

JAMES C. UNGUREANU**Science, Religion and the ‘New Reformation’ of the Nineteenth Century**

The concept of a ‘New Reformation’ has a long history among Protestant intellectuals. Protestant theologians, philosophers, historians and men of science have all called for another reformation of religion, a purification of Protestant Christianity rather than its abandonment. But in the hands of nineteenth-century scientific naturalists, dissident intellectuals and even liberal Anglicans, the trope of ‘New Reformation’ underwent a dramatic transformation. From a Protestant self-critique, the trope became a polemic against orthodox Christian belief. While the new ‘reformers’ continued to use the language of Protestants, they ultimately rejected the doctrinal beliefs of traditional Christianity.

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With the quincentennial celebrations of the Protestant Reformation behind us, it is now perhaps appropriate to once again reassess what historians and scholars since the 1930s have been saying about Protestantism and the rise of modern science. As is well known, in 1938 American sociologist Robert K. Merton identified a strong connection between a Puritan ethos and scientific achievement.¹ Subsequent studies in the 1970s by Paul H. Kocher, Richard S. Westfall, John Dillenberger, Reijer Hooykaas, Charles Webster and Margaret C. Jacob continued to defend the claim that certain elements of Protestant theology in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries inspired a new empirical and experimental approach to understanding nature.² More recent studies by historian of science Peter Harrison argue that the hermeneutical preconditions of modern science are found in the Protestant, literal understanding of Scripture and the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, encouraging seventeenth- and eighteenth-century natural philosophers to see themselves as the new priests of nature tasked with interpreting the creation.³ The general consensus

1 See the classic study by Merton, R.K. *Science, Technology, and Society in Seventeenth Century England*, New York: Harper ([1938] 1970).

2 See e.g. Kocher, P.H. *Science and Religion in Elizabethan England*, San Marino, CA: Huntington Library (1953); Westfall, R.S. *Science and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England*, Hamden, CT: Archon Books: (1970 [1958]); Dillenberger, J. *Protestant Thought and Natural Science: A Historical Interpretation*, London: Collins (1961); Hooykaas, R. *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science*, Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press (1972); Webster, C. *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform, 1626-1660*, London: Duckworth (1975); Jacob, M.C. *The Newtonians and the English Revolution: 1689-1720*, Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press (1976).

3 Harrison, P. ‘Protestantism and the making of modern science’, in Howard, T.A. & Noll, M.A.

among historians of science and religion is that early modern scientists (or "natural philosophers" as they were called) insisted that knowledge of nature involved the study of the world designed by an omniscient, omnipotent and benevolent Creator, and that the practice of science was to be conceived within a religious framework shaped by natural theology. Science and religion developed a 'firm alliance' and 'common intellectual context' in Protestant England.⁴

But there remains some tension within the scholarship. While scholars agree that Protestantism and science were closely aligned, they also maintain that this alliance collapsed during the Victorian period. The collapse is often credited to a small but influential group of thinkers described as the 'scientific naturalists', who redefined science by promoting expertise, professionalisation and the secularisation of nature by excluding all references to the supernatural. Many historians of science also believe that the scientific naturalists employed the 'conflict thesis', the notion that science and religion are fundamentally and irrevocably at odds.⁵

Among the most well-known voices of this Victorian coterie were biologist Thomas H. Huxley (1825-95), physicist John Tyndall (1820-93), and evolutionary philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). Huxley, for instance, once declared that 'extinguished theologians lie about the cradle of every science as the strangled snakes beside that of Hercules'. He believed that history demonstrated that 'whenever science and orthodoxy have been fairly opposed, the latter has been forced to retire from the lists, bleeding and crushed if not annihilated; scotched, if not slain'. Indeed, the historical record proved, he asserted, that as natural knowledge increased, belief in the supernatural decreased. According to Huxley, no one should 'imagine he is, or can be, both a true son of the Church and a loyal soldier of science'.⁶

Scientific naturalism was no doubt the 'English version of the cult of science in vogue throughout Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century'.⁷ While many in the last decades of the nineteenth century rejected the teachings of historical Christianity, most did not abandon belief in God. Rather, what occurred was a loosening or redefinition of Christianity with the concurrent

(eds.) *Protestantism after 500 Years*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: (2016), pp. 98-120.

4 On this 'alliance' and 'context' see e.g. Cannon, S.F. *Science in Culture: The Early Victorian Period*, New York: Science History Publications (1978); and Young, R.M. *Darwin's Metaphor: Nature's Place in Victorian Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1985).

5 Russell, C.A. 'The conflict metaphors and its social origins,' *Science & Christian Belief* (1989) 1, 3-26.

6 Huxley, T.H. *Darwiniana*, London: Macmillan and Co. (1894), pp. 52, 58, 82 149; Huxley, T.H. *Essays Upon Some Controverted Questions*, New York: D. Appleton & Co. (1893), p. 5; and Huxley, T.H. *Method and Results*, London: Macmillan & Co. (1894), p. 159.

7 Lightman, B. 'Victorian sciences and religions: discordant harmonies,' *Osiris* (2001) 2nd Series, vol. 16 : 343-366, 346.

appearance of alternative forms of religious belief. The Victorian period was indeed an age of doubt, but it was also a period of disbelieving religiously. As Lance St John Butler put it, it was a time of 'faith expressing itself doubtfully and doubt expressing itself in the language of religion'.⁸ Rather than inducting the secularisation of society, the late Victorian period should be viewed as a time of religious reconstruction or transformation.

For similar reasons, the scientific naturalists must not be seen as anti-religious. A number of scholars have been attentive to the continuing power of religion in late Victorian scientific naturalism.⁹ Perhaps more than any other historian, Bernard Lightman has challenged conventional interpretations of the scientific naturalists. He has argued that 'there were many vestiges of traditional religious thought embedded in Victorian agnosticism', and has even suggested that 'agnosticism originated in a religious context'. A closer reading of the leading scientific naturalists reveals that many were indebted to a Dissenting or Nonconformist tradition, which 'sought to set forth a serious new, non-clerical religious synthesis'. Huxley, for instance, was always keen to align his cause with the Protestant Reformation. Indeed, the intellectual progress of his day convinced Huxley that a 'New Reformation' was on the horizon.¹⁰ In a letter to Broad Churchman Charles Kingsley, moreover, Huxley even claimed that he reached his position like the heroes of the Reformation, after exercising his private judgement. 'I can only say with Luther,' he wrote, "'Gott helfe mir, Ich kann nichts anders.'"¹¹ Like Huxley, Tyndall also saw himself as a 'reformer', and was proud of his kinship with William Tyndale (1494-1536), the sixteenth-century martyred translator of the English Bible.¹² As a young man Tyndall had mastered the works of important Protestant apologists such as John Tillotson (1691-64), Jeremy Taylor (1613-67) and William Chillingworth (1602-44).¹³ Tyndall pithily summarised his own religious convictions in his

8 Butler, L.Stj. *Victorian Doubt: Literary and Cultural Discourses*, New York: Harvester & Wheatsheaf (1990), p. 86.

9 See e.g. Cosslett, T. *Science and Religion in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1984); Desmond, A. *Huxley: From Devil's Disciple to Evolution's High Priest*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley (1997); White, P. *Thomas Huxley: Making the 'Man of Science'*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2003); Kim, S.S. *John Tyndall's Transcendental Materialism and the Conflict between Religion and Science in Victorian England*, New York: Edwin Mellen (1996); Francis, M. *Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life*, New York: Cornell University Press (2007); and Taylor, M. *The Philosophy of Herbert Spencer*, London: Continuum (2007).

