, Dissent also allowed for psychological and scientific inquiry hitherto regarded as dangerous by an increasingly outdated orthodoxy forced to confront the Christian element in previously 'heretical' discoveries. Our second chapter follows on directly by turning to Unitarianism, a branch of Dissent that embraced late eighteenth-century rationalism, liberal capitalism, and Enlightenment culture within the terms of its beliefs. Preaching to middle-class believers in comfortable, elegant chapels, the Unitarians denied the divinity of Christ, the existence of 'mythical' realms like heaven and hell, and those doctrines difficult to discuss empirically, such as the Immaculate Conception and the Resurrection. The immense importance of the Trinity to Christianity, however, isolated the Unitarians who became increasingly secular in the way that they focused on education, women's rights, and the poor. As well as exploring the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, Wordsworth and Coleridge, Richard Price, Felicia Hemans, and Elizabeth Gaskell in relation to their individual interests in Unitarianism, the chapter sketches the relationship of this branch of Dissent both to the discourse of sensibility and also to its

sister religion, Quakerism. We also cast light on a central debate within Unitarianism regarding the loss of mysterious or revelatory elements of faith, an event championed by William Johnson Fox and his literary circle; but mourned by those associated with the pioneering James Martineau.

The third chapter moves into the Victorian period to examine a religious and literary group known as the Oxford Movement, or Tractarianism, headed by preacher-poets whose doctrines and aesthetics alike enchanted writers from Wordsworth to Christina Rossetti and Gerard Manley Hopkins. Defined by its investment in restoring a High Anglican Catholic law to the Church, the Tractarians publicly discussed reserve, the Eucharist, confession, the Incarnation, and analogy, while also proscribing those literary methodologies they regarded as most suitable for communicating with God. Keble's *Lectures on Poetry* (1832–41) read like a manifesto designed to educate the reader in religious poetics while teaching him or her how to respond to it correctly. Yet Keble, like his fellow poets Isaac Williams and Frederick Faber, also sought to teach Christians how to write poetry, a genre which for him was capable of relieving readers from the troubles of an anxious world and leading them back to God. We close this chapter by noting the aesthetic impact of Tractarianism on secular writers like Walter Pater, who saw in the movement a sentimentalism compatible with both paganism and hedonism. Chapter 4 examines a group that was often deeply hostile to the Oxford Movement. Evangelicalism crossed denominational boundaries (including those between the Established Church and Dissent), and was marked by its emphasis on Christian beliefs such as the Cross, conversion, and the idea that the Bible was the supreme source of revelation. The permeable and invisible boundaries of Evangelicalism made it almost impossible to classify, a factor that led to distorting caricatures among some commentators. Outsiders were not alone in struggling to identify Evangelicalism accurately: Evangelicals expended considerable energy in trying to clarify what they were about, and they often answered the question by noting what they were not (for example, Catholic or Broad Church). There was more to Evangelicalism than its hostility to others, however. Our chapter explores the complex (dis)engagement of Evangelicalism with its surrounding culture, with reference to mid-century novels such as *Jane Eyre*, *David Copperfield*, *The Moonstone*, and *Bleak House*. Although the latter two texts are notable for their use of caricatured religious figures, they nevertheless manage to capture accurately Evangelical unease about the Bible and its

interpretation in the mid-nineteenth century, a concern stirred up by the publication of *Essays and Reviews*. Part of the Evangelical response to the hermeneutic uncertainty of the period was to take refuge in rhetorical preaching, dramatic revivalism, and sensational tales of conversion. After considering the treatment of Evangelical discourse by novelists, the final part of the chapter reflects on questions of judgement, exploring the treatment of temptation and the trope of the fallen woman in *Middlemarch* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* respectively. The chapter ends by tracing a vociferous debate among Evangelicals over hell, one that exposed the narrowness of doctrine and the diversity of theological perspective that characterized the movement.

Our attempt in Chapter 4 to appreciate the complexity of Evangelicalism is followed in Chapter 5 by an attempt to rethink the meaning of secularization. The dramatic development of modernity in the second half of the nineteenth century had a visible and sizeable impact on religious belief in Britain, but we take issue with the common assumption that Christianity experienced a linear and fatal haemorrhage in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Beginning with a close reading of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, we suggest other ways in which secularization might be read. The consequences for religion of the cultural ascendancy of materialism are considered with the help of several short ghost stories. Parallels are then made between the way in which this genre sought to come to terms with the unknown, and an important debate among theologians in the mid-Victorian period over the relative merits of transcendence and immanence as the starting-point for theology. Such theological differences, between those who sought God in the world beyond, and those who sought him in the here and now, help explain the different attitudes towards the city that one finds among Christian groups of the period. Some Christians viewed the city negatively, but others found in it the means of refiguring the relation between Christianity and culture. Using George Gissing's novels, and material relating to the work of the Salvation Army, the chapter argues that one of the effects of nineteenth-century urbanization was to restore a prophetic role to the Church, one that took seriously the call found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) for the people of God to be salt and light. Dissenting Christians found it easier than their counterparts in the Established Church to accommodate the role of prophet: the latter were more likely to occupy positions of socio-political power and this investment in the establishment made it harder for them to criticize their surrounding culture. Inevitably, the decline of Christianity's privileged

position in society undermined both the status of the Church of England and also the idea of a state religion, but this is not evidence of a decline in Christianity per se. Late nineteenth-century contestations of faith expressed themselves in debates about blasphemy and freethinking, as *Jude the Obscure* reveals, and yet such challenges, seemingly detrimental to religion, in fact created a new platform for continued discussion. The chapter concludes by suggesting that, despite its author's antagonism to Christianity, Hardy's novel reminds us of the rewriting that is intrinsic to the Christian tradition.

The final chapter shows the extent to which the religious map of Britain was redrawn at the end of the century. It explores the interest among many late nineteenth-century writers in both Catholicism and the religious ideas with which it was, albeit problematically, associated, such as Mysticism. We begin with the work of J. K. Huysmans, a writer, like Oscar Wilde, whose turn to Catholicism has been treated sceptically by many critics. The chapter argues that some of this scepticism stems from a long tradition of British anti-Catholicism, manifest throughout the nineteenth century and exemplified in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Protestant readers were often blinded to the diversity, nuance, and intellectual vitality of Catholic writers, but, as recent critics such as Frederick Roden and Marion Thain have pointed out, the poetry of writers such as Michael Field (the pseudonym of Edith Cooper and Katherine Bradley) was profoundly influenced by Catholic theology. After reflecting on the important role of Catholic publishers in the period, the chapter examines the treatment of nature and creation in the work of Alice Meynell and Oscar Wilde, both of whom utilized different forms of sacramentalism to see religion in the material world. While sacramentalism offered a means of linking together religion and aesthetics, it also brought with it the possibility of slipping into increasingly heterodox interpretations, as the work of Marie Corelli exemplifies. Our last chapter closes with a discussion of Meynell's distinction between mysticism and religion as a means of structuring a comparison between two important but different writers at the turn of the century: W. B. Yeats and G. K. Chesterton.

NOTES

1. M. Arnold, 'Hebraism and Hellenism', in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), ed. J. D. Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 129–44 (144).
2. Arnold, 'Sweetness and Light', in *Culture and Anarchy*, 43–71 (54).
3. *Ibid.* 47–8.
4. Arnold, 'Hebraism and Hellenism', 132.
5. *Ibid.* 131, 134.
6. *Ibid.* 132.
7. *Ibid.* 131.
8. M. Arnold, *Literature and Dogma; an essay towards a better apprehension of the Bible* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1873), 20–1.
9. See D. J. Delaura, *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England: Newman, Arnold, Pater* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1969).
10. For a helpful account of the way in which writers seeking to rewrite the Bible are faced with a text that is not entirely malleable, see H. Fisch, *New Stories for Old: Biblical Patterns in the Novel* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1988).
11. See J. N. D. Kelly, *The Athanasian Creed* (London: A. & C. Black, 1964); and J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd edn. (Harlow: Longman, 1972).
12. In his recent study, *Contested Christianity: The Political and Social Contexts of Victorian Theology* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2004), Timothy Larsen justifiably complains of the comparative neglect of dissenting religion among historians working on the nineteenth century, a neglect that is especially apparent in Owen Chadwick's nevertheless magisterial and indispensable work, *The Victorian Church*, 2 vols. (London: A. & C. Black, 1966).
13. P. Davis, *The Oxford English Literary History*, viii. 1830–1880: *The Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 134.
14. It is worth noting that a number of contemporary academic journals explore the relationship between literature and theology—see, for example, *Literature and Theology*, *Religion and Literature*, and *Christianity and Literature*.
15. See A. C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992); and J. Schad, *Queer Fish: Christian Unreason from Darwin to Derrida* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004).
16. See D. Jasper, *The Sacred and Secular Canon in Romanticism: Preserving the Sacred Truths* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).
17. C. Rowland, *Radical Christianity: A Reading of Recovery* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988), 11.

18. See L. Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards an Investigation' (1970), in *Lenin and Philosophy* (London: New Left Books, 1971), 127–86.
19. See M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (1976), trans. R. Hurley (London: Penguin, 1990), 101.
20. For a useful account of nineteenth-century Sabbatarianism, see J. Wigley, *The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980); and for a thoughtful analysis of the impact of the Revised Version of the Bible, see J. Marsh, *Word Crimes: Blasphemy, Culture, and Literature in Nineteenth-Century England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 255–9.
21. W. Blake, [*A Vision of the Last Judgment*], *For the Year 1810*, in *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. D. V. Erdman (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 544.

