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Allen C. Guelzo

Gettysburg College

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Keywords
Episcopal Church, James May, Christianity, George Washington Bethune, Protestant Episcopal Church

Abstract
Sometime during the summer of 1830, the Rev. Dr. James May, an Episcopal clergyman and at that time rector of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, boarded a Hudson River steamboat on his way to a well-earned rest in the New York mountains. Sharing the same steamboat and the same destination with "a prominent Presbyterian Clergyman of the city of New York," the Rev. Dr. George Washington Bethune. The two divines fell to talking denominational shop, and "in the course of their conversation the Presbyterian spoke most favorably of the Protestant Episcopal Church." May was evidently taken aback; he was not accustomed to unsolicited endorsements from Presbyterian quarters. But Bethune was insistent: "I do not see," said he, "what is to hinder your Church from becoming the dominant Christian body in this country before the close of the next half century." [excerpt]

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Some time during the summer of 1830, the Rev. Dr. James May, an Episcopal clergyman and at that time rector of St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, boarded a Hudson River steamboat on his way to a well-earned rest in the New York mountains. Sharing the same steamboat and the same destination was “a prominent Presbyterian Clergyman of the city of New York,” the Rev. Dr. George Washington Bethune. The two divines fell to talking denominational shop, and “in the course of their conversation the Presbyterian spoke most favorably of the Protestant Episcopal Church.” May was evidently taken aback; he was not accustomed to unsolicited endorsements from Presbyterian quarters. But Bethune was insistent: “I do not see,” said he, “what is to hinder your Church from becoming the dominant Christian body in this country before the close of the next half century.”

Bethune could not, in 1830, have been speaking strictly in terms of numerical growth. He was, instead, talking about identity, ethos, and purpose, for he had seen the public face of the Episcopal Church transformed by the explosive eruption of an evangelical revival. In little more than two decades, the Episcopal Church had elbowed its way out of the margins of American Protestantism and claimed a place in the mainstream of Protestant evangelicalism, complete with prayer meetings, revivals of “religious sensibility,” and all the trappings of an evangelical and republican religious

culture. And in the peculiar combination of evangelical piety and ancient liturgical structure which that revival fostered, Dr. Bethune perceived the shape of a major re-alignment in American Christianity.

Some ten years later, May found himself on a similar Hudson River steamboat, and to his amazement, he found himself once again in the company of the oracular Dr. Bethune. "They naturally referred to their former meeting and conversation, and to the ecclesiastical events that had in the interval interested the Church at large." Bethune remembered the comment he had made to May about the coming dominance of the Episcopal Church, and asked May if he recalled it. "Yes, perfectly," May innocently replied. "Well," answered Bethune, "I can now tell you why the Protestant Episcopal Church will not be the leading denomination in the next fifty years." We do not know what must have passed through May’s mind as Bethune delivered that sepulchral introduction to the next hour’s conversation, but he probably could guess all too well what was coming. Within one generation after Bethune’s earlier prophecy, the Evangelical tide in the Episcopal Church was ebbing as suddenly as it had flowed, and with it washed away all hope for making the denomination the center of a national Protestant hegemony. "The Presbyterian was right," concluded Benjamin B. Leacock, an evangelical Episcopalian who recorded May’s story in 1883. At the time of May’s first encounter with Bethune, "a liturgical Church, with an earnest, humble, Gospel-preaching ministry, would have been a rallying point for all the conservative elements in the different, and that at time more or less distracted, Church organizations ... until eventually, it would have become the head of the sisterhood of Evangelical Churches in this land." But, as Leacock disgustedly concluded, "the Protestant Episcopal Church threw away its God-given opportunity" and traded its occasion to exercise the national religious hegemony which Bethune had predicted for the more well-known role it would play as the religious preserve of the wealthiest of American elites.