10 Huxley, T.H. to Dyster, F.D. 30 Jan 1859; quoted in Desmond *op. cit.*, (9), p. 253.

11 Huxley, L. *Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley*, 2 vols., New York: D. Appleton & Co. (1902), vol. 1. pp. 233-239.

12 Huxley, L. 'John Tyndall: a centenary sketch', *Cornhill Magazine* (1920) vol. 122, no. 293: 627-640, 630.

13 Jeans, W.T. *Lives of the Electricians: Professors Tyndall, Wheatstone, and Morse*, London: Whittaker & Co. (1887), p. 5.

journal, writing that 'I would lay my hand upon the writings of John in the New Testament, and the religion there taught is not the religion of the understanding but a deeper one.' A decade before Huxley, Tyndall similarly proclaimed the 'plea of Martin Luther must be mine "I cannot otherwise – my God assist me!"'¹⁴ Like Huxley and Tyndall and so many others during the century, evolutionary philosophy Spencer justified his rejection of orthodoxy on moral grounds.¹⁵ But as one biographer has observed, Spencer's assumptions and outlook belonged to a provincial Dissent heavily influenced by a Calvinistic outlook.¹⁶

Thus while they may have rejected historical Christianity, the scientific naturalists all aspired to a 'religion pure and undefiled', stripped of the dogma they considered accretions and perversions of Christ's original message. Indeed, Beatrice Webb (1858-1943), at one time one of Spencer's many devoted followers, aptly summarised the post-Protestant position of the scientific naturalists:

The Protestant...declares virtually the supremacy of his own reason. He asserts that his religion is rational and can be defended by arguments. It is true that, originally, he declared the infallibility of the Scriptures – but these, in their great variety, can be shown to assert many contradictory dogmas, and when once his individual mind is regarded as arbitrator as to how these contradictory statements are to be reconciled so that a whole may be constructed, he cannot rest until he has made some examination into the different claims of the various authors of the Scriptures to divine inspiration...During this process, whatever may have been his conclusions on particular points, the Bible has lost its infallibility. He has sat in judgement over it and acknowledged that his reason, his sense of logical truth, is his real guide, the guide whom he is morally obliged to follow.¹⁷

Likewise, Bernard Lightman argues that the scientific naturalists should be seen as 'new natural theologians' who had a 'sense of the divine in nature' and attempted to 'treat science as a religion since it was the study of divine natural law'. In short, the scientific naturalists pursued 'genuine religious goals and not merely the substitution of something secular for something religious'.¹⁸

14 Journals, 7 April 1850; I wish here to thank Bernie Lightman for sharing scans of Tyndall's journals he obtained from the Royal Institution.

15 Spencer, H. *Autobiography*, 2 vols., New York: D. Appleton & Co. (1904), vol. 1, pp. 171-172.

16 Peel, J.D.Y. *Herbert Spencer: The Evolution of a Sociologist*, New York: Basic Books (1971), p. viii.

17 MacKenzie, N.&J. & Knight, L. (eds.) *The Diaries of Beatrice Webb*, abr. edn., London: Virago (2000), p. 121.

18 See e.g. Lightman, B. *The Origins of Agnosticism: Victorian Unbelief and the Limits of Knowledge*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press (1987), and *Evolutionary Naturalism in Victorian Britain: The 'Darwinians' and their Critics*, Aldershot: Ashgate (2009); see also shorter studies such as 'Does the history of science and religion change depending on the narrator? Some atheist and agnostic perspectives', *Science & Christian Belief*, (2012) 24 2, 149-168; and 'The creed of science and its critics' in Hewitt, M. (ed.) *The Victorian World*, New York: Rout-

How this Victorian coterie attempted to achieve these goals was by reconceptualising 'religion' in terms of a solely inner spirituality. By privatising religion in such a way, and thus separating religion from theology, they believed themselves to be harmonisers, or peacemakers, claiming that conflict between 'science and religion' was simply impossible. Instead, the conflict was between science and theology, or theological dogmatism, not religion. In this essay I want to place greater emphasis on the continuity between scientific naturalism and the Protestant tradition.¹⁹ In particular, I concentrate on what the scientific naturalists and others called the 'New Reformation'. A host of Victorian intellectuals saw themselves as new 'reformers', fulfilling the work that began with Martin Luther. They sustained in their language strong traces of a Protestant polemic against superstition, corruption, authority and even apostasy from what they believed was the true message of Christ. They consistently eschewed accusations of atheism and maintained that they were not against religion per se, but theological dogmatism. This sense of religion as apart from theology was usually characterised in a romantic fashion, emphasising emotion and feeling instead of reason.

In distinguishing theology from religion, agnostics like Huxley, Tyndall and Spencer joined a significant number of other Protestant thinkers who likewise believed that faith is an expression of personal or moral sentiment. Radical Dissenters and Nonconformists, dissident intellectuals, and even liberal Anglicans also argued that 'true religion' had been disguised and disfigured by the clergy over the centuries. For this group of thinkers, the 'New Reformation' would bring mankind one step closer to fulfilling (indeed, completing) the Reformation of the sixteenth century.

It is important to keep in mind that most of the scientific naturalists were raised in devout, Protestant homes. This Protestant upbringing, of course, included an antagonistic attitude toward the religious establishment, and especially the Roman Catholic Church.²⁰ Traces of these Protestant elements are

ledge (2012), pp. 449-465. More recently, see the collection of essays in Lightman, B. & Reidy, M.S. (eds.), *The Age of Scientific Naturalism: Tyndall and his Contemporaries*, London: Pickering & Chatto (2014), and Dawson, G. & Lightman, B. (eds.) *Victorian Scientific Naturalism: Community, Identity, Continuity*, Chicago/London: Chicago University Press (2014).

19 Some scholars, however, have touched upon it: e.g. Larsen, T. *A People of One Book: The Bible and the Victorians*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2011), esp. pp.195-218; Barton, R. 'Sunday Lecture Societies: Naturalistic Scientists, Unitarians, and Secularists unite against Sabatarian legislation' in Dawson & Lightman *op. cit.*, (18), pp. 189-219; and Erdozain, D. *The Soul of Doubt: The Religious Roots of Unbelief from Luther to Marx*, New York: Oxford University Press (2015), esp. pp. 173-220.