5

Secularization: Dickens to Hardy

ACCORDING to the sociologist of religion Steve Bruce, writing in *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*, ‘modernization creates problems for religion’.¹ By evoking Nietzsche’s infamous pronouncement in the book’s title, Bruce signals from the outset his belief that the problems had proved too much for Christianity by the beginning of the twentieth century, and the rest of his book details the ways in which the forces of modernity brought this to pass. Despite Bruce’s confident and articulate defence of the secularization thesis, his writing is notably defensive at several points, inadvertently revealing the extent to which secularization theory has been the subject of vociferous criticism over the past twenty years. Following Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge’s rejection of the secularization paradigm in *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation*, which claimed that religion has shown a capacity to renew itself amid modernity through cults and sects, scholars from a multitude of disciplines have become increasingly sceptical about the notion that a linear and inescapable erosion of faith was at an advanced stage by the second half of the nineteenth century. Historians have questioned the assumption that late Victorians were significantly less religious than their predecessors; sociologists have expressed doubts about the quantitative data used to chart a decline; and literary and cultural critics have shown a renewed interest in the multitude of writings from the second half of the nineteenth century pertaining to the supernatural.²

Nevertheless, the disruption of the secularization paradigm has its limits; as Alex Owen reminds us in her magisterial *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern*: ‘however much the theory of secularization has been critiqued—and the notion of the secular itself differently defined—the concept of a rational secularized culture as a key signifier of modernity has remained a constant.’³ Through her examination of the occult, Owen seeks to reconfigure our understanding of the relationship between spirituality and modernity, and contest the

assumption that religion simply disappeared as modernity advanced. Such work is a helpful corrective to the implicit and explicit accounts of decline provided by famous Victorian chroniclers of religion such as George Eliot, Matthew Arnold, and Samuel Butler. While there can be little doubt that modernity revolutionized society and posed major challenges for religion, it does not follow that modernity disrupted a profoundly Christian era and necessitated its decline. Modernity disrupted a pre-modern era, and Christianity was forced to try to adapt accordingly, as it had been forced to respond to other dramatic cultural changes throughout history. Rather than applying secularization theory in an indiscriminate and dogmatic fashion to insist upon the historic inevitability of religious decline, it is more constructive, and more accurate, to think about the ways in which Christianity adapted its form and message to engage with widespread cultural change. Not only does this help uncover a strong religious presence beyond the period when it was supposed to have fallen into dramatic decline; it resists the monolithic assumption of secularization theory that religion cannot have a place in the modern world.

Like many other well-known writers of the Victorian period, Charles Dickens translated and reinterpreted the religious beliefs he inherited. The tendency among certain critics to treat his work as secular rather than religious erects a false dichotomy. To describe Dickens as a religious writer does not stop us thinking about the secular in his writing any more than it requires a typological or decontextualized 'Christian' reading of his texts; instead, it calls for an openness to the breadth of religious discourse that one might expect to find in the writings of a mid-nineteenth-century writer. Only then can one appreciate how Dickens's writing embodies the religious and the secular simultaneously. Janet Larson frames the blurred distinctions astutely in *Dickens and the Broken Scripture* when she argues that Dickens sought to invoke and revise the Bible in his work.⁴ Although the most explicit example of this rewriting is evident in a text that Dickens intended solely for private circulation—*The Life of our Lord* (1846)—one finds it throughout his writing. Recognizing the prevalence of biblical references elsewhere in Dickens's work leads to greater interpretive weight being placed on the absences in the religious narrative of *A Christmas Carol* (1843). In the story the supernatural intervention of Marley's ghost prompts an investigation into the real meaning of Christmas. The investigation concludes by replacing the explicit theological detail of the Christmas story with a new carol, one

that translates the Gospel in terms of human charity and love for one's neighbour. Dickens deliberately recalls the Gospels' accounts of Jesus as the light of the world—for example, Scrooge attempts, unsuccessfully, to smother 'the light, which streamed from under [the extinguisher-cap], in an unbroken flood'—only to empty the symbol of any direct reference to Deity.⁵ The 'Wise Men' are only mentioned in passing, the (Holy) Ghost proceeds from Marley rather than the Father, and the narrative displays no interest in exploring the 'sacred name and origin' of the Incarnation.⁶

The narrow parameters of secularization theory insist that texts like *A Christmas Carol* be read as unambiguous evidence for the decline of religion by the mid-nineteenth century. To move with such ease, however, from a local text to a grand narrative is problematic. Leaving aside the difficulties involved in any historical generalization, it is hard for twenty-first-century critics to reconstruct how readers in the 1840s, living in an age where religious discourse was integral to daily life, would have interpreted the absence of explicit theological references. Whatever the answer to this, the text requires some theological awareness for its effect: the sentimentalized moral injunction for Scrooge to cease his commercial exploitation depends upon the underlying assumption that Christmas is a special time of year, an assumption inseparable from its religious roots. Even if the text is to be read as a deliberate attempt to empty the Christmas narrative of its theological content rather than translating the Gospel in a way consistent with the confessional community of the Church, its secularity remains contingent on religion.⁷ Yet the religious remnant that the secular feeds upon is something that traditional secularization theory struggles to acknowledge or comprehend. Dickens's text may appear to remove certain theological references from the Christmas story but these references continue to haunt the narrative: from the very start the narrator's excessive insistence that Marley is 'dead' infers the possibility of an afterlife and this thought is continued in the second paragraph via multiple references to 'sole', a word with obvious double meaning.

The theological remnant in *A Christmas Carol* refuses to go away, despite the text's efforts to quantify and objectify the supernatural content of religion. But there can be no doubt that the cultural drive towards materialism evident in Dickens's text had consequences for religion. This chapter will begin by analysing the impact of materialist philosophy on religious thought in the mid- to late nineteenth century. Materialist philosophy had been increasingly influential since the Enlightenment, but the growing cultural status of science and the energetic polemics

by advocates such as T. H. Huxley did much to familiarize the public with a materialist vocabulary. Ultimately, it was materialism rather than science per se that posed problems for religion. As we shall explain, the difficulties were caused largely by the limited theological understanding of a previous generation, exemplified in the natural theology of William Paley. The failure of theology to deal adequately with the mediated nature of reality meant that it was threatened by the ambition of materialism to account for all unexplained phenomenon. One of the places where the reaches of materialism are particularly apparent is in ghost stories, a genre that Dickens's Christmas numbers did much to promote and popularize. Although the genre initially seems predicated on the disruption of received scientific knowledge by supernatural phenomena, many ghost stories proceed to frame these disruptions within a scientific and evidential context that seeks to explain the unknown and fill in the gaps traditionally accounted for by belief in God. Among other things, materialism questions the possibility of transcendence in the modern world: when George Eliot, for example, tries to return to transcendent motifs in *Daniel Deronda*, she does so in a manner that makes them subservient to materialist methodology and concerns. The turn away from transcendence has been observed by a number of commentators writing about nineteenth-century religion, and explains the next section of the chapter, on immanent theology and the rise of the social Gospel. A key figure in this respect is F. D. Maurice, whose dispute with Henry L. Mansel in the late 1850s helped ensure that 'Mansel's was the last great nineteenth-century effort at a theology of transcendence'.⁸ Instead of reading Maurice's Christian socialism as contiguous to the secular, humanistic religion advocated by Ludwig Feuerbach, the chapter argues that the social Gospel, for all its weaknesses, was grounded in a clear theological vision. After exploring the philosophy of the Christian Socialists further, the chapter moves on to examine the impact of the Gospel in the new urban environment of the nineteenth century. In many respects the city provides an ideal focus for the strands elucidated in the chapter, particularly in the way that it complicates our understanding of religious and secular space. While both atheists and believers were inclined to read the city as a symbol of secularization, accounts of urban life often feature the surprising re-emergence of the prophet, a role subsequently contested by the orthodox, heterodox, and irreligious alike. This jostling for the right to interpret and construct the essence of true religion will be the subject of the concluding part of the chapter, focusing on blasphemers, atheists, and freethinkers at the end of the nineteenth century.

MATERIALISM

Virtually all accounts of nineteenth-century religion and/or secularization draw attention to the importance of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859). While it is difficult to overstate the long-term cultural impact of Darwin's work, it is easy to exaggerate its immediate effect on Christian belief and/or simplify the divergent responses that met its publication.⁹ Many leading religious figures responded positively to the text, while others expressed relative indifference. A perusal of a selection of Evangelical periodicals from the early 1860s, for example, reveals that the main threat to the status and authority of the Bible was perceived to come from *Essays and Reviews* not *The Origin of Species*. Moreover, those Christians who did criticize Darwin's account of evolution often did so on diverse and even contradictory grounds. One should not, therefore, conclude that *The Origins of Species* initiated or exposed an essential divide between science and religion. Many of the leading scientists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were believers, and, as Aileen Fyfe explains in *Science and Salvation: Evangelical Popular Science Publishing in Victorian Britain*, groups such as the Religious Tract Society played a major role in the promotion of science during the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁰ So what contribution did Darwin's text make to secularization? A useful starting-point is Darwin's fascination with the work of William Paley. Published in 1802, Paley's *Natural Theology* is best remembered for its use of a watch as an analogy by which one might infer that the world was created by God: in the same way, argued Paley, that the complex mechanism of a watch presupposed design by a maker, the complexity of the natural world inferred a divine author behind it. But, as Stephen Prickett helpfully reminds us in *Narrative, Religion and Science: Fundamentalism versus Irony, 1700–1999*, Paley's 'analogy of a watch [was] first used by the British scientist, Robert Boyle, popularized by the French philosopher, Leibniz, and developed with minute precision by Paley's contemporary, Pierre Laplace'.¹¹ Paley's argument from design continued a tradition of natural theology that had been popular in English theology since the time of John Locke. Central to the enterprise of natural theology was an attempt to reason from the natural world to an understanding of God. Instead of breaking with this tradition, Darwin continued it: his personal writings reveal the influence of Paley on his early thought, and the attention devoted to the eye in

The Origin of Species (another example used by Paley), along with the telescope (a modern equivalent, as Prickett reminds us, of the watch), shows how Darwin inherited the methodology of natural theology. In the words of Prickett: 'By the time Darwin came to write *The Origin* he had clearly appropriated Paley to the point where the structure and contents of *Natural Theology* were a part of his own mental furniture.'¹² Where Darwin differed from Paley, however, was in the conclusion he reached about where this methodology might lead. The failure of much of the Church to deal with Immanuel Kant's critique of natural theology, along with the failure of those (typically Calvinists) who rejected natural theology to articulate an alternate theology that took adequate account of the mediated nature of reality, meant that popular Christian belief often relied upon a god-of-the-gaps theology, in which God was used to account for the mysteries of the universe. In the wake of the scientific revolution that took effect in the second half of the nineteenth century, the gaps that God was needed to fill diminished rapidly, and some were left wondering what place belief in God had in the modern world.

In terms of positioning scientific materialism as a methodological alternative to a religion predicated on either natural theology or special providence, Huxley was a far more important figure than Darwin. The common description of Huxley as 'Darwin's bulldog' belies the contribution of Huxley to the professionalization of science and its growing cultural status.¹³ In one of his most important essays, 'On the Physical Basis of Life' (1868), Huxley set out his philosophical objection to seeking an explanation for strange and unusual phenomena in religion and the supernatural. He argued that the only reasonable explanation was one that was materially based: 'the materialistic terminology is in every way to be preferred. For it connects thought with the other phenomena of the universe, and suggests inquiry into the nature of those physical conditions, or concomitants of thought, which are more or less accessible to us ... whereas, the alternative, or spiritualistic, terminology is utterly barren, and leads to nothing but obscurity and confusion of ideas.'¹⁴ In an attempt to avoid the charge that his reliance upon physical explanations constituted an a priori materialist philosophy, Huxley invoked the scepticism of Hume and claimed that his position was predicated on a provisional hypothesis rather than necessary truth. However, his unwillingness to countenance anything other than a physical basis for life suggests that Huxley's position was a materialist one, if not in theory then at least in practice.