It will be difficult to understand the depth of Leacock’s disgust or Bethune’s disappointment if we accept only the "myth of synthesis" which, in varying proportions, pervades the standard histories of the Episcopal Church in the United States, such as William W. Manross, Charles C. Tiffany, Raymond W. Albright, or James Thayer Addison. This "synthesis," which is a cultural more than a theological construction, involves the suggestion that Episcopalian history, unlike the schismatic and divisive histories of other American denominations, is genetic and comprehensive rather than controversial—that the Episcopal Church has managed to exceptionalize itself, to synthesize “Catholic” and “Protestant,” “Liberal” and “Evangelical,” and disarm the potentially confrontational elements of American religion in a tolerant and elegant embrace. In the process, this myth either disorses the evangelicals of the last century as a minor but unavoidable fluke of nineteenth-century life, or as merely a harmless phase in the life of the Episcopal Church which yielded gracefully and without murmur to the hegemony of a gilt-edged anglo-catholicism. This turning of a blind eye to conflict and destruction should not, after all, come as a total surprise, since the overall historiography of the Episcopal Church is a remarkably incurious affair: for a religious denomination whose immense material presence is so large and so easily recognizable its history has been served largely by self-protective biography and

2Tyng, Memoir of the Rev. Gregory T. Bedell, D.D. (New York, 1859), 324; May was, perhaps not incidentally, something of an illustration of Bethune’s message, since May had been converted during a Presbyterian revival at Jefferson College, and seriously considered entering the Presbyterian ministry before at last deciding to enter the evangelical Episcopal seminary at Alexandria, Virginia in 1825 (Alexander Shiras, Life and Letters of Rev. James May, D.D. [Philadelphia, n.d.], 12-21.


4The “myth of synthesis” is the most obvious in Manross’s A History of the American Episcopal Church (New York, 1950), where the evangelicals are mentioned only on pages 213-219, 228-234, 269-270, 298-300; James Thayer Addison even suggests that the evangelicals were “not true Anglicans” in The Episcopal Church in the United States, 1789-1931 (New York, 1951), but actually gives them longer coverage than Manross, 90-112, 206-213. Albright’s A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church (New York, 1964) gives a much more well-rounded and sympathetic picture of the evangelicals and their numerous societies and campaigns (163-171, 226-251, 270-294), although it is clear in this case that Albright owed a great deal to the one major history of the evangelical/anglo-catholic struggle, Men and Movements in the American Episcopal Church (New York, 1950), by the ex-Methodist and canon historiographer of the Episcopal Church, E. Cloves Chorley.
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self-congratulatory chronicle, and protected from constructive comparison by the peculiar liturgical dialect which Episcopalians deploy as a semiotic screen around their cultus. It will still come, though, as something of shock to stumble over Bethune, May, and Leacock, and realize that in fact the history of the Episcopal Church in the 19th century was deeply cratered by a fierce struggle for the identity of the Episcopal Church, a struggle which on one level pitted classic Protestant dogma against gaudy Catholic ritual, and on yet a more profound level, committed the Evangelical symbols of Whig republicanism to battle against the ambiguous anti-modernism of an industrial consumer culture.

If we must look for a date on which to fasten the first visible eruption of evangelicalism in the Episcopal Church, it must be on the day in 1811 when two remarkably dissimilar individuals were both consecrated as bishops in the Episcopal Church—John Henry Hobart, the high-church bishop of New York, and the new bishop of New England, Alexander Viets Griswold. Just where Griswold’s evangelicalism came from is not clear, but there are at least two major sources we can identify. One, obviously, is the evangelical revival in the Church of England. William Meade, later the evangelical bishop of Virginia, recalled vividly seeing William Wilberforce’s famous Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the hands of his family as a boy, and marked “the blessed change” in Virginia from a latitudinarian to an evangelical diocese from the appearance of the Practical View. And indeed, Griswold’s consecration conversion is an uncanny rhetorical echo of the communion conversion of Charles Simeon, the greatest of the evangelical Anglican preachers. Another source was the Methodists, who were, at least in terms of structure and liturgy, still close enough to Anglicanism for crossovers to take place. But whatever the influences, Griswold’s conversion remained the central plot of evangelical Episcopalianism, and his conversion was soon followed by a rapid flurry of further evangelical conversions and consecrations.

Assembling a collective biography of the evangelicals is not an easy task. One major difficulty is in terminology, since Episcopal historians have used the term evangelical rather loosely, so that it is applied equally to the 19th century evangelical party (who are the subject of this essay), the “liberal evangelicals” who were linked to the broad church and the social gospel, and even modern “Catholic evangelicals” who claim to represent a combination of Anglo-Catholic ritual and “evangelical” interest in promoting missions and biblical study. Evangelical has also been read backwards into early 18th-century Anglicanism to describe Anglicans as various as the Cambridge Platonists and the latitudinarians (who shared common ground with the 19th century evangelicals more in terms of their low-church polity than their soteriology). Some of this can be read simply as an attempt to give coherency to the lengthy and sometimes circular story of Anglican theology; but it can also be read as a further example of the urge toward synthesis. Either way, the result has been to obscure the outlines of what was, at least to these 19th-century evangelicals, a coherent and recognizable movement which formed itself around an experiential pietist Protestantism, a clear-cut biblical absolutism, and the centrality of preaching in the worship of the church.