20 See e.g. Norman, E.R. *Anti-Catholicism in Victorian England*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. (1968); Wolffe, J. *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain, 1829-1860*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1991); and Paz, D.G. *Popular Anti-Catholicism in Mid-Victorian Britain*, Stanford: Stanford University Press (1992). More recently, see Wheeler, M. *The Old Enemies: Catholic and Protestant in Nineteenth-Century English Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2006).

readily found in their writings. As we shall see, scientific naturalists, dissident intellectuals and liberal Anglicans were all heavily indebted to a commonplace Protestant historiography. Liberal Protestant theologians throughout the nineteenth century accepted and even promoted a division between religion and theology as a strategy for defending religion, responding to the trumpet call of the 'New Reformation' just as eagerly as scientific naturalists. An examination of the religious perspectives of these groups will bring into sharp relief the unintended consequences of the close association between Protestantism and scientific naturalism at the end of the nineteenth century.

Dissident Intellectuals and the New Reformation

While the scientific naturalists were no doubt an influential force within British science in the second half of the nineteenth century, it is important to keep in mind that they were only one group among many vying for cultural authority. Among others were those dissident intellectuals who often appeared in the pages of the radical weekly newspaper *The Leader*, edited by Chartist Thornton Leigh Hunt (1810-73), literary critic George Henry Lewes (1817-78), and financially backed by liberal clergyman Edmund R. Larken (1809-95), together they attempted to promulgate 'a larger Christian liberalism than then existed'.²¹ Together they proclaimed their hope in 'New Reformation' that would restore religion to its proper function. For this group of thinkers, the 'New Reformation' would bring mankind one step closer to fulfilling (indeed, completing) the Reformation of the sixteenth century.²² In an open letter, Lewes himself declared 'the New Reformation will start from a fuller development of Luther's great principle', which was, of course, the 'liberty of private judgment'. The 'New Reformation', however, would go beyond Luther by offering 'absolute freedom', giving every soul 'the sacred privilege of its own convictions'.²³ As historian Mark Francis has pointed out, Huxley, Tyndall, Spencer and other scientific naturalists were all avid readers of *The Leader*.²⁴

While the nineteenth century was the first period in which a high proportion of people 'consciously and deliberately rejected Christianity', as Anthony Cockshut observed, it nonetheless remained a deeply religious era.²⁵ Dissident intellectuals associated with *The Leader* rejected orthodoxy because they found in Scripture and Christian doctrine ideas which were not compatible with the 'spirits and wants of the age'. To the dissident intellectual, while Christianity

21 Ashton, R. G. H. *Lewes: A Life*, Oxford: Clarendon Press (1991), p. 88.

22 'The New Reformation', *The Leader* (27 Apr 1850) vol. 1 no. 5, 105-106; see also 'The Progress of the New Reformation', *The Leader* (11 May 1850), vol. 1, no. 7: 153.

23 Lewes, G.H. 'Social Reform', *The Leader* (10 Aug 1850), vol. 1, no. 20: 469-470.

24 See Francis, M. *op. cit.*, (9), pp. 111-131.

25 Cockshut, A.O.J. *Anglican Attitudes: A Study of Victorian Religious Controversies*, London: Collins (1959), p. 23.

was indeed a dying religion, central tenets of English Protestantism continued to hold vital cores of truth.

Among the 'pioneers of the New Reformation' were men like poet Leigh Hunt (1784-1859), Unitarian laymen William R. Greg (1809-81), critic Francis W. Newman (1805-97), and Unitarian minister James Martineau (1805-1900). In his *Religion of the Heart* (1853), Hunt appealed to those who rejected the historical underpinning of Christianity yet retained 'a strong sense of religion at heart'. He argued that religion undergoes progressive changes, and that those 'doctrines revolting to the heart are not made to endure, however mixed up they may be with lessons more divine'. 'Let Divine Science', Hunt proclaimed, 'be heard in our pulpit; hear in a pulpit for the first time, a place, from which all the letter and almost all the spirit of this visible scripture of God have hitherto been excluded.'²⁶ Greg's *Creed of Christendom* (1851), 'a manual of modern biblical criticism for the unlearned', similarly argued for a 'higher view of religion', one that dreaded neither the discoveries of science nor the progress of religion. After all, it was God who had 'arranged matters in this beautiful and well-ordered but mysteriously governed universe'. But according to Greg, religion was necessarily progressive, ever-changing because humanity itself was ever progressive.²⁷ Newman was well-known for his controversial spiritual autobiography, *Phases of Faith* (1850), in which he chronicled his break with orthodoxy. Despite abandoning Christianity, Newman longed for a religion 'animated by primitive faith, love and disinterestedness'. Indeed, he believed that 'religion always had been, and still is, a state of sentiment toward God', and thus 'far less dependent on articles of a creed'.²⁸ Newman also supported Martineau's 'Free Christian Union'. This society, according to Martineau, was intended to 'restore the natural order of religious organization and growth'. Character and conscience, not doctrines, rites and creeds, would ally 'reformers' of all communions in public testimony to their spiritual quest for the 'Church of the Future'. 'The Reformation did the work of its time', he wrote, 'but not of all time.'²⁹

Many of the dissident intellectuals were also part of a circle that associated with radical publisher John Chapman (1821-94), who likewise insisted that orthodox Christianity could no longer address the spirit of the modern age. Influenced by Unitarian thought, Chapman's *Analytical Catalogue of Mr.*

26 Hunt, Leigh J.H. *The Religion of the Heart: A Manual of Faith and Duty*, London: John Chapman (1853), pp. 2, 254.

27 Greg, W.R. *The Creed of Christendom*, London: John Chapman (1851), pp. viii-xvii, 192.

28 Newman, F.W. *Phases of Faith; or, Passages from the History of My Creed*, London: John Chapman (1850), pp. 44, 76, 188.

29 Martineau, J. *The New Affinities of Faith: A Plea for Free Christian Union*, London: Williams & Norgate (1869) pp. 7, 21. On the 'Free Christian Union', which was a liberal Protestant project in Britain that lasted from 1867-70, see Ledger-Lomas, M. 'Unitarians and the contradictions of liberal Protestantism in Victorian Britain: the Free Christian Union, 1867-70', *Historical Research* (2010) 83 221, 486-505.

Chapman's Publications (1852) displayed a weighty collection of heterodox writers.³⁰ The men and women of Chapman's circle, such as George Combe, Robert Chambers, Harriet and James Martineau, Francis W. Newman, John Stuart Mill, William R. Greg, James Anthony Froude, George Henry Lewes and George Eliot, all believed in the progress of science and religion.³¹ Phrenologist George Combe (1788-1858), for instance, argued in his famous *Constitution of Man* (1828) that the laws of nature are universal, unbending and progressive. While he rejected orthodox Christianity, particularly the doctrines of the Fall and Atonement, he was no atheist.³² Indeed, he argued that the laws of nature in fact attested to the wisdom and benevolence of a Creator, and even regarded his *Constitution* as a work of 'natural theology'.³³ In discussing the 'relations between science and scripture', he wrote that in all ages new ideas are often charged with impiety, but nevertheless contended that opposition between science and revelation was 'impossible'. If the 'facts in nature are *correctly* observed, and divine truth is *correctly* interpreted,' he wrote, there should be no conflict between revelation and science. According to Combe, revelation was never 'intended to supersede the necessity of all other knowledge'.³⁴

Combe also published a remarkable treatise 'On the Relation between Religion and Science' (1847), a document almost entirely ignored by historians of science and religion. He explained that the work of natural theology convinced him that God reigns through fixed, immutable natural laws.³⁵ More importantly, he argued that the Reformation remains to be completed, equated progress in religion with progress in knowledge, and accused 'religious professors' of atheism when they denied the laws of nature. What needs to occur, according to Combe, was a second or 'new Reformation', and proposed that his phrenological work serve as a practical step towards reconciling religion and science.³⁶

Another member of Chapman's circle was of course Mary Anne Evans (1819-1880), or George Eliot, whose novels often reflected the sensibilities and ideas of the dissident intellectuals. Raised in an evangelical family, she came to abandon her faith after being disappointed with evangelical social ethics and after studying the religious and theological writings of German higher critics. In

30 *An Analytical Catalogue of Mr. Chapman's Publications*, London: John Chapman (1852).