The position Huxley articulates in 'On the Physical Basis of Life' is anticipated by the narrator in 'The Haunted and the Haunters' (1859), a ghost story by Edward Bulwer Lytton. In a statement that accords with Bulwer Lytton's own position on the supernatural, the narrator declares:

I had witnessed many very extraordinary phenomena in various parts of the world—phenomena that would be either totally disbelieved if I stated them, or ascribed to supernatural agencies. Now, my theory is that the Supernatural is the Impossible, and that what is called supernatural is only a something in the laws of nature of which we have been hitherto ignorant. Therefore, if a ghost rise before me, I have not the right to say, 'So, then, the supernatural is possible', but rather, 'So, then, the apparition of a ghost is contrary to received opinion, within the laws of nature—i.e. not supernatural'.¹⁵

This attempt to respond to the supernatural within the parameters of materialism shows the extent to which supernatural accounts of religion were forced on to the back foot. Whereas the popularity of ghost stories in the nineteenth century has often been read as a disruption to the explanatory potential of science, a closer examination of the way in which they frame this disruption suggests otherwise. In Sheridan Le Fanu's 'The Green Tea', first published in *All the Year Round* in 1869 and then reprinted as the opening story of *In a Glass Darkly* (1872), the interruption of the supernatural is described as follows: 'It [the phantom monkey] amounted at last to a dreadful interruption. You will ask, how could a silent immaterial phantom effect that? It was thus, whenever I meditated praying; it was always before me, and nearer and nearer'.¹⁶ The language used here is revealing: not only is the supernatural transformed from that which is truly other to an objectified 'it' capable of being quantified ('amounted'); the inexplicable phenomena is read in terms of basic scientific categories of time ('whenever') and space ('before me, and nearer and nearer').

One of the most striking fictional attempts to relocate the supernatural within a scientific framework can be found in George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil* (1859). Latimer, the narrator of this tale, is troubled by inexplicable powers of foresight and an ability to read the minds of others, but his unusual powers prove incapable of penetrating the mystery of Bertha, a woman he describes as 'my oasis of mystery in the dreary desert of knowledge'.¹⁷ After marrying her, Latimer claims to see Bertha for who she really is, and yet the mystery continues when she appears to enter into a conspiracy with her new maid, Mrs Archer. The nature of this conspiracy is revealed in the final moments of the tale when Latimer's friend, the scientist Charles Meunier, helps him extract from

the lifeless body of Mrs Archer hidden information regarding an attempt to poison Latimer. Just before Mrs Archer's death, Meunier proposes 'an experiment on this woman' that involves transfusing his blood into her after her heart has stopped beating.¹⁸ Meunier and Latimer's desire to dominate the mystery of femininity leads them to transform Mrs Archer's death chamber into a scientific laboratory, and the text clearly marks this refurbished space as male. Just before the experiment is carried out, Bertha is led out of the room, and her attempt to send two female attendants to keep watch in her place is subverted by Latimer:

When they entered, Meunier had already opened the artery in the long thin neck that lay rigid on the pillow, and I dismissed them, ordering them to remain at a distance till we rang: the doctor, I said, had an operation to perform—he was not sure about the death. For the next twenty minutes I forgot everything but Meunier and the experiment in which he was so absorbed ... It was my task at first to keep up the artificial respiration in the body after the transfusion had been effected, but presently Meunier relieved me, and I could see the wondrous slow return of life; the breast began to heave, the inspirations became stronger, the eyelids quivered, and the soul seemed to have returned beneath them.¹⁹

In many respects, this final, climactic scene is more disturbing than the secret it uncovers: not only is female space violated, but the attempt to master the unknown and position the mystery of the female 'soul' beneath the two men results in the subject of human death becoming subservient to an absorbing experimental operation.

Consistent with the materialist framing provided by tales of the supernatural is the repeated emphasis on mediation. Throughout the mid-nineteenth century ghost stories freely use haunted houses and other material objects to mediate the supernatural. Despite the fact that some narrators, such as the one in Sheridan Le Fanu's 'An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in an Old House in Aungier Street' (1853), draw attention to the limitations of '[p]en, ink, and paper' as 'vehicles for the marvellous', they continue to rely on text to communicate their tales.²⁰ The centrality of mediation to manifestations of the supernatural extends also to the implied critical reader referred to at the start of many stories, whose anticipated scepticism helps to shape the form of the ghost story and without whom there would be no ghost story. By maintaining an ambivalence regarding the supernatural origin of the events they narrate, many ghost stories highlight this mediatory role of the reader. In this respect they accord with the central insight offered by Sludge in Browning's dramatic monologue 'Mr Sludge, the Medium' (1864). Sludge insists that those attending séances collude in the production

of a plausibility structure for the supernatural: attendees expect the supernatural and see what they want to see. At one point Sludge even suggests that this desire to see the supernatural is equivalent to those who interpret historical circumstances providentially:

When you and good men gape at Providence,
Go into history and bid us mark
Not merely power-plots prevented, crowns
Kept on kings' heads by miracle enough,
But private mercies—oh, you've told me, sir,
Of such interpositions! ...

(927–32)

Although he draws attention to the mediated nature of all belief in the supernatural, whether in the form of séances or religion, Sludge never dismisses the possibility that those beings refer to some aspect of reality. His cynicism and self-interest may prevent us from accepting his arguments uncritically but the focus of the poem is on reminding us how supernatural belief is mediated, not on dispelling the supernatural altogether.

Mediation is also central to the complex treatment of materialism in George Eliot's last novel, *Daniel Deronda* (1876). On one level this novel appears to leave behind the interest in science found in earlier novels such as *Middlemarch*, but, on another level, Daniel's preference for the realm of the prophetic over 'that dead anatomy of culture which turns the universe into a mere ceaseless answer to queries' continues to ground itself in Eliot's sophisticated understanding of materialism.²¹ Through Mordecai, Eliot reminds her readers that the prophetic vocation is to be understood as thoroughly material and organic, not as a synonym for the immaterial and unmediated. In response to his question—'what is it to feel the light of the divine reason growing stronger within and without?'—Mordecai declares: 'It is to see more and more of the hidden bonds that bind and consecrate change as a dependant growth—yea, consecrate it with kinship: the past becomes my parent, and the future stretches towards me the appealing arms of children.'²² Given Mordecai's concern to root his understanding of the prophetic within a materialist framework, it may be significant that Eliot chooses Jewish prophecy over its Christian equivalent as the means by which Daniel might avoid 'the dead anatomy of culture'. According to Geoffrey Hartman, the apostle Paul's use of a spirit/letter dichotomy to help reread the Jewish law and explain the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and Christianity

was restated by Early Church fathers such as Augustine to the effect that 'Christian freedom is freedom from the literalism of Jewish ritual law and, generally, from a literal interpretation of what has come to be known as the Old (superseded) Testament. Freedom and spirituality are contrasted with Jewish slavery, that is, with the carnal or literal interpretation of Old Testament commandments, rituals, and narratives.'²³ In the rest of his essay 'The Letter as Revenant' Hartman considers the limitations of this binary and exposes Christianity's misreading of the Jewish tradition. While Hartman may be accused of underestimating the important contribution of materialist thought to the history of Christian theology, there can be little doubt that a privileging of the spiritual over the material was popular in many of the Evangelical circles that Eliot came to reject. Hartman's claim that the materiality ascribed to Jewish thought contains within it a greater interpretative freedom than Christians have often alleged, is borne out by the use to which Eliot puts it in *Daniel Deronda*. At several points in the novel, the hope and vitality offered by the prophetic depends on the sustenance of the material world that it mediates, as the following observation by Mordecai illustrates:

I said, let my body dwell in poverty, and my hands be as the hands of the toiler; but let my soul be as a temple of remembrance where the treasures of knowledge enter and the inner sanctuary is hope. I knew what I chose. They said, 'He feeds himself on visions', and I denied not; for visions are the creators and feeders of the world. I see, I measure the world as it is, which the vision will create anew. You are not listening to one who raves aloof from the lives of his fellows.²⁴

IMMANENT THEOLOGY AND THE RISE OF THE SOCIAL GOSPEL

In *The Age of Atonement* Boyd Hilton observes a theological transition in the nineteenth century between the age of Atonement and the age of Incarnation: the former, dominant in the first half of the century, is said to have been characterized by a pessimistic view of the world's fallen nature and emphasized the need for redemption to avoid the judgement of hell; the latter, which is alleged to have come to the fore in the second half of the century, brought with it a more optimistic focus on this world rather than the afterlife, believing it possible to bring about social transformation and see the kingdom of God manifested on earth. Hilton readily admits that this narrative involves broad brushstrokes (which are

made to seem broader by their brief summary here) but he is far from alone in pointing to a fundamental theological shift around the middle of the nineteenth century. He writes: 'By 1870 it was commonplace for Anglicans to assert that a theological transformation had recently taken place, whereby a worldly Christian compassion, inspired by the life of Jesus, had alleviated such stark Evangelical doctrines as those of eternal and vicarious punishment.'²⁵ Tracing the Victorians' self-awareness of a shift in theological attitudes, Hilton tells us that '[t]he *coup de grâce* came with the publication of *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation* by a posse of High Churchmen in 1889'.²⁶

Hilton's focus on Evangelicalism encourages him to use the categories of Atonement and Incarnation; other commentators, however, have utilized other vocabulary to convey their sense of a theological shift. Philip Davis, for example, employs terms used by the theologian Aubrey Moore, who 'suggested that throughout the ages the emphasis in the religious temper had oscillated between two doctrines of God—God as transcendent, the Creator separate from the world; and God as immanent within His creation. The second half of the nineteenth century was, he said, the age of the Incarnation rather than of the Fall, and, especially with the rise of evolutionary theory, an age of immanence rather than of transcendence.'²⁷ While this schema runs the risk of erecting a false divide between immanence and transcendence, two categories that have been intrinsically linked throughout the history of Christian theology, it relates to some of the broader philosophical trends of the period (e.g. the growth of materialism and the influence of Hegel), as well as helping to contextualize the important theological dispute between F. D. Maurice and Henry L. Mansel in the late 1850s.