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4Chorley, Men and Movements, 32.
5W. W. Sweet, “New Light on the Relation of Early American Methodism to the Anglican Clergy in Virginia and North Carolina,” in Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 22 (March 1953), 69–90; see also Albright, A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 154–160.

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6One of the penalties which Episcopal historiography has paid for its complacency has been the failure to identify or assemble some really useful statistics on clergy and communicants (apart from the simple head-counting in diocesan and General Convention reports) from which to formulate a database, to isolate and tag evangelicals and evangelical parishes, and track their subsequent paths. The materials from which such a database could be assembled are not out of reach, in the form of church membership rolls, society memberships and officer lists, and parish histories, and the application of social science methodologies to these sources could yield a substantially fuller social and class picture of the evangelicals and the Episcopal Church in the 19th century. In the absence of such a database, I am content to let this essay be exploratory; there yet remains an enormous but worthwhile work to be done in terms of reconstructing the lives and mentality of evangelical laymen and laywomen (see the forthcoming work of Diana Butler, The Party is the Whole of the Church: The Case of Anna Pierpont,” and Richard Rankin, Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen: The Religion of the Episcopal Elite in North Carolina, 1800–1860. University of South Carolina Press),
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Within this description, a few salient and revealing details can be picked out of the shelf of long-forgotten evangelical clerical biographies and memoirs, beginning with J. K. P. Henshaw’s memoir of Richard Channing Moore and ending with Charles Rockland Tyng’s biography of the elder Stephen Tyng in 1890. There is, undoubtedly, a powerful cast of characters—Moore, to start with, who carried evangelical fire to Virginia in 1814 as bishop of that diocese, and then William Meade, the Ezra to Moore’s Nehemiah, who “never wavered in his adherence to that system of evangelical teaching and practice to which his earliest religious convictions were due, and under the preaching of which he had seen the Church in Virginia rise as though from the dead.” And on the record goes, to include John Johns, Meade’s successor as bishop of Virginia, and Charles Pettit McIlvaine, who began his ministry as chaplain at West Point (and promptly turned the military academy into a uniformed prayer-meeting) and moved in 1832 to become the second bishop of Ohio, where he “preached with unwonted faithfulness the unsearchable riches of Christ.” McIlvaine’s predecessor in Ohio was the most energetic evangelical missionary bishop of them all. Philander Chase, who almost single-handedly founded and built not only the diocese of Ohio, but, after that, the diocese of Illinois and Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio.

But surprisingly few of these leaders came from elite Episcopalian families or, if they did possess elite credentials, they often came from non-Episcopal backgrounds. James Milnor was a well-to-do Philadelphia lawyer, but of Quaker background, and was only pulled into the Episcopal Church by the influence of his wife; he then entered the priesthood in 1814 and turned St. George’s Church in New York into an evangelical hothouse. Joseph Pilmore was a poor Methodist itinerant with the unexpected distinction of being ordained in 1795 by the original high-church bishop of Connecticut, Samuel Seabury. Stephen Higgins Tyng, Sr., was born of a Congregationalist mother and an Episcopalian father, and was regarded as mentally unbalanced by his rector when he explained his conversion. William Sparrow was born in Massachusetts but raised in Ireland, where he was confirmed in the Church of Ireland but converted in “a Dissenting meeting.” Not only were their backgrounds often unpredictable, but sometimes so were their educations. McIlvaine and Johns were both graduates of Princeton Theological Seminary, and wore the impress of Princeton’s Presbyterian Calvinism all their lives.