31 See Ashton, R. *142 Strand: A Radical Address in Victorian London*, London: Vintage Books (2006); see also comments in Francis, M, *op. cit.*, (9), pp. 132-143

32 See his reflections on 'true religion' in Gibbon, C. (ed.) *The Life of George Combe*, 2 vols., London: Macmillan & Co. (1878), esp. vol. 1, pp. 223-225.

33 Combe, G. *The Constitution of Man considered in Relation to External Objects*, Boston: Carter & Hendee (1829), pp. 19, 23-32.

34 *ibid.*, pp. 395-396 (my emphasis).

35 Combe, G. *On the Relation between Science and Religion*, 4th People's Edn., Edinburgh: Maclachlan & Stewart (1857), pp. v-xxxii.

36 *ibid.*, pp.11-14. For a detailed study on Combe see e.g. van Wyhe, J. *Phrenology and the Origins of Victorian Scientific Naturalism*, Aldershot: Ashgate (2004).

1842, in an oft-quoted letter to her father, Eliot wrote that she had concluded that the Bible was a collection of 'histories consisting of mingled truth and fiction'. By 1850 she had become the assistant editor for Chapman's radical '*Westminster Review*', publishing her first article in the quarterly the following year in which she urged readers to recognise 'the presence of undeviating law in the material and moral world'. Eliot believed that English Protestantism was 'in bondage to terms and conceptions which, having had their root in conditions of thought no longer existing, have ceased to possess any vitality, and are for us as spells which have lost their virtue'.³⁷

Eliot penned those words in a review of Robert William Mackay's (1803-1882) *The Progress of the Intellect* (1850). A frequent guest of Chapman's house, Mackay was influenced by the Tübingen School of Theology and was one of the earliest writers to introduce German historical criticism to an English audience. Significantly, Mackay also claimed that 'religion and science are inseparable'. But in the intellectual progress of religion, he argued, 'the hypothesis of miracle has lost its usefulness'. Miracles, according to Mackay, implied 'something inconsistent with the order of a perfect government, something overlooked in the original plan requiring an interpolation contradictory to its general tenor'. A 'perfect and immutable being', he added, 'cannot break his own laws, or be at variance with himself'. Thus notions of miracles ought to be replaced with the belief in the perfection and uniformity of natural law. In the final analysis, Mackay concluded, historical Christianity had lost all meaning in his day, and therefore ought to be replaced with a new religion.³⁸

As is well known, Eliot expressed her own particular religious misgivings in an 1855 article published in the *Westminster Review*. Here Eliot offered a searing attack on popular London evangelical minister, John Cumming. Interestingly, she declined to discuss the merits of Cumming's 'dogmatic system', taking exception only to his manner of expression, which she believed lacked the 'spiritual joys and sorrows' of the 'life and death of Christ as a manifestation of love'. That is, Cumming promoted, according to Eliot, an external religion without love, sympathy, charity and feeling. Cumming's conception of God was altogether unattractive: 'He is a God who, instead of sharing and aiding our human sympathies, is directly in collision with them.' Eliot's moral revolt against Christianity was a common theme among dissident intellectuals. Eliot, like many of those authors who influenced her thought, wished to replace orthodox conceptions of God with a new 'religion of human sympathy'. She wanted to

37 [Eliot, G.] 'Mackay's Progress of the Intellect', *Westminster Review*, (Jan 1851), vol. 54, no. 2: 353-368. A more detailed account of these themes in Eliot's thought can be found in Hempton, D. *Evangelical Disenchantment, Nine Portraits of Faith and Doubt*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press (2008), pp. 19-40.

38 Mackay, R.W. *The Progress of the Intellect, As Exemplified in the Religious Development of the Greeks and Hebrews*, 2 vols., London: John Chapman (1850), vol. 1, pp. 20, 22, 40.

retain a Protestant ethic but not Christian belief.³⁹

While dissident intellectuals rejected historical Christianity, they continued to use the language of Protestantism. Perhaps the most salient example of this movement was historian of European rationalism William E. H. Lecky (1838-1903). At an early age he published a survey of *The Religious Tendencies of the Ages* (1860), which aimed at solving 'that great of theology, the legitimate province of private judgement'.⁴⁰ Unsurprisingly, he believed that Catholicism had suppressed private judgement, whereas Protestantism had encouraged it. But Lecky himself subscribed most closely to a latitudinarian position. As historian Jeffrey Paul von Arx puts it, for Lecky latitudinarianism 'was the latest expression of the traditional Protestant revolt against spiritual authority,' the very 'culmination of the development of religious thought' and the 'basis for social and political unity and progress'.⁴¹

Indeed, the real religious force in England, according to Lecky, had always been latitudinarianism.⁴² Protestantism was only temporary. The progress of religion is on an inevitably upward march from the barbarous superstitions of the Dark Ages to the most radically liberal position of rationalists like Lecky. While Lecky did not deny the existence of God, he did argue that the contending religious parties brought Christianity into doubt. The solution was what he believed was the moderation displayed in the latitudinarian position. Latitudinarians offered the 'spirit of charity and of tolerance towards those with whom they disagree'. Importantly, he insisted that 'Protestantism and dogmatism are logically incompatible.' Systematic theology had 'been the parent of almost all the errors and of a very large proportion of the crimes that have disfigured the history of Christianity'. Such a system had corrupted the simple message of Jesus. Indeed, Lecky strongly believed that 'primitive Christianity' was the very essence of the latitudinarian position. Thus, according to Lecky, latitudinarianism was not only the fulfilment of the Reformation, but the continuation of the primitive Christianity.⁴³

These statements anticipated central features of Lecky's more well-known work, the *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe* (1865), which was an extended attack on dogmatic theology.⁴⁴ For Lecky, a liberal and undogmatic Protestantism was essential for moral and religious

39 Eliot, G. 'Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming', *Westminster Review*, (Oct 1855), vol. 64, no. 126, 436-462.