In 1858 Mansel published the Bampton theology lectures he had given at Oxford in a book entitled *The Limits of Religious Thought*. His opening lecture began by considering the conflict between dogmatism and rationalism, before locating the dichotomy with reference to the traditional theological distinction between revelation and reason. Though recognizing the importance of reason for philosophical thought, Mansel's Kantian understanding of the synthetic and limited nature of knowledge encouraged him to reject all attempts at a theology based on human rationality and, instead, to privilege revelation as the only means of positive knowledge about God. To illustrate his belief that God was beyond all finite, rational thought, Mansel distinguished the apostle Paul's recourse in Corinthians to the 'limits of human

knowledge'²⁸ from Hegel's claim that '[t]he logical conception is the absolute divine conception'.²⁹ Mansel's distrust of Hegelian pantheism and his preference for a uniquely Christian transcendent theology was reflected in the second lecture of *The Limits of Religious Thought*: 'so far is human reason from being able to construct a scientific Theology, independent of and superior to Revelation, that it cannot even read the alphabet out of which that Theology must be framed.'³⁰

The importance that Mansel attached to 'separating, as far as it can be effected, the language of prayer and praise from the definitions and distinctions of philosophy' was rejected by Maurice, who detailed his objections in *What is Revelation?* (1859).³¹ Given the veracity and extensiveness of Maurice's critique, it was unsurprising that Mansel should respond aggressively in *An Examination of the Rev. F. D. Maurice's Strictures on the Bampton Lectures of 1858* (1859). Maurice then penned a further, shorter response entitled *Sequel to the Inquiry, What is Revelation?* (1860). The core of Maurice's critique was Mansel's elevation of mystery and emphasis on transcendence. Not only did Maurice think that elevating mystery ran counter to the central message of the New Testament—the revelation of God made known in the person of Jesus—he feared that Mansel's theological method encouraged a static dogma, dislocated from and lacking engagement with contemporary thought. Maurice did not share the view of those in the Church who claimed that Mansel's argument undermined the role of a rational Christian apologetic; instead, Maurice argued that Mansel was constructing an alternative apologetic, one that arrogantly sought to place itself beyond criticism by insisting that God's understanding is radically different from our own. The consequence—private dogma over public truth—was a position Maurice believed to be antithetical to Christian faith. Claude Welch succinctly captures Maurice's desire to eschew any sort of theological abstraction when he explains that, for Maurice, 'the root of the matter is "facts" and "reality", not doctrines'.³² Nowhere was the difference between the two theologians more apparent than in the different approaches they took to the Bible, a text that both saw as being of prime importance. Maurice criticized Mansel's abstract defence of the divine authority of the Bible, for insisting that one must 'receive the Bible as a whole or not at all; so leading many to place it on their shelves as a book which it was safe to accept without any careful study of its contents; so driving others who felt doubts about particular passages, to cast it aside altogether'.³³ Rather than seeking to

place the Bible beyond criticism or argue endlessly about its theoretical authority, Maurice encouraged people to read scriptural narratives and reflect upon them in the light of their own experience:

I fancied the Scripture language, instead of shrinking into a little corner of its own, and declining all comparison with any other, was capable of being tested by the metaphysical inquiries and beliefs of all peoples and ages. I could not doubt that it was, at the same time, the popular language, that it would go straight home to the very heart and spirit of our people—of the poor, to whom the Gospel was first preached—because it addressed itself, not to that which is superficial and accidental, but to that which is deepest in all, and common to all.³⁴

While critics have rightly noted the difficulty of labelling Maurice's theological position, there can be little doubt that its immanent orientation was intimately linked to his desire for social justice. Indeed, the best known feature of Maurice's legacy is the role he played in the emergence of the Christian Socialists and what became known as the social Gospel. Proponents of the social Gospel construed the good news of the Christian message primarily in terms of its response to contemporary social problems and inequality. At the start of *The Victorian Christian Socialists* (1987) Edward Norman demarcates the unique contribution of early Christian Socialists such as Maurice, Charles Kingsley, Thomas Hughes, and J. M. Ludlow, explaining that their beliefs differed from the political revolutionaries associated with either Chartism or late nineteenth-century socialism. Christian Socialists were not, as Norman goes on to admit, alone in their desire to alleviate poverty and address social problems (as the history of Evangelicalism makes clear); nevertheless, they 'dared to contemplate, if not a transformed political structure, at any rate the vision of a humanity emancipated from the thrall of custom and the existing ties of social deference'.³⁵ Many of the formal bodies of Christian socialism did not emerge until the latter part of the nineteenth century (e.g. the Guild of St Matthew, founded in 1877, the Christian Social Union, founded in 1889, and the Christian Socialist League of 1894) but the theological foundation of the orientation towards the immediate, social implications of the Gospel were laid down by Maurice and popularized through the fiction of Kingsley, '*the disseminator of the ideals of the Christian Socialists [italics added]*'.³⁶

The vision of Christianity proposed by Christian Socialists has been the subject of extensive critique over the years, and for good reason. Donald E. Hall tells us that: 'even though it was short-lived and some of its members are better remembered for their subsequent manifestations

as muscular Christians, we are right to ask if Christian socialism itself was an abject failure.³⁷ According to its detractors, Christian socialism was inadequate in terms of both its theology and its radical credentials. Before examining the former, it is worth interrogating briefly the charge that figures such as Maurice and Kingsley were ideologically conservative. It is easy to see why the best known Christian Socialists have been accused of masking a commitment to the status quo in their call for social change: their promotion of the virtues encouraged in the Sermon of the Mount (e.g. obedience, sacrifice, and forgiveness) appear to encourage acquiescence to the inequality of the day, while Maurice's suggestion 'that Domestic Morality is not only an integral portion of Social Morality, but should be the starting point of all discussions respecting it'³⁸ seems to fall short of the radical revolutionary rhetoric we find in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. Through a careful examination of the language used in works such as *Politics for the People*, a Christian Socialist weekly that appeared briefly in 1848, Hall detects an inherent conservatism in the metaphors used by Maurice and his circle: 'The Christian Socialists and muscular Christians manipulated language as a pedagogical tool, one that they used to repudiate demands that they found uncomfortable and irreconcilable with their own class-bound view of the proper constitution of the body of the nation.'³⁹ While Hall's reading of texts by Christian Socialists is astute and persuasive, the implication that all references to ordered bodies have to be read as conservative needs to be questioned. Hall's conclusion—that 'when words are made flesh, they often form the bodies of soldiers'—may identify accurately the conservative usages to be found in much of the material written by the Christian Socialists, but it also anticipates, inadvertently, the militant radicalism of the next generation of adherents to the social Gospel; figures such as William and Catherine Booth, the founders of the Salvation Army, whose authoritarian impulses somehow found expression in a revolutionary movement that might better be described as paramilitary.⁴⁰ Many of the next generation of writers, including Eliza Lynn Linton, author of *Joshua Davidson, Christian and Communist* (1872), were far more radical than Kingsley's tailor and poet, Alton Locke, in their vision of a prophetic biblical call for social transformation.⁴¹

Although more radical Christian expressions of socialism suggested that the conservatism of Anglicans like Kingsley was not inherent to Christianity, they did little to answer the other major concern: namely, whether the focus on the material world was intrinsically secular.

Not everyone was certain that the social Gospel was still the Gospel. Conservative Evangelical publications frequently denounced 'broad-church perversions' of the Christian message, and even Evangelical factions with a clear commitment to responding to the material needs of the poor, such as the Salvation Army, displayed considerable unease regarding the theological relation between preaching the Gospel and addressing social need.⁴² For some, the risk exemplified in *A Christmas Carol's* translation of religion was one that threatened to culminate in the atheistic religion of humanity articulated by Ludwig Feuerbach in *The Essence of Christianity* (1841). Feuerbach argued that God was a projection of all that humanity aspired to be: 'The personality of God is thus the means by which man converts the quality of his own nature into the qualities of another being,—of a being external to himself. The personality of God is nothing else than the projected personality of man.'⁴³ However, instead of viewing atheism as antithetical to religion, Feuerbach thought it provided the means of appreciating the essence of religion: humanity.

Feuerbach's ideas about the religion of humanity were explored by the first English translator of *The Essence of Christianity*, George Eliot, in her novel *Silas Marner* (1861). Like the biblical character of Job, Silas experiences a series of tragic events, and these cause him to question his faith. However, in a text that frequently reflects upon the meaning of words that remain after their initial meaning has been lost—at one point Dolly declares 'I can never rightly know the meaning o' what I hear at church, only a bit here and there, but I know it's good words'—the allusion to Job becomes the means by which Eliot replaces the content of Christian thought with Feuerbach's ideas.⁴⁴ Whereas the Book of Job answers Job's questions about his suffering through the intervention of God, who speaks out of the whirlwind and inspires worship, Silas discovers a child called Eppie; his subsequent conversion to a new sense of hope and purpose is said to have reawakened a 'strong feeling ready to vibrate with sympathy'.⁴⁵ The key term here, as for some of the earlier nonconformists, is sympathy: in place of God, conspicuously absent from the religious language that permeates the latter stages of the novel, human companionship answers Silas's despair. Having observed that Silas 'was quite unable, by means of anything he heard or saw, to identify the Raveloe religion with his old faith', the narrator goes on to explain: 'He had no distinct idea about the baptism [of Eppie] and the church-going, except that Dolly had said it was for the good of the child; and in this way, as the weeks grew to months, the child created

fresh and fresh links between his life and the lives from which he had hitherto shrunk continually into narrower isolation.⁴⁶

Owen Chadwick famously warned in *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* against convenient narratives of intellectual history that ignored the reality of social history. His warning is a useful reminder that, despite the influence of Eliot in mediating and exploring the religion of humanity, relatively few Victorians reached the same atheistic conclusion as Feuerbach. Callum Brown is right to insist that Christian discourse continued to dominate British culture well into the twentieth century, and the historian Hugh McLeod has carefully documented the persistence of religion among the working classes throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.⁴⁷ At the same time, the question underlying Feuerbach's work—how one should understand the essence of Christianity—was the concern of many Victorians. The extensive cultural transformations of the period forced people to reinterpret exactly what it was they believed and reconsider how those beliefs related to the world in which they found themselves. Such matters were, of course, extremely complex: even the reductive answer offered by Feuerbach acknowledges the broader difficulty of quantifying and objectifying the essence of faith. The chapters of *The Essence of Christianity* all reach slightly different conclusions about the question posed by the title, alerting readers to the polyphonic nature of the Christian narrative. Perhaps this explains Feuerbach's confusion in determining his own relation to the Christian tradition. In the space of one sentence, found in the preface to the second edition (published in the same year as *A Christmas Carol* and translated by Eliot in 1854), Feuerbach seems incapable of deciding whether his work is 'a close translation', a 'historical-philosophical analysis', or 'a solution of the enigma of the Christian religion'.⁴⁸