When compared to the apparently conventional Episcopalian backgrounds of most of the Episcopal leadership of the early Republic—Seabury, William White, Samuel Provoost, James Madison—the comparatively irregular origins of many of the evangelicals tempts us to wonder whether the question of origins suggests a pervasive marginalization among the evangelicals, just as the myth of synthesis insists. But Episcopal evangelicalism was a curious mix of the marginal and the central. Most of the great evangelical parish ministries were in central, urban settings: Milnor was succeeded at St. George’s in New York City by Stephen Tyng, Sr., who had also, before coming to St. George’s, served at Pilmore’s old church in Philadelphia, St. Paul’s. Preaching three times on Sundays and again on Wednesdays, Tyng had packed St. Paul’s so densely that the church was known s “Tyng’s Theatre,” and it was once said that Tyng could have walked from the pulpit to the street over the heads of the congregation. Their regional strength, however, was linked to diocesan leadership: and it is significant that the great evangelical dioceses—Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, Iowa, Illinois—lay at a distance

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from the penetration of market capitalism in the antebellum United States. Still, this was an important margin to occupy. The evangelical Episcopalians showed no desire to lay the foundations for Episcopalianism’s later reputation as the religion of America’s industrial ruling class: McIlvaine, for instance, was highly critical of slavery, colonization, and race prejudice, and lent himself during the Civil War to the Union as Abraham Lincoln’s good-will ambassador to the Church of England; Charles Edward Cheney regularly stood in the chancel of Christ Church, Chicago, to ask for aid and jobs for unemployed workers in the 1860s, along with starting a primitive settlement house.\(^{14}\)

What may tell us even more about the religious dynamism of these evangelicals is the fact that the growth of evangelical parishes and evangelical dioceses took place in spite of “a tacit understanding” from 1835 onwards that divided “the world into two fields,” in which “the domestic department was committed substantially, and practically, to the high church party,” and foreign missions to the evangelicals.\(^{15}\) And far from regarding that division as a political dead end, the American evangelicals threw themselves into foreign missions work with fully as much energy (though with little of the success) of their Church of England counterparts, planting Episcopal missions in Greece, in South America, in Japan, and in the deadly and ill-starred station at Cape Palmas in Liberia.\(^{16}\) From little more than handful of “awakened” Episcopalians like Devereux Jarrett of Virginia and William McClenahan of Philadelphia at the time of the Revolution, the evangelicals claimed the allegiance of two-thirds of the clergy of the church at the General Convention of 1844.\(^{17}\)

Like the English evangelicals, there was a natural logic in their priorities which invited them to set both sacraments and order further down the scale from faith and repentance. Episcopal order, for the evangelicals, was simply one way among many that Protestants might adopt as a way of constructing a church organization, and none of these ways was to be regarded as having any greater biblical or divine sanction than any other. Manton Eastburn, the bishop of Massachusetts and Griswold’s hand-picked successor, argued that the Episcopal Church, by promoting the episcopal scheme of church government, “merely claims to say, with every other Christian body, what is the constitution of the ministry which, among ourselves, is deemed to be after the scriptural and apostolical pattern.” What was important to the evangelicals was the harmony of common belief, not a subordination to a common discipline. The church, Eastburn confidently asserted, “fulminates no ban of excommunication against that uncounted host, who within other pales, are dispensing to famishing millions the bread of life. . . .”\(^{18}\) The openness of their evangelical fraternalism, and the overweening confidence they placed in their liturgy and their stability as a church also combined to lead the evangelicals to their most confident and daring proposition: American evangelical union under the Episcopal banner. As one evangelical bishop, George David Cummins, wrote in 1869:

... Oh! if this Church of ours could rise to the grand conception that she is wise enough and comprehensive enough to take such a stand, who can doubt that she would bind to her by hooks of steel every waversing son, make herself fitted to be the great American Church, and win


\(^{17}\)Albright, A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 169; Albright’s numbers seem unreflectively high, but it is also worth considering that evangelicalism in the Church of England at mid-century yields some comparable numbers — see Ian Barclay, The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians (New York, 1976), 63; Peter Toon, Evangelical Theology, 1833–1856: A Response to Tractarianism (Atlanta, 1979), 2; and Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church (New York, 1966), 446.