40 Lecky, W.E.H. *The Religious Tendencies of the Age*, London: Saunders, Otley & Co. (1860), p. 1.

41 Von Arx, J.P. *Progress and Pessimism*, Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press (1985), pp. 71, 78.

42 Lecky, W.E.H. *op. cit.*, (40), pp. 137-138.

43 *ibid.*, pp. 27, 148, 192-193, 196-197.

44 Lecky, W.E.H. *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, 2 vols., New York: Appleton & Co. (1872).

progress. Like so many of his contemporaries, Lecky did not wish to eradicate religion, or 'true Christianity' as he put it. A 'true and healthy Christianity', he wrote, cultivates 'a love of truth for its own sake' and inculcates a 'spirit of candour and of tolerance towards those with whom we differ'. In other words, the decline of dogmatic theology and clerical influence was not inimical to religion at all—rather, it called on people to return to the 'days of the Apostles', and thus is a 'measure if not a cause of its advance'.⁴⁵

In describing the triumphal advance of reason over superstition, Lecky argued that rationalism had made extraordinary strides in Protestant countries. By 'rationalism' Lecky meant 'Protestant Rationalism'. Like Eliot, Lecky believed that 'religion in its proofs as in its essence is deemed a thing belonging rather to the moral than the intellectual portion of human nature. Faith and not reason is its basis; and this faith is a species of moral perception'.⁴⁶

Of all the dissident intellectuals, however, James Froude was perhaps the most widely influential.⁴⁷ While he memorably expressed his religious doubts in his semi-autobiographical novels *The Shadows of the Clouds* (1847) and *Nemesis of Faith* (1849), these books were more than thinly disguised autobiographies—they were also Froude's thoughts on intellectual history, ranging from German biblical criticism, theology and religious history to the contemporary state of Anglicanism. But however unorthodox his views, Froude always claimed to be Protestant. What needs to be emphasised here is that for Froude the Protestantism of his day was not Protestantism at all.⁴⁸ As Michael Madden observes, Froude thought nineteenth-century Protestantism was a 'mere shadow of the movement begun at the Reformation'.⁴⁹ Protestantism, according to Froude, placed its faith in reason and free inquiry, not authority. He thus criticised nineteenth-century Protestants for failing to live up to the original principles of the Reformation.⁵⁰

Most importantly, Froude also viewed Protestantism as a regulative or corrective force in world history. That is, Protestantism was not just a sixteenth-century phenomenon—it was part of a general law, a regenerative principle throughout the course of human history. In this sense, rigid doctrinal formulations paralysed religious progress. Religion, according to Froude, was 'not a

45 Lecky *op. cit.*, (44), vol 1, pp. 200-201.

46 *ibid.*, vol 1, p. 191.

47 On Froude, see the definitive volume by Brady, C. *James Anthony Froude: An Intellectual Biography of a Victorian Prophet*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2013).

48 Froude's own critique of Protestantism can be found in the numerous essays he published in popular periodicals, some of which were later collected in his *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, 4 vols., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons (1888).

49 Madden, M. 'Curious paradoxes: James Anthony Froude's view of the Bible', *Journal of Religious History*, (2006) 30 2: 199-216.

50 Froude, 'Conditions and Prospects of Protestantism,' in *op. cit.*, (48), vol. 2, p. 165.

series of propositions or a set of outward observances of which the truth or fitness may be properly argued; it grows with the life of a race or nation; it takes shape as a living germ develops into an organic body.⁵¹

By the late 1880s, a series of contentious articles appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* discussing 'the great change in theological and religious thought'.⁵² Renegade Anglican priest Charles Voysey (1828-1912), who was condemned by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Seal as a heretic, began the series by explaining that the 'new reformation' did not mean wholesale destruction, but improvement. Voysey believed the 'new reformation' was the continuation and indeed the completion of the 'old reformation', that great and heroic struggle 'to break the tyranny of Church authority and establish the right of private judgement at all in matters of religion'. Thus the 'new reformation' will be an expansion and wider application of 'our Protestant forefathers'. While the 'old reformation' was gradual, the 'new reformation' occurred rapidly as a result of biblical criticism, comparative religious studies and the enormous strides in scientific knowledge. This 'increased eagerness for truth and fact', Voysey asserted, was part of the reason why so many of his contemporaries (including himself) had rejected the dogmas of Christianity. Perceptively, Voysey observed that once the doctrine of the Fall is rejected, 'the whole fabric which rests upon it comes to the ground'. He writes: 'No fall, no redemption; no curse, no Calvary; no hell, no atonement; no atonement, no incarnation; no incarnation, no Christ; no Christ, no Trinity.' At the same time, Voysey believed 'in the existence of some One who has given me life, and put into me this sense of loyalty to Himself before all things, who makes me glad when I obey and sad and wretched when I disobey Him'. The work of the 'New Reformation', he argued, will be a return to a more 'natural' religion.⁵³

Near the end of the century, Mary Augusta Ward (1851-1920), niece of poet Matthew Arnold and granddaughter of Thomas Arnold, the famous liberal churchmen and headmaster of Rugby School, authored the immensely popular *Robert Elsmere* (1888), a tale of an Anglican minister in the process of losing his faith in historical Christianity. Ward combined many intellectual and moral tendencies of her age, which looked forward to the inevitable triumph of a new and simpler type of religion. It was plain to Ward that historical Christianity was dying and a new religion would soon take its place. As Bernard Lightman observes, Ward was confident that the unsettlement of orthodox Christianity

51 Froude, 'The Oxford Counter-Reformation', in *op. cit.*, (48), vol. 4. p. 155.

52 Voysey 'The New Reformation: Part I', *Fortnightly Review*, (Jan 1887) 41 241, 124-138; Fremantle, W.H. 'The New Reformation: part II - theology under its changed conditions', *Fortnightly Review*, (Mar 1887) 41 243, 442-458.

53 On Voysey, see e.g. Davies, C.M. *Heterodox London*, 2 vols., London: Tinsley Bros (1874), vol. 1, pp. 274-310; Crowther, M.A. *Church Embattled: Religious Controversy in Mid-Victorian England*, London: David & Charles (1970), pp. 127-137.

would usher in a new faith, stronger and more attuned to modern thought.⁵⁴ In short, it was a Protestantism with doctrine left out. Ward even believed it was the guiding hand of God himself behind the intellectual and religious crisis of the period.

A year later Ward celebrated the coming of a new faith in an article tellingly entitled the 'New Reformation,' published in *The Nineteenth Century*. Ward's 'New Reformation' is disclosed in a dialogue between two fictional characters, Ronalds, an orthodox Anglican minister, and Merriman, who has embraced German historical criticism as had Elsmere in Ward's novel. In fact, Merriman is little more than Elsmere over again, repeating Ward's own personal belief that the old orthodoxy must 'translate' or transform to the subjective mode of interpreting religious phenomena, that all supernatural miracles must dissolve, dissipate and resolve into naturalistic explanations. 'All round us,' Ward declared through Merriman, 'I feel the New Reformation preparing, struggling into utterance and being! It is the product, the compromise of two forces, the scientific and the religious.' Ward thus celebrates that the growing 'liberal forces now rising' among all religious sects 'will ultimately coalesce, [and] science will find the religion with which, as it has long since declared, through its wisest mouths, it has no rightful quarrel, and religion will find the science which belongs to it and which needs it'. Ward's 'New Reformation', in other words, will serve as a substitute for historical Christianity.⁵⁵

In sum, numerous dissident intellectuals associated with *The Leader* and Chapman's circle continued to see themselves as deeply religious individuals, despite their rejection of historical Christianity. Religion to them was the living kernel, theology the dying husk that it inevitably outgrew.