Christianity's historic resistance to being distilled into a set formula reminds us of the need to remain alert to the mutability and plurality of belief as we (re)construct our own narratives of nineteenth-century secularization and religion. Rarely, if ever, does it help to characterize people's beliefs as either religious or secular. Much of the time, one encounters lines of thought that encompass both, and this is the case with the social Gospel. Religion does not have to rely on transcendence to secure its identity: interpreting belief in terms of material concern may run the risk of eroding a realist view of God but this is not the only possible outcome.⁴⁹ As the doctrine of the Incarnation makes clear, Christianity is committed to the possibility of thinking about the supernatural within the context of the material world and, for all

its faults, Maurice's advocacy of the social Gospel engages with and explores this possibility. Contrary to the picture painted by some of his critics, Maurice was seeking to work within the Christian tradition. Bernard Reardon reminds us: 'For it was primarily as a theologian that Maurice saw himself, and such he claimed to be. His social reformism, for which he has usually been remembered, is really an aspect of his theology and an expression of one of its fundamental principles.'⁵⁰ In the admiring (and perhaps insufficiently critical) words of Edward Norman, it was the theological orientation of their engagement with the material world that enabled the Christian Socialists to be 'prophets of their times ... [who] discerned ultimate meanings and moral lessons in the conditions of their day'.⁵¹

URBAN PROPHETS

Given the dramatic growth of cities in the nineteenth century, it is to be expected that commentators with an interest in religion should have sought to discern the spiritual impact of the new urban environment. The conclusion of many proponents of secularization is that urban growth was a catalyst for religious decline; less well known, however, is the extent to which the data used to support this comes from Christian sources.⁵² Especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, Christians were at the forefront of those positing the city as a secular void with which the Church was failing to engage. Infamous in this regard was William Booth, whose *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890) borrowed the leading metaphor used by Henry Morton Stanley in his account of David Livingstone's mission to Africa, and applied it to London. Although Booth's narrow Evangelical beliefs did not incline him to view the religious dimension of the city positively, his dramatic invective against the city was not so much a cynical rhetorical ploy as the product of a mode of thought—the man who instructed his officers that their first aim was to attract attention was practically incapable of speaking in a measured, impartial tone.⁵³ Admitting the analogical dimension of his writing in the opening chapter of *In Darkest England* did not stop Booth from constantly implying that he was describing the city as it really was. The false claim for unmediated reportage is evident early on in the book when Booth likens the scenes he has seen to Dante's picture of hell, only then to declare that '[t]he man who walks with open eyes and with bleeding heart through the shambles of our civilisation needs no such

fantastic images of the poet to teach him horror'.⁵⁴ But Booth's account of the city was far from being that of the neutral observer; as Joseph McLaughlin notes, Booth's belief that 'all the misery of modern existence could be traced to the migration of agricultural laborers from the countryside into the city' strongly influenced the picture he created.⁵⁵

Booth's view of the city was one that he inherited from other nineteenth-century Evangelical urban commentators. Earlier in the century the more circumspect Thomas Chalmers had reached the negative conclusion that:

there is no denying of the fact, that were churches to be built at this moment, up to the full accommodation of all our city families, it would have almost no perceptible influence on the habit into which they have degenerated. It is not at the sound of a bell, that they will consent to relinquish the sordid or profane gratifications wherewith they fill up that day of rest, which they have turned into a day of rioting and lawless indulgence.⁵⁶

The tendency among Evangelicals (and other Christian commentators) to presume the worst about the city has a long history and resists easy explanation. London's dramatic growth, around 1800, leading to the first city of modern times with over a million inhabitants, explains why commentators were keen to comment on urbanization, but it does not explain why the city was frequently seen as antipathetic to religious belief. Some critics have argued that the roots of this antipathy are to be found in the Bible's hostility to the city, yet, as Graham Ward explains, the biblical writers are more equivocal:

In the Bible, then, a complex weave of myth, fact, fear, hope and history circulates about cities. The utopian dreams of city-builders wishing to construct paradise within their boundaries, is crossed by a dark sense of judgement by God on 'all the lofty towers and all the sheer walls' (Isaiah 2: 12), and both these strains are filtered through stories of a heavenly archetypal city, the eschatological city of divine manufacture and perfection.⁵⁷

Despite the complexity of the biblical narratives, the symbolic value of the city—epitomizing the height of humanity's achievement—combined with a largely Protestant tendency to emphasize humanity's sinfulness, go some way to accounting for the overly negative accounts found among many religious urban commentators in the nineteenth century. Moreover, as critics have pointed out, it was in the interests of religious groups seeking money and support for the missionary work they were undertaking in the city to exaggerate its heathen characteristics. In the case of *In Darkest England*, the book was a polemic designed to raise awareness

of, and money for, the relief of poverty in England. This is not to deny the reality of much of what Booth described; rather, it reminds us of the need to read contemporary urban accounts from the nineteenth century, whether Christian, atheistic, or otherwise, with their mediated quality in view.

The effect of the sensational language used by writers like Booth compelled observers to reach dramatic conclusions which lacked nuance and minimized the complexities involved. All too often there was a distorted focus on whether or not the missionary work in the city was successful: in the face of alleged urban crises, it was inevitable that Victorians should seek anxiously for measurable signs of improvement. This framing of religious analysis in terms of success/failure, or growth/decline, was further encouraged by the nineteenth-century drive towards measurement and quantification, a tendency illustrated by the emergence of the social sciences and one to which Michel Foucault has alerted a whole generation of Victorian scholars.⁵⁸ Callum Brown points out that nineteenth-century Christians were caught up in the cultural obsession with quantification: 'In the 1840s and 1850s, churches were infected as much as other branches of the nation's life by the mania for statistics.'⁵⁹ The 1851 census and the furore that followed its findings highlight this mania: endless discussions about the methodological validity of the 1851 census, both at the time and ever since, are of limited value, and not simply because there is no earlier religious census with which to compare the 1851 data.⁶⁰ Interpreting religion primarily in terms of church attendance is limited and reductive, despite the convenience of the measurement.

While the obsession with quantification may not always have been helpful for Victorian analysts seeking to describe their culture, it played an important role in constructing nineteenth-century urban life. George Simmel's observation in 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903) is perceptive: 'Punctuality, calculability, exactness are forced upon life by the complexity and extension of metropolitan existence ... These traits ... colour the contents of life and favour the exclusion of those irrational, instinctive, sovereign traits and impulses which aim at determining the mode of life from within, instead of receiving the general and precisely schematized form of life from without.'⁶¹ The city's attempts to regulate its own activity are frustrated by the complexity and multiplicity of the social relations within it; the resulting disjuncture, between the fragmentation one experiences and the systemic impulse that motivates the

idea of the city, explains why so many Victorians move endlessly between a bewildering encounter with the disorder of London to descriptions of the city that utilize epic and apocalyptic vocabulary. In a recent article entitled “‘And I saw the Holy City’: London Prophecies in Charles Dickens and George Eliot”, Elena Petrova considers how the London novels of Dickens and Eliot locate themselves in a Christian mythological tradition dating back to St Augustine’s *City of God* and John’s Book of Revelation.⁶² Whereas Dickens and Eliot sought, in different ways, to use this tradition for the purposes of prophesying a renewal of the city, the next generation of writers were often less hopeful. Adrian Poole tells us in *Gissing in Context* that “[t]he major shift in consciousness between Dickens and later Victorian writers is in the recession of this confidence in the “blest morning””.⁶³

George Gissing’s *The Nether World* (1889) imagines a London that is far closer to Babylon than it is to the New Jerusalem. The novel’s lack of clergymen, its depiction of working-class characters who reject formal religion, and its insistence on conditions of poverty that are not relieved by the forces of providence, have led Stephen Gill to conclude, in his introduction to the Oxford World’s Classics edition of the novel, that: ‘Christianity ... is notably absent’.⁶⁴ Gill continues: ‘During the latter third of the century a number of heroic clergymen attempted to revivify the Church as a force within working-class communities in London, and alongside them, inspired by Christian ideals, worked the volunteers for the university settlements. This limited but positive action is not even glanced at in *The Nether World*.’⁶⁵ Yet the novel is not as secular as Gill suggests. The work of Christian organizations among London’s working-class communities is glanced at, albeit via a passing reference to a ‘promenade of the Salvation Army’,⁶⁶ whose work, as the narrator goes on to point out, ‘half-puzzled, half-amused her [Jane Snowdon]; she spoke of it altogether without intolerance, as did her grandfather, but never dreamt that it was a phenomenon which could gravely concern her’.⁶⁷ While the reference to ‘gravely concern’ denotes a religion that is dying, the use of the word ‘phenomenon’ reminds readers that it is the temporal forms and expressions of religion that are in urgent need of renewal. The religious failure to address people’s daily concerns is evident elsewhere in the novel: the bells of a church playing ‘There is a happy land, far, far away’ are still heard, but, as the narrator explicitly states, ‘that hymn makes too great a demand upon the imagination to soothe amid instant miseries’.⁶⁸ At the start of the novel there is an insistence

that religious forms in current usage no longer have anything to offer: Jane's anguish is said to have 'uttered itself, not in a mere sound of terror, but in a broken word or two of a prayer she knew by heart'.⁶⁹

Although *The Nether World* offers glimpses of secularization, perhaps most apparent in Michael Snowdon selectively excising material from the Gospels when he teaches his granddaughter, there is more to the novel's religious orientation. For a start, the dark vision of London's nether region is contingent upon a Christian framework. At several points, beginning with the arrival of the mysterious benefactor Michael Snowdon, the narrative repeatedly holds out the hope of eschatological renewal, only to return to misery and hardship. The reliance upon a specifically Christian vision of a place where all hope is abandoned, is clear from the allusion to hell in the title. While the allusion is evident throughout the novel, particularly in the vocabulary used, it remains implicit until the intervention of the Christian prophet, Mad Jack. Towards the end of the novel, Mad Jack relates to the crowd a vision he claims to have received from an angelic being: 'This life you are now leading is that of the damned; this place to which you are confined is Hell! There is no escape for you.'⁷⁰ Mad Jack retains the dramatic language of sin and damnation common to apocalyptic accounts of hell and judgement, but the wording of the vision and its location at the climax of the novel make it clear that it is the whole of society that is being addressed. Commenting on this strange scene, in which Mad Jack shifts from praise to judgement and does not appear himself, Kirsten Hertel writes:

Even though Mad Jack only appears sporadically and has no influence whatsoever on the plot, his psalm singing and his soliloquizing speeches are reminiscent of the choir in ancient Greek tragedies, which functions mainly as the author's mouthpiece. Similarly, Mad Jack can be seen as Gissing's mouthpiece ... Mad Jack's dream at the end of the novel can be understood as giving voice to the author's own personal disappointment in, and dissatisfaction with, the political and social conditions not only in London, the capital, but also in a highly developed world on the threshold of the twentieth century.⁷¹

One might go even further and argue that Mad Jack articulates a reality that the narrator is incapable of admitting directly. In other words, Mad Jack is more than a vestige of Christianity, ridiculed by those around him and given limited space in the narrative; he is the prophetic voice the narrator aspires to during the rest of the novel. Up until this point, the narrator cannot stop himself from making condescending remarks about the nature of working-class characters and holding out an illusory hope for their future happiness.