The Affinities between dissident intellectuals and liberal Protestantism

In the foregoing section we occasionally mentioned the influence of liberal Anglicans, or Broad Churchmen, on dissident intellectuals. Indeed, Broad Churchmen had also responded to calls for a 'New Reformation' and shared a common bond not only with dissident intellectuals, but, as we shall see, the scientific naturalists as well. As Voysey claimed in his essay on the 'New Reformation', 'hundreds of living clergymen and ministers' have rejected central Christian dogmas. Although neither a party nor a faction but a set of individuals, Broad Churchmen shared the belief that the authority of the Bible and the Church must be subjected to historical and scientific criticism.

54 See Lightman, B. "'Robert Elsmere" and the agnostic crisis of faith', in Helmstadter, R.J & Lightman, B. *Victorian Faith in Crisis*, pp. 283-311, on p. 300.

55 Ward, M.A. 'The New Reformation', *Nineteenth Century* (Mar 1889) vol. 25, no. 145, 454-480.

Influenced by German idealism and romanticism, Broad Churchmen stressed the importance of religious experience, feeling and intuition over against the claims of theological dogmatism. For the Broad Churchmen authority lay in private judgement and in the individual conscience; they believed that various doctrinal positions, which had long been considered essential to the Christian faith, needed to be modified or even abandoned in the light of modern thought. By relaxing doctrinal restrictions, they hoped to reconcile Christianity with the intellectual tendencies of the age.⁵⁶

The Broad Church is often divided into two generations. The first generation included men such as Thomas Arnold (1795-1842), Julius C. Hare (1798-1855), Connop Thirlwall (1797-1875), Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-72), Richard Whately (1787-1863) and Charles Kingsley (1819-75), who all spoke of and called for reforms in religious belief. As early as the 1830s, for instance, Arnold had been urging a broader, more critical and less dogmatic approach to theology. Arnold also joined forces with the Nonconformists in opposing the Tractarians and their attempt to accentuate the traditionalism of the Church of England.⁵⁷ Launching one of the bitterest attacks on the Oxford Movement, Arnold called them the 'Oxford Malignants', comparing them to the 'Judaizers of the New Testament'.⁵⁸

Other liberal Anglicans sought to liberate Christianity from what they believed were outdated doctrines. In 1853, Christian Socialist Maurice published a collection of essays in which he rejected both the traditional substitutionary view of the Atonement and the notion of eternal punishment.⁵⁹ Moreover, in a series of letters between him and a 'layman' on the question of the Bible and science, Maurice declared that 'divinity [i.e., theology] needs reformation' and that he was grateful to 'the physical student [i.e., man of science] if in anywise he helps the Reformation forward'.⁶⁰ Broad Churchman Kingsley's own interest in the sciences is well known. He participated in many scientific circles, and was elected a fellow of the Linnean Society and of the Geological Society of London. He also kept up a busy correspondence with a number of scientific men, including, Thomas H. Huxley. In 1863, Kingsley even told Maurice that he was busy 'working out points of Natural Theology, by the strange light of Huxley, Darwin, and Lyell'.⁶¹ Indeed, shortly after reading Darwin's *Origin of Species*, he

56 For a history of the Broad Church see e.g. Jones, T.E. *The Broad Church: A Biography of a Movement*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books (2003).

57 On the Oxford Movement see e.g. Mozley, Rev.T. *Reminiscences Chiefly of Oriel College and the Oxford Movement*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co. (1882).

58 Arnold, T. 'The Oxford Malignants and Dr. Hampden', *Edinburgh Review*, (1836), vol. 63, no. 127, 225-239.

59 Maurice, F.D. *Theological Essays*, London: Macmillan & Co. (1853).

60 Maurice, F.D. *The Claims of the Bible and of Science*, London: Macmillan & Co. (1863), p. 117.

61 Kingsley, Mrs C. (ed.) *Charles Kingsley, His Letters and Memories of his Life*, 2 vols., London: Macmillan & Co. (1894), vol. 2, p.155.

believed that 'all natural theology must be rewritten'.⁶²

The next generation of Broad Churchmen were more radical still, and consisted of Baden Powell (1796-1860), Henry B. Wilson (1803-88), Mark Pattison (1813-84), Benjamin Jowett (1817-93), Rowland Williams (1817-70), Frederick Temple (1821-1902), Arthur P. Stanley (1815-81) and Henry H. Milman (1791-1868). Many of this second generation believed that Christianity had to be modified in order to survive. This younger generation of Broad Churchmen also believed that a 'second Reformation' was coming, hailing the triumph of private judgement and individual inquiry over the 'abominable system' of ecclesiastical tyranny.⁶³

These streams of thought culminated in the notorious publication of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860. A monument and manifesto of liberal Anglican thought, Temple, Williams, Powell, Wilson, Pattison, Jowett and layman Charles W. Goodwin sought to 'illustrate the advantage derivable to the cause of religious and moral truth, from a free handling, in a becoming spirit, of subjects peculiarly liable to suffer by the repetition of conventional language, and from traditional methods of treatment'. Despite its seemingly innocuous preface and inconspicuous title, the 'septem contra Christum,' as they were called by their opponents, brought the full impact of German historical scholarship and biblical criticism to England, provoking one of the greatest religious controversies of the Victorian age.⁶⁴ Temple, for instance, described the advance or progress of knowledge in history. Tellingly, like other dissident intellectuals, he divided history into three stages, corresponding to the life of an individual – childhood, youth and manhood. He believed society, like the individual, was capable of 'perpetual development'. During the infamous 1860 British Association Meeting for the Advancement of Science at Oxford, Temple gave a sermon at St Mary's church, where he argued that 'change in science necessitates a change in its relation to religion'. He urged his audience to 'look for the finger of God' in the universal laws of nature. A reverent study of these laws, he proclaimed, 'can and will bring us nearer in temper to their Divine Author'.⁶⁵

The most controversial essayist was theologian and future Master of Balliol Jowett. He believed that interpretive differences were the result of the 'growth

62 Darwin, F. *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, 2 vols., New York: D. Appleton & Co. (1896), vol. 2, pp. 81-82.

63 See e.g. Abbott, E. & Campbell, L. (eds.) *Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett*, 2 vols., London: John Murray (1897), vol. 1, pp. 160, 362; Prothero, R.E. & Bradley, G. *Life and Correspondence of Arthur Penrhyn Stanley*, 2 vols., London: John Murray (1893), vol. 2, pp. 238, 239.

64 'To The Reader', *Essays and Reviews*, London: John W. Parker & Son (1860); see also the superbly annotated recent edition by Shea, V & Whitla, W. (eds.) *Essays and Reviews: The 1860 text and its reading*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia (2000).

65 Temple, F. *The Present Relations of Science to Religion: A Sermon Preached on Act Sunday, July 1, 1860 Before the University of Oxford, during the Meeting of the British Association*, Oxford: J. H. & Jas. Parker (1860).

or progress of the human mind'. Jowett maintained that the 'unchangeable word of God...is changed by each age and each generation in accordance with its passing fancy'. A new critical method is needed, one that takes into account all the advances of knowledge. In other words, we need to read and interpret the Bible 'like any other book'. By this he meant that readers should forgo the traditions of theology, dogma and the ecumenical councils. The Bible is an ancient document and not readily applicable to modern times. In this context Jowett questioned the Resurrection, reinterpreted the Atonement and espoused the benefits of a comparative study of religions. A more 'rational' interpretation would 'dry up the crude and dreamy vapours of religious excitement' and offer 'new sources of spiritual health'. Like the dissident intellectuals, Jowett proposed a progressive history of religion analogous to the kind of progress witnessed in the individual. While he believed that religion and science were not in conflict, the interpretation of Scripture must 'conform to all well-ascertained fact of history or of science'.⁶⁶

While this composite volume provoked one of the greatest religious controversies of the Victorian age, the essayists were not without defenders. Maurice, for instance, wrote to Stanley in 1861 that the clergy should accept the *Essays and Reviews* as ushering a 'new reformation' in the Church.⁶⁷ In 1864, Stanley himself excitedly wrote to a friend that 'we are on the verge of a religious revolution – a revolution more gradual, I trust, and therefore more safe, but not less important, than the Reformation and ending, I hope, not in further divisions, but in further union'. 'I agree with you', he wrote to another friend the following year, 'that the prophet of the second Reformation has not yet appeared. Perhaps he never will. But that a second Reformation is in store for us, and that the various tendencies of the age are preparing the way for it, I cannot doubt, unless Christianity is doomed to suffer a portentous eclipse'.⁶⁸

Stanley also publicly defended the essayists in an article published in *Fraser's Magazine*. While he disagreed with the general tone of the volume, he pointed out that 'the principles, even the words, of the Essayists have been known for the last fifty years, through writings popular amongst all English students of the higher branches of theology'. He asserted that 'science, history, and the principles of our moral nature are formidable antagonists to Theology if she sets herself against them'. Like so many others, Stanley made the distinction between religion and theology, and asserted that a 'new reformation' was emerging within the Church through the agency of German critical scholarship.⁶⁹

66 Jowett, B. 'On the Interpretation of Scripture', *Essays and Reviews*, 330-433.

67 Maurice, F. *The Life of Frederick Denison Maurice, Chiefly Told in His Own Letters*, 2 vols., London: Macmillan & Co. (1884), vol. 2, p. 383.

68 Prothero & Bradley *Life and Correspondence of Arthur Penrhyn Stanley*, vol. 2, 238-239.

69 Stanley, A.P. 'Theology of the Nineteenth Century', *Fraser's Magazine*, (1865), vol. 71, no. 422,

Like the dissident intellectuals, then, Broad Churchmen looked back into history for vindication of their views. They hailed the Reformation as the triumph of private judgement and individual inquiry over organised ecclesiastical tyranny. The 'Neo-Christianity' of the liberal Anglicans portrayed Christianity as a living organism, growing and adapting to its ever-changing environment. Indeed, one of the fundamental arguments of liberal Anglicans was that Christianity was not static, but developmental, adapting itself to the progressive growth of man's capacity to reason. The story of Christianity's historical progress or development was thus crucial to the liberal case for the continued need of the church to reform itself in the present day. Broad Churchmen were convinced that the rapid decline and disappearance of dogma was both inevitable and desirable. In spite of their differences of opinion, Broad Churchmen spoke as if Christianity came naturally to the man of reasonable education and culture, that Christianity at its best was the flower of natural religion, that doctrine was by nature variable, and that no plenary, unchanging revelation had ever been vouchsafed to men.

But the sort of biblical criticism championed by the essayists and other Broad Churchmen ultimately did more harm than good. These 'septem contra Christum' provided, as Ieuan Ellis aptly observed, not only the means of separating religion from science, but, implicitly, the growing perception that they were in conflict.⁷⁰ Historian Dennis G. Wigmore-Beddoes had demonstrated the strong affinities between liberal Anglicans and radical Protestants like the Unitarians in the nineteenth century.⁷¹ The evidence also seems to suggest, as we have seen, that liberal Anglicans also shared strong affinities with dissident intellectuals.

A series of unintended consequences

Of course, there were also many affinities between Broad Church ideas and the scientific naturalists. As Paul White observes, Huxley and the scientific naturalists used the 'resources of liberal theology and romantic criticism' to redraw the boundaries of religion.⁷² Indeed, in 1861 Huxley and some of the scientific naturalists organised a defence in support of the authors of *Essays and Reviews*. The 'Scientists' Testimonial' declared that 'Feeling as we do that the discoveries of Science, and the general progress of thought, have necessitated some modification of the views generally held on Theological matters, we welcome these

252-68.

70 Ellis, I. *Seven against Christ*, Leiden: Brill (1980), pp. 99-101.

71 Wigmore-Beddoes, D.G. *Yesterday's Radicals: A Study of the Affinity between Unitarianism and Broad Church Anglicanism in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. Ltd. (1971).

72 White *op. cit.*, (9), p. 104.

attempts to establish religious teaching on a firm and broader foundation.⁷³ Among its signatories were George Busk, William B. Carpenter, Charles Darwin, John Lubbock, Charles Lyell and William Spottiswoode. Although never published, this collective effort shows how the men of science rallied in support of liberal churchmen. This unholy alliance became more public however when, in the pages of *The Reader* (a short-lived journal published by Huxley, Tyndall and Spencer), an anonymous author praised Broad Churchmen for embracing historical criticism and recent scientific discoveries. With the *Essays and Reviews*, the author wrote, 'the new theology had publicly burst forth.'⁷⁴

The Protestant Reformation was a potent metaphor for liberal churchmen, radical Nonconformists, dissident intellectual, and agnostics alike. For many, the 'New Reformation' represented the building of a new religion that would recover what had been lost by Christianity when it perverted the pure ideals of its original founder. The scientific naturalists and dissident intellectuals saw themselves as continuing the process of theological purification and moral improvement initiated by Luther. A 'new' or 'second' reformation became the clarion call of those who sought religious and moral guidance through the free pursuit of science. Similarly, radical Nonconformists and Broad Churchmen hailed the Reformation as the triumph of private judgement and individual inquiry over organised ecclesiastical tyranny. The Reformation convinced many that private judgement was the safest guide to true religion.

Important theological changes needed to occur to make such a position possible. It was not that a large number of hitherto faithfully orthodox believers suddenly had a 'crisis of faith' and gave up Christianity. Rather, many now found it possible to drop particular beliefs which they personally found morally objectionable or unsatisfactory. Christianity had gradually become less credal, less dogmatic, less specific, and more vague.