Mad Jack is not the only urban prophet of the late nineteenth century. He bears a notable resemblance to William and Catherine Booth, despite viewing alcohol rather differently, and the novel's passing reference to the Salvation Army may be intended to suggest this. Like Mad Jack, the Booths were eccentric Christian prophets who frequently employed apocalyptic language to describe their experience of urban life. For W. T. Stead, who enlisted the Booths' help in producing his 1885 exposé of child prostitution, *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon*, and then ghost-wrote William Booth's *In Darkest England*, the willingness to speak publicly and boldly was a major part of the Booths' appeal. Commenting on Catherine in his biography of her, published in 1900, Stead praised the 'whole-hearted zeal, a thoroughgoing earnestness, a flaming passion of indignation, that cheered one like the sound of trumpet ... Her utterances blazed with the sacred wrath of the Hebrew prophets.'⁷² Stead's admiration of the public prophet, attributable in part to his own aspirations to be a voice to the nation, is mirrored in the role of his namesake, W. F. Stead, in recovering the work of another Christian prophet, Christopher Smart, who, as we discussed in Chapter 1, was committed to a lunatic asylum for praying in public places.⁷³ W. F. Stead's description of Smart's eccentricities—'such as saying his prayers in public; he insisted upon his friends praying with him, and he would fall upon his knees in the street to pour forth his prayers, in spite of the jeers of small boys and the curious glances of the passers-by'—is uncannily close to Gissing's description of Mad Jack's reception in *The Nether World*.⁷⁴

Interpreting the return of the Christian prophet in the late nineteenth century is too complex a task for the interpretative framework offered by secularization theory. In *Queer Fish: Christian Unreason from Darwin to Derrida*, John Schad assesses the place of 'the Christian [who] emerges from the crowd as truly other, truly marginal' positively, recognizing that where mainstream culture and Christianity become too entwined, the latter loses its radical dimension and risks becoming a synonym for conservative bourgeois respectability.⁷⁵ If Schad is right, and the appearance of the marginalized Christian marks a potential return to a subversive religion that is truly prophetic, then one might read the figures of Mad Jack and the Booths in a manner that does not simply focus on their marginal status. By definition, prophets stand outside the mainstream; to interpret them solely as signifiers of religious demise fails to allow for their ability to renew religion. The role of the prophet is to break with the cultural conformity of their religious contemporaries

in order to proclaim a radical message. By undertaking this role in such a public manner, the Christian prophets of the late nineteenth century break with privatized notions of faith in order to ‘proclaim it [the Gospel] as part of the continuing conversation which shapes public doctrine’.⁷⁶

RELIGION, MODERNITY, AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

It is no coincidence that the reappearance of the Christian prophet occurs in the city. To appreciate the reasons for this, one needs to start by recognizing the substantial impact of modernity on public life. Jürgen Habermas’s claim that modernity collapses society’s public sphere is evident in the city.⁷⁷ Although critics have been quick to point out both the limitations of the public sphere of which Habermas mourns the loss, and the dynamic emergence of a nexus of social groups in its place, they have not always given sufficient weight to the negative impact of the city on public life. For example, Judith Walkowitz’s claim in *City of Dreadful Delight* that the “‘dreadfully delightful city” [London in the 1880s] became a contested terrain, where new commercial spaces, new journalistic practices, and a range of public spectacles and reform activities inspired a different set of social actors to assert their own claims to self-creation in the public domain’,⁷⁸ though true, runs the risk of failing to acknowledge how the fragmented nature of urban life simultaneously militates against the cohesive public space required by a new set of ‘social actors’. The loss of the public sphere is evident in chapter XXI of *The Nether World* when the narrator describes people gathering at Clerkenwell Green to exchange ideas: ‘From the doctrine of the Trinity to the question of cabbage *versus* beef; from Neo-Malthusianism to the grievance of compulsory vaccination; not a subject which modernism has thrown out to the multitude but here received its sufficient mauling.’⁷⁹ Ostensibly, this passage appears to foreshadow the line of thought that Walter Benjamin later developed in his famous essay ‘The Work of Art in the Mechanical Age of Reproduction’, and promotes the modernity of the city as a democratizing power. But read more closely, and interpreted in the context of a novel that insists on the stultifying environmental forces at work in the city, the passage not only reveals how complex ideas are ‘mauled’; it hints at the collapse of public dialogue. In the

preceding sentence we read: 'Innumerable were the little groups which had broken away from the larger ones to hold semi-private debate.'⁸⁰ The fragmentation of ideas and the fracturing of the public sphere become so great under the force of modernity that individual voices are in danger of becoming inaudible, as their particularity struggles to locate itself within a meaningful set of universal relations. It is significant that whereas the Trinity provides a model within Christian theology for relations between the particular and the universal, the scene Gissing describes relegates the Trinitarian ideal to another disconnected particular of semi-private interest.⁸¹ At the end of the paragraph where these debates are described, the narrator emphasizes the death of the public sphere and the emptiness of modernity's public gesture with the comment: 'Above the crowd floated wreaths of rank tobacco smoke.'⁸²

It would be a mistake to blame the privatization of religion on the growth of the modern city. What the new urban environment did in the late nineteenth century was to make explicit a trajectory that had been gathering pace since the advent of the Reformation and Modernity, two movements which, as Max Weber argued in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, have much in common.⁸³ While there can be no doubt that a number of religious commentators held the city responsible for the decline of Christian Britain, the growth of the metropolis did not always *encourage* secularization. By exaggerating the privatizing trend of modernity, the city revealed a process of isolation that had been underway for some time. The stories of anonymous, forgotten people, and remote, detached *flâneurs* found in many urban narratives compelled some religious figures to recover the public dimension of their faith. Life in the city exposed the dangers of a religion that was too private and too isolated, thereby providing a context in which prophetic figures, such as Mad Jack, might once again find a place. Though the message Mad Jack proclaims is, for much of the novel, culturally disengaged and in need of translation — he is only heard when he speaks of hell; the rest of what he says 'sounded as gibberish' — it symbolizes a renewal of Christianity in the public sphere and, in turn, marks a recovery of Christianity's distinctive voice.⁸⁴

On one level, Mad Jack's public proclamation of faith is a continuation of earlier religious activity. The turn of the nineteenth century saw the birth of several missionary organizations, such as the Baptist Missionary Society (1792), the London Missionary Society (1795), and the Church Missionary Society (1799). Moreover, as the century unfolded, Evangelical activism expressed itself through a multitude of

philanthropic and religious organizations, many of which were located in, or focused on, the city. Indeed, long before Christianity showed signs of leaking away in the sense outlined by secularization theory, one finds it employing a deliberate strategy of leaking its message. Throughout the century Christianity sought ways of infiltrating mainstream culture with its reading of the Gospel, using a variety of means such as educational reform, charitable endeavours, and direct political action. Booth's *In Darkest England*, with its attempt to articulate a vision of social transformation, offers one example of such leakage, while the efforts of nonconformist Christians to prosecute Edward John Eyre, the Governor of Jamaica who imposed martial law in 1865 and brutally suppressed the indigenous people, provides another.⁸⁵ Instead of seeing instances of socio-political involvement as signs of secularization, one might argue that they demonstrate the opposite and reveal the extent to which Christian ideals and beliefs infused nineteenth-century culture. But if the leaking of Christianity was, at least in part, a deliberate and successful strategy, it also ran the risk of capitulating to other cultural pressures that, ultimately, threatened to silence the Christian voice. By the time one gets to Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), religion has been translated into a veneer of bourgeois respectability that can no longer offer a meaningful distinction between the morality of Jekyll and his alter ego.

What figures like Mad Jack offer is an alternative to those who, having exchanged the Christian prophetic vocation for too high a degree of cultural assimilation, have lost sight of the radical message they originally intended to proclaim. While Mad Jack's 'wild, discordant voice' may upset theorists of secularization who cannot account for his continuing presence and insight, it also upsets versions of the Christian faith that, in their drive for cultural respectability, are happy to ignore the harsh realities of the nether world.⁸⁶ A striking example of a respectable Christianity that is no longer respectable or effectual can be found in Gissing's novel when Pennyloaf walks past Mad Jack and enters the house of her alcoholic mother. The scene that confronts Pennyloaf is described by the narrator as follows:

There were five coloured cards, such as are signed by one who takes a pledge of total abstinence; each presented the signature, 'Maria Candy', and it was noticeable that at each progressive date the handwriting had become more unsteady. Yes, five times had Maria Candy promised, with the help of God, to abstain ... But it appeared that the help of God availed little against the views of one Mrs. Green, who kept the beer-shop ...⁸⁷

As the narrator goes on to conclude: ‘The struggle was too unequal between Mrs. Candy with her appeal to Providence, and Mrs. Green with the forces of civilisation at her back.’⁸⁸ By translating its message into an ineffectual but culturally respectable form—in this case the middle-class temperance movement—Christianity forfeits both its power and its distinctiveness. Ironically, it is the fragmentation of the city that helped expose this trend, thereby providing the impetus for Christianity to find a means of renewing itself and thus recover a prophetic public voice. In the context of Gissing’s bleak narrative, Mad Jack is no more able to effect change or offer solutions than his respectable Christian counterparts, but whereas the former manages to retain a distinctive public voice that is capable, on occasion, of diagnosing society’s ills, the latter, having allowed itself to be seduced by the pervading culture, has nothing to say and can no longer be heard.