But such diffusive Christianity eventually succumbed to alternatives to Christianity. As we have seen, the chipping away of the foundations of Christian theology was accomplished largely by Christian theologians. Liberal Protestants in particular experienced the intellectual pressure of modernity upon traditional theology. Science, historical criticism and changing notions of morality caused many Protestants to modify traditional beliefs. While radical Nonconformists and Broad Churchmen continued to believe that Protestantism could still guide men and women, the scientific naturalists and dissident intellectuals believed in a Protestantism-minus-Christianity. While Huxley had rebuffed the efforts of English positivists as 'Catholicism-minus-Christianity',⁷⁵ he himself appropriated the historiographical traditions and rhetorical strategies of liberal

73 Quoted in full in Shea & Whitla *op. cit.*, (64), pp. 657-659.

74 [Anon.] 'The Edinburgh and the Quarterly on the New Theology', *Reader*, (30 July 1864) vol. 4, no. 83, 123-124.

75 Huxley *Method and Results, op. cit.*, (6), p. 156.

Protestant theologians in support of his vision of the 'new religion' of the 'New Reformation'. Ironically, liberal Protestants also insisted that 'real Christianity' is more than the prevailing religious system of professed Christians. Ultimately, it was nineteenth-century liberal Protestant intellectuals that domesticated, privatised and, in the final analysis, gave religion its optional character. While there is no clear trajectory from the Reformation to modern unbelief, there still might be some truth to John Henry Newman's claim that 'Protestantism leads to infidelity'.⁷⁶ We cannot ignore the fact that churchmen of this era were engaged in a periodic and ongoing struggle to relieve Christianity of 'superstitious' excrescences.

Thus agnostics, dissident intellectuals and liberal Protestants all used central ideas of the Protestant tradition with deadly effect against Christianity itself. Protestantism, it was believed, was the religion of progress in that its inception led humanity out of the 'dark ages' into a higher, more 'adult' religious phase. This opened the way for more radical thinkers like the agnostics to claim that they represented a yet higher religious stage than Protestantism in the progress of religious and moral consciousness of humanity.

The Broad Churchmen were not, of course, the first clergymen to cast doubt on historical Christianity. Earlier in the nineteenth century a number of German historians and theologians also hoped for a second or new Reformation. Historian Thomas A. Howard has observed that German historicism had its foundations in theology, and that 'nearly all nineteenth-century liberal German theologians saw themselves not as debunkers of religion but as faithful torchbearers of the Reformation'. German mediating theologians, historians and others believed that the principles of the Reformation could still act as a catalysing agent, advancing civilisation away from superstition and darkness towards reason and light.⁷⁷ During the tercentenary celebrations of the Reformation in Germany, for example, many theologians and historians promoted a stadial view of human history in which the rise of Protestantism ushered in a new understanding of intellectual and religious freedom. As theologian Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher (1768-1834), often considered the 'father' of liberal Protestantism, preached from Berlin's Trinity Church in 1817, 'we live daily in the free enjoyment of the glorious benefits that befall to Christianity on account of the Reformation of the Church'.⁷⁸ Even German philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) declared that 'the great form of the World Spirit...is

76 Mozley, A. *Letters and Correspondence of John Henry Newman: During his Life in the English Church*, 2 vols., London: Longmans, Green & Co. (1890-91), vol. 2, p. 319.

77 Howard, T.A. *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W. M. L. de Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness*, New York: Cambridge University Press (2000), pp. 17-18, 23-50.

78 Schleiermacher, F. 'Am zweiten Tage des Reformations-Jubelfestes, 1817', *Sämmtliche Werke*, ii/4 (Berlin, 1835), 67-68; quoted in Howard, T.A. *Remembering the Reformation: An Inquiry into the Meanings of Protestantism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2016), p. 48.

the principle of the North, and, from a religious perspective, Protestantism'.⁷⁹

While the German influence on Victorian thought has long been recognised,⁸⁰ many of these ideas, of course, can be traced back even further. As historian Alexandra Walsham has observed

In its early stages, Protestantism deliberately adopted a rhetoric of rationality and enlightenment. In the polemic that poured from the pulpit and press, it overtly presented itself as a movement that would purge the dross of 'magic' from the pure metal of the Christian 'religion' and prune away the 'superstitious' popish and pagan accretions that had sprung up around it. The reformers liberally employed the metaphor of light dispelling intellectual darkness; they spoke of the Gospel as an instrument for liberating the mass of the populace from the yoke of ignorance in which they had been kept by the papacy; and they poured scorn on the crude materialism and credulity that characterized late medieval piety.⁸¹

Such a polemic of 'rationality' is readily found in seventeenth-century Protestant writings, which constructed a new historiography designed to expose the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church and thus justify Protestant ascendancy. Similar rhetorical strategies were subsequently adopted and extended between contending Protestant groups as self-critique, particularly by the Cambridge Platonists, English virtuosi, and Latitudinarian divines, who railed against 'superstitious' Catholics and Protestant 'enthusiasts' alike. By the nineteenth century, early histories and philosophies of science functioned as Protestant self-critique designed to provide Protestants with a set of beliefs through which they could differentiate themselves from biblical literalists and more conservative religious groups.⁸²

That the Protestant Reformation, which began as a movement to renew and purify Christianity, but which quickly turned into polemics between Protestants and Catholics, and subsequently between contending Protestant sects, had a tacit and perhaps even explicit role in creating the perception that science and

79 Quoted in Howard *Remembering the Reformation*, p. 58.

80 See e.g. the classic studies by Hillebrand, K. *Six Lectures on the History of German Thought*, London: Longmans, Green & Co. (1880), Tulloch, J. *Movements of Religious Thought in Britain during the Nineteenth Century*, London: Longmans, Green & Co. (1885), and Pfliegerer, O. *The Development of Theology in Germany since Kant and its Progress in Great Britain since 1825*, London: Sawn Sonneschein & Co. (1890). See also the article by Schirmer, W.F. 'German literature, historiography and theology in Nineteenth-Century England', *German Life & Letters*, (1947-48) 1, 165-174. More recently, see Davis, J.R. *The Victorians and Germany*, Oxford: Peter Lang (2007).

81 Walsham, A. 'The Reformation and "The Disenchantment of the World" Reassessed', *Historical Review*, (2008) 51 2, 497-528.

82 See Ungureanu, J.C. *Science, Religion and the Protestant Tradition: The Origins of a Conflict*, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press (2019, in press), which charts in detail the development and consequences of these ideas.

religion were in conflict or at war, lends credence to a notion first articulated by German sociologist Max Weber, and further developed by James Turner, Michael Buckley, and more recently by Charles Taylor and Brad Gregory: namely, that modern unbelief betrays roots to the Reformation. What this paper hopes to have shown, however, is that it was a particular kind of Protestantism which subjected Christianity to both rational criticism and subordinated it to experiential religion, which eventually gave birth to a conflict narrative that, in turn, enabled the rise of secularism. There was indeed a deep kinship between liberal Protestantism and secularism, the boundaries of which were remarkably porous.

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