FREETHINKING, BLASPHEMY, AND THE REWRITING OF RELIGION

State religion declined towards the end of the nineteenth century as its privileged position was rendered increasingly untenable by modernity. The decline of Christianity’s privileged cultural status did not result in a decline of religion per se—as we have seen, space was created for the re-emergence of the prophet—but it was significant nevertheless. A corollary of this transformation was the growing power of Dissent, which, like the secular voices of figures such as Eliot and Huxley, benefited from the diminishing influence of the Anglican Church.⁸⁹ One of the many motifs used by writers to convey the change taking place was church bells. In *The Nether World* the narrator tellingly observes: ‘The sound of church bells—most depressing of all sounds that mingle in the voice of London—intimated that it was nearly eleven o’clock, but neither of our friends had in view the attendance of public worship.’⁹⁰ It is an account that captures the ongoing presence of state religion while also introducing the possibility that the voice of established religion is not as compelling or influential as it once was. While question marks hang over the notion that the working class at the centre of Gissing’s narrative previously experienced a golden age of religious engagement to the established Church, it is clear that those seeking to revive religion in the late nineteenth century were forced to do so amid changed cultural

conditions. In place of the melodious sound of Anglican church bells one finds a cacophony of voices (including that of the prophet) seeking to attract people's attention. The resulting noise is conveyed throughout *In The Year of Jubilee* (1894): at one point the narrator describes how '[a]t Camberwell Green they mingled with a confused rush of hilarious crowds, amid a clattering of cabs and omnibuses, a jingling of tram-car bells'.⁹¹ Modernity's noise necessitates media awareness and expertise on the part of those who wish to be heard, hence the fact that the physical noise of the city in *In The Year of Jubilee* is accompanied by an excess of advertisements competing for people's attention and drowning out individuals' ability (or willingness) to listen to the 'still small voice' (1 Kings 19: 11–13) of religious instruction: Ada Peachey's refusal to listen to her husband's admonitions leads him to conclude that 'living when she did ... only a John Knox could have impressed her with this menace [hell]—to be forgotten when the echoes of his voice had failed'.⁹² Aside from anything else, this insistence on the power of contemporary advertising, an important theme in a number of Gissing's novels, challenges the privileged position of the prophet who speaks with the unmediated and uncontested voice of divine authority.

Understanding the new material conditions in which the figure of the prophet re-emerged during the late nineteenth century is crucial. Among other things, fictional descriptions of the reception of prophetic voices insist that the space entered by prophets was not explicitly sacred. And with so many different voices contesting the role of prophet, it was difficult to decide who the true Christian prophets were. Prophets are heterodox by definition, and the declining influence of the Anglican Church in the second half of the nineteenth century removed any vestige of ecclesial authority to which Protestants might appeal when deciding to which prophets they should listen. Like Dissent, the role of the prophet exploited the blurred and permeable boundaries between orthodoxy and heresy, boundaries that were being stretched by many freethinkers in the second half of the nineteenth century to include heterodox, even atheistic messages. Perhaps the most famous of these irreligious prophets is the madman that embraces the prophetic mantle in Frederick Nietzsche's *The Gay Science* (1882; 1887) and announces God's death. Before Nietzsche, however, one finds a number of secularists rereading religious language in order to articulate opposition to what they see as the blindness and oppression caused by Christian religion. Some of the best known freethinkers of the period—including Charles Bradlaugh, G. W. Foote, and Annie Besant—regularly styled themselves

as prophets and made use of associated rhetoric in an effort to proclaim an (ir)religious message they thought others needed to hear. In this context Joss Marsh's observation of the parallel between Foote's attempts to promote secularism and the work of the Booths is both fascinating and suggestive: 'Street speaking and meetings in open spaces were techniques Salvationists shared with Secularists, and which in an age of increasing advertisement and commercial display clearly provoked ... anxiety over public space and publicity.'⁹³

Another freethinker who can be said to have situated himself within the prophetic tradition was the poet James Thomson. If William Blake was right and poets were the new prophets, then Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night* (1874) can be read as a secular, poetic antecedent to *In Darkest England*. In her groundbreaking reading of Thomson's work Isobel Armstrong argues that:

Its Nietzschean project is to deconstruct the symbolic language of the western Christian tradition, not destroying these symbols ... but demonstrating that their language and imagery can *only* be used to adumbrate a quite different and systematically opposed account of experience. And so Thomson's black epistemological epic rigorously redefines terminology—'dream', 'real' and 'hope' are examples in the first poem. When the inhabitant of the city becomes aware of subliminal sound in the vast, oppressive silence, it is concealed, muffled and indistinct (III), as of 'hidden life asleep', the throbs of passion and 'Far murmurs, speech of pity and derision', the language of death-in-life, not the true language of death. Bradlaugh argued not simply that theistic terminology is inaccurate and misleading but that Christian antinomies constitute a nonsense language which has no basis in experience. (And so [Henry] Mansel's idealist propositions turn up in a strange context.) That is why the sounds of the city are incoherent. The atheist project was to change the meaning of the sign and to obliterate its customary distinctions.⁹⁴

The sound of church bells is transformed by the double movement of Thomson's poem, which 'uses the language of hell and of Christian despair to enter fully into that condition, and at the same time withdraws from it to expose it as mystified mythology which collapses under an antagonistic alternative materialist mythology'.⁹⁵ Rather than undertaking the impossible task of replacing the language of Christianity with a new atheistic language, Thomson seeks '[t]o show the bitter old and wrinkled truth | Stripped naked of all vesture that beguiles'.⁹⁶ *The City of Dreadful Night* exemplifies the work of Jacques Derrida's *bricoleur*, who recognizes that rewriting is the only option available to revolutionary writers.⁹⁷ By thinking about the secular in terms of its attempts to

rewrite religion (and vice versa), we end up with a more constructive paradigm for thinking about the position of religion in modernity than that offered by secularization theory. The flux of modernity and its distrust of authority encourage the process of rewriting, creating opportunities and difficulties for freethinker and believer alike. As the next chapter will note, the fluidity and contingency built into the idea of rewriting explains how a prominent freethinker like Annie Besant could move between Christianity, atheism, and theosophy, frustrating every attempt to theorize any teleology that insists on modernity's linear turn from (or to) religion.

Despite the continuity implicit in the idea of rewriting, it would be wrong to ignore the violent ruptures that often resulted from attempts to rewrite religion and/or the secular in the late nineteenth century. In *Word Crimes* Joss Marsh focuses on the alarm caused by alleged instances of blasphemy. Working on the assumption that '[t]here is little to learn from a naked and reductive formula, shorn of historical context' that describes blasphemy as '*the speaking of the unspeakable*', Marsh shows how charges of blasphemy frequently slide into charges of obscenity and/or attempts through language to undermine the authority of the establishment.⁹⁸ Chapter 6 of Marsh's work turns its attention to Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895), a novel that some early reviewers thought of as blasphemous. Marsh observes that 'the hysterical chorus was not without motivation. Blasphemy is both subject and willed effect of Hardy's swan song to fiction.'⁹⁹ She goes on: 'Structured around a sequence of blasphemous scenes, surprisingly innocent of commentary, *Jude* works across the historical registers to invoke blasphemy both in traditional religious terms and as the class crime of language and offense against literary values that the debacle of 1883 [Foote's trial for blasphemy] had made of it.'¹⁰⁰ Sacred texts and ideas are parodied throughout Hardy's novel: Sue's purchases of two pagan statuettes early on sets out the novel's rejection of the hopeful conclusion to tragedy found in the Book of Job; Jude idealizes a town pointedly called Christminster only to discover, in a scene echoing the nativity story, that no rooms are available for him and his family in their hour of need; and Sue's grief at the death of her children is met by the sound of the organist at the College chapel playing 'the anthem from the seventy-third Psalm; "Truly God is loving unto Israel"'.¹⁰¹ Highlighting another example of Hardy's attempts to parody religion, Marsh reflects upon Jude's death at the end of the novel and the accompanying

liturgical-style references to the Book of Job. She writes: 'There is an element of blasphemous *imitatio* in Jude's intoning of biblical text, while the disconnected "responses" of the holiday crowd outside, watching the boat races, turn the scene into an anti-church service.'¹⁰²

There is, however, more than one way of interpreting *Jude the Obscure's* blasphemous subtext. Hardy's novel may rewrite religion but the important scene in which Sue and Jude are sacked from their job of 'relettering' the Ten Commandments in the church may not be as dismissive of the biblical text as Marsh implies when she explains how 'this kind of manhandling of sacred text was a job for "militant" Secularists'.¹⁰³ Instead, *Jude the Obscure* suggests that the 'relettering' Sue and Jude are asked to undertake is a process intrinsic to the Bible. When Jude returns to the church the day after being given the contract to restore the Ten Commandments, the narrator describes how: 'He found that what the contractor's clerk had said was true. The tables of the Jewish law towered sternly over the utensils of Christian grace.'¹⁰⁴ By implicitly acknowledging the way in which the New Testament writers rewrite the Mosaic Law, Hardy indicates that the novel's religious revisions are a continuation of the rewriting of the Christian tradition. Significantly, when Sue and Jude flee to Melchester, Sue asks Jude: 'will you let me make you a *new* New Testament, like the one I made for myself at Christminster?'¹⁰⁵ While Sue's desire to remould the Bible may have appeared blasphemous to some readers, she goes on to describe her work as expressive of a freedom to interpret the Sacred Text without constraint. Sue views her action of 'cutting up all the Epistles and Gospels into separate *brochures*, and re-arranging them in chronological order as written', as preferable to the way in which ecclesial authorities have framed and canonized Sacred Texts, exclaiming passionately: 'I won't say any more, except that people have no right to falsify the Bible!'¹⁰⁶ The possibility that Sue's rewriting of the Bible continues an interpretative tradition common to Protestantism in general and Dissent in particular modifies the meaning we ascribe to the so-called blasphemy of Hardy's novel. Although blasphemy remains a helpful term for describing the ruptures created by this text, it does not have to be read exclusively within the Secularist paradigm detailed by Marsh. Nor does the novel's blasphemous content provide evidence for the abstract account of religious decline presented by some advocates of secularization theory. Christianity was certainly rewritten in the nineteenth century, largely in response to major cultural changes

brought about by modernity, but whether, as in the case of Dickens's reworking of the Christmas story, the result is best described as religious or secular is a difficult, perhaps impossible question to answer.

NOTES

1. S. Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 2.
2. See, for example, historical work such as H. McLeod and W. Ustorff (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), and H. McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850–1914* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996); sociological work such as C. G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800–2000* (London: Routledge, 2001); literary and cultural theory such as Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), and J. Derrida and G. Vattimo (eds.), *Religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), and nineteenth-century cultural history such as R. Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), and A. Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
3. Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 10.
4. J. L. Larson, *Dickens and the Broken Scripture* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1985).
5. C. Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* (1843), in *Christmas Books*, ed. E. Farjeon (Oxford: Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 1994), 37.
6. *Ibid.* 21, 10.
7. The parasitic relation of the secular to religion is theorized at length in G. Vattimo, *End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, trans. J. Snyder (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988) and G. Vattimo, *Belief*, trans. L. D'Isanto and D. Webb (Oxford: Polity, 1999).
8. P. Davis, *The Oxford English Literary History*, viii. *1830–1880: The Victorians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 141.
9. For further information on the reception of Darwin see J. Moore, *The Post-Darwinian Controversies: A Study of the Protestant Struggles to Come to Terms with Darwin in Great Britain and America, 1870–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), and R. L. Numbers and J. Stenhouse (eds.), *Disseminating Darwinism: The Role of Place, Race, Religion and Gender* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
10. See A. Fyfe, *Science and Salvation: Evangelical Popular Science Publishing in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). For

further discussions of the encounter between religion and science in the nineteenth century, see D. Knight, *Science and Spirituality: The Volatile Connection* (London: Routledge, 2003), and D. Knight and M. D. Eddy (eds.), *Science and Beliefs: From Natural Philosophy to Natural Science, 1700–1900* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

11. S. Prickett, *Narrative, Religion and Science: Fundamentalism versus Irony, 1700–1999* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 76.
12. *Ibid.* 79.
13. See A. Desmond, *Huxley: From Devil's Disciple to Evolution's High Priest* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1997).
14. T. H. Huxley, 'On The Physical Basis of Life' (1868), in *Collected Essays*, i (London: Macmillan and Co., 1894), 130–65 (164).
15. E. Bulwer Lytton, 'The Haunted and the Haunters', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 86 (Aug. 1859), 224–45 (230–1).
16. S. Le Fanu, *In A Glass Darkly* (1872), ed. R. Tracy (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1993), 30.
17. G. Eliot, *The Lifted Veil and Brother Jacob*, ed. S. Shuttleworth (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 2001), 18.
18. *Ibid.* 38.
19. *Ibid.* 41.
20. S. Le Fanu, 'An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in an Old House in Aungier Street', *Dublin University Magazine*, 42 (Dec. 1853), 721–31 (721).
21. G. Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (1876), ed. G. Handley (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1988), 308.
22. *Ibid.* 451.
23. G. Hartman, *Scars of the Spirit: The Struggle Against Inauthenticity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 109.
24. Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 426.
25. B. Hilton, *The Age of Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 5.
26. *Ibid.* Also, see C. Gore (ed.), *Lux Mundi: A Series of Studies in the Religion of the Incarnation* (London: John Murray, 1889).
27. Davis, *The Oxford English Literary History*, viii. 139.
28. H. Mansel, *The Limits of Religious Thought* (Oxford: John Murray, 1858), 29–30.
29. *Ibid.* 30.
30. *Ibid.* 61.
31. *Ibid.* 65. One of the most interesting readings of the debate between Maurice and Mansel can be found in ch. 5 of S. Prickett, *Romanticism and Religion: The Tradition of Coleridge and Wordsworth in the Victorian Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). Prickett rejects the standard account of the disagreement between Maurice and Mansel and argues that the 'apparent similarity with Mansel was to drive Maurice

- to attack him with a fervour unusual even for himself in controversy. Mansel's position is far too close for comfort: it is like a heavy-footed parody of the very subtle structure that Maurice was struggling to expound in *The Kingdom of Christ*' (137–8).
32. C. Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, i. 1799–1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 255.
 33. F. D. Maurice, *Sequel to the Inquiry, What is Revelation?* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1860), 279.
 34. *Ibid.* 15. Maurice's desire to read Scripture in the light of human experience helps explain the parallels between his Christian socialism and the Liberation Theology of the late twentieth century.
 35. E. Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 2.
 36. *Ibid.* 36.
 37. D. E. Hall, 'On the Making and Unmaking of Monsters: Christian Socialism, Muscular Christianity, and the Metaphorization of Class Conflict', in D. E. Hall (ed.), *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 63.
 38. F. D. Maurice, *Social Morality* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1869), 13.
 39. Hall, 'On the Making and Unmaking of Monsters', 64.
 40. *Ibid.*
 41. Although Alton Locke claims that 'those old Jewish heroes did fill my whole heart and soul', the 'lessons' he claims to have learnt from 'Moses leading his people out of Egypt; Gideon, Barak, and Samson, slaying their oppressors ... [and] Jehu, executing God's vengeance on the kings' seem to have lost their radical edge in translation. See C. Kingsley, *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet: An Autobiography* (1850), 2 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1851), i. 13.
 42. The Salvation Army's anxiety regarding the relationship between social action and preaching the Gospel manifested itself in a number of internal debates in the 1880s: having previously argued that the Gospel alone could transform the lives of the destitute, William Booth found himself increasingly drawn to the potential for social schemes to alleviate poverty, culminating in the publication of *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890). For a helpful discussion of the factors that gave rise to this change of emphasis, see K. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1963).
 43. L. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, 2nd edn. (1843), trans. M. Evans (London: John Chapman, 1854), 224.
 44. G. Eliot, *Silas Marner* (1861), ed. D. Carroll (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1996), 143.
 45. *Ibid.* 125.

46. Ibid.
47. See Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, and McLeod, *Religion and Society in England, 1850–1914*.
48. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. v.
49. Slavoj Žižek argues otherwise when he claims that Christianity revises the Old Testament's transcendent understanding of God to reveal the deity as 'one of us'. Žižek concludes his argument by inviting Christianity to complete the undoing of its essentialist roots: 'That is the ultimate heroic gesture that awaits Christianity: in order to save its treasure, it has to sacrifice itself ...' See S. Žižek, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 171.
50. B. M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age: A Survey from Coleridge to Gore* (London: Longman, 1980), 166.
51. Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists*, 182.
52. For further discussion on the relation between urbanization and secularization, see H. McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), and H. McLeod (ed.), *European Religion in the Age of the Great Cities 1830–1930* (London: Routledge, 1995).
53. Booth explained that 'the first necessity of the movement' is 'TO ATTRACT ATTENTION'. See W. Booth, *All About the Salvation Army* (London: Salvation Army Book Stores, 1883), 11.
54. W. Booth, *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (London: International Headquarters of The Salvation Army, 1890), 13. Commenting on this analogical link between hell and poverty in London, Alison Milbank writes: 'Booth's answer to this diurnal inferno was literal removal by emigration to the colonies, as well as a purged Britain. The protestant conception of the afterlife as an extension of this earthly existence ... has become actual. Booth's Salvation Army, as it became, was in itself a literalisation but in some ways also a secularisation of the Christian doctrine of the Church Militant. The relations between its rescue work and its message of redemption remains problematic to this day.' See A. Milbank, *Dante and the Victorians* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 201.
55. J. McLaughlin, *Writing the Urban Jungle: Reading Empire in London from Doyle to Eliot* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 98.
56. T. Chalmers, *The Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*, ii (Glasgow: Chalmers & Collins, 1823), 2–3.
57. G. Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000), 33.
58. See M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1979).

59. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 25.
60. For a thoughtful statistical analysis of the data gathered by the 1851 religious census, see K. D. M. Snell and P. S. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
61. G. Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903), in *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings*, ed. D. Frisby and M. Featherstone (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 177–8.
62. E. Petrova, "'And I saw the Holy City": London Prophecies in Charles Dickens and George Eliot,' *Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London*, 2: 2 (2004).
63. A. Poole, *Gissing in Context* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1975), 38.
64. S. Gill, 'Introduction', to G. Gissing, *The Nether World* (1889), ed. S. Gill (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1992), p. xv.
65. *Ibid.*
66. Gissing, *The Nether World*, 152.
67. *Ibid.* 152.
68. *Ibid.* 120.
69. *Ibid.* 7.
70. *Ibid.* 345.
71. K. Hertel, 'In Darkest London: George Gissing's *The Nether World* as Urban Novel', *The Gissing Journal*, 40: 1 (2004), 12–34 (32).
72. W. T. Stead, *Mrs Booth of the Salvation Army* (London: James Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1900), 200–1.
73. W. F. Stead published a version of Smart's *Jubilate Agno* under the title *Rejoice in the Lamb: A Song from Bedlam*.
74. W. F. Stead, 'Introduction', to C. Smart, *Rejoice in the Lamb: A Song from Bedlam* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939), 27.
75. J. Schad, *Queer Fish: Christian Unreason from Darwin to Derrida* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004), 107.
76. L. Newbigin, *Truth to Tell: The Gospel as Public Truth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 64.
77. See J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. T. Burger and F. Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), and J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. W. Rehg (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996). For a useful collection of essays on literature and the public sphere, see S. VanZanten Gallagher and M. Walhout (eds.), *Literature and the Renewal of the Public Sphere* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000). Also, see C. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).

78. J. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago Press, 1992), 18.
79. Gissing, *The Nether World*, 181.
80. Ibid.
81. See C. Gunton, *The One, The Three & The Many* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
82. Gissing, *The Nether World*, 181.
83. While Weber's idea that the Protestant work ethic was the primary motivation for the development of capitalism has rightly been critiqued as too simplistic, the observation of a vital and significant link between the emergence of Protestantism and the rise of western capitalism remains instructive.
84. Gissing, *The Nether World*, 337.
85. While a number of religious figures from the Anglican Church sought to defend Governor Eyre, missionary leaders from nonconformist organizations were instrumental in fighting for him to be prosecuted. See T. Larsen, *Contested Christianity: The Political and Social Contexts of Victorian Theology* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2004), ch. 12.
86. Gissing, *The Nether World*, 75.
87. Ibid. 75–6.
88. Ibid. 76.
89. See Chapter 1 of this book for a more detailed discussion of Dissent.
90. Gissing, *The Nether World*, 319.
91. G. Gissing, *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894), ed. J. Halperin (London: The Hogarth Press, 1987), 60.
92. Ibid. 244.
93. J. Marsh, *Word Crimes: Blasphemy, Culture, and Literature in Nineteenth-Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 163.
94. I. Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993), 469.
95. Ibid. 463.
96. J. Thomson, *The City of Dreadful Night and Other Poems* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1888), 2.
97. Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,' in *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass (London: Routledge, 2003).
98. Marsh, *Word Crimes*, 7.
99. Ibid. 269.
100. Ibid. 270.
101. T. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure* (1894–5), ed. C. H. Sisson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1985), 411.

102. Marsh, *Word Crimes*, 276.
103. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 369; Marsh, *Word Crimes*, 277.
104. Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, 369.
105. Ibid. 206.
106. Ibid. 206, 207.