\(^{18}\)Eastburn, The Moderation of the Protestant Episcopal Church (Boston, 1849), 7.
from the penetration of market capitalism in the antebellum United States. Still, this was an important margin to occupy. The evangelical Episcopalians showed no desire to lay the foundations for Episcopalianism’s later reputation as the religion of America’s industrial ruling class: McIlvaine, for instance, was highly critical of slavery, colonization, and race prejudice, and lent himself during the Civil War to the Union as Abraham Lincoln’s good-will ambassador to the Church of England; Charles Edward Cheney regularly stood in the chancel of Christ Church, Chicago, to ask for aid and jobs for unemployed workers in the 1860s, along with starting a primitive settlement house.14

What may tell us even more about the religious dynamism of these evangelicals is the fact that the growth of evangelical parishes and evangelical dioceses took place in spite of “a tacit understanding” from 1835 onwards that divided “the world into two fields,” in which “the domestic department was committed substantially, and practically, to the high church party,” and foreign missions to the evangelicals.15 And far from regarding that division as a political dead end, the American evangelicals threw themselves into foreign missions work with fully as much energy (though with little of the success) of their Church of England counterparts, planting Episcopal missions in Greece, in South America, in Japan, and in the deadly and ill-starred station at Cape Palmas in Liberia.16 From little more than handful of “awakened” Episcopalians like Devereux Jarrett of Virginia and William McClennahan of Philadelphia at the time of the Revolution, the evangelicals claimed the allegiance of two-thirds of the clergy of the church at the General Convention of 1844.17

Like the English evangelicals, there was a natural logic in their priorities which invited them to set both sacraments and order further down the scale from faith and repentance. Episcopal order, for the evangelicals, was simply one way among many that Protestants might adopt as a way of constructing a church organization, and none of these ways was to be regarded as having any greater biblical or divine sanction than any other. Manton Eastburn, the bishop of Massachusetts and Griswold’s hand-picked successor, argued that the Episcopal Church, by promoting the episcopal scheme of church government, “merely claims to say, with every other Christian body, what is the constitution of the ministry which, among ourselves, is deemed to be after the scriptural and apostolical pattern.” What was important to the evangelicals was the harmony of common belief, not a subordination to a common discipline. The church, Eastburn confidently asserted, “fulminates no ban of excommunication against that uncounted host, who within other pales, are dispensing to famishing millions the bread of life. . . .”18 The openness of their evangelical fraternality, and the overarching confidence they placed in their liturgy and their stability as a church also combined to lead the evangelicals to their most confident and daring proposition: American evangelical union under the Episcopal banner. As one evangelical bishop, George David Cummins, wrote in 1869:

... Oh! if this Church of ours could rise to the grand conception that she is wise enough and comprehensive enough to take such a stand, who can doubt that she would bind to her by hooks of steel every wavering son, make herself fitted to be the great American Church, and win


17Albright, A History of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 169; Albright’s numbers seem unreflectively high, but it is also worth considering that evangelicalism in the Church of England at mid-century yields some comparable numbers — see Ian Barclay, The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians (New York, 1976), 63; Peter Toon, Evangelical Theology, 1833–1856: A Response to Tractarianism (Atlanta, 1979), 2; and Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church (New York, 1966), 446.

18Eastburn, The Moderation of the Protestant Episcopal Church (Boston, 1849), 7.
to her vast multitudes now standing aloof from her, uncertain whither she is tending...  

Alfred Lee, the evangelical bishop of Delaware, spoke similarly in his controversial sermon to the General Convention in 1868 of "a bright vision" which "has often risen before my mind of a Church pure and primitive" which would be "a rallying point for those who are weary of sectarian strife, a candlestick of the Lord, whose radiance should illumine our cities and forests, our mountains and plains."

In antebellum America, where the schismatic tendencies of American Protestantism had exfoliated sect after sect, the evangelical Episcopalians developed their own "myth of synthesis," in which Americans weary of religious strife and division would flock to unite themselves under an evangelical Episcopal Church.

These prospects may have enthralled the evangelicals; they appalled the remnants of the old high-church party who, in the 1820s and 1830s, found their principal spokesman in John Henry Hobart of New York. Hobart prized orthodoxy, orderliness and the liturgy as the substance of his religion, and he took the Episcopalian evangelicals' affection for prayer meetings and other non-liturgical services as evidence of a secret distaste for the Prayer Book. This apparent denominational fussiness had an important political message, for the decades of Hobart's episcopate coincided with the political triumph of an egalitarian brand of democracy, carrying its hero, Andrew Jackson, into the White House in 1828. Not all Americans were pleased with the violence of democratic politics and the slouchiness of democratic culture, and conservatives of rank and traditional station cast around for associations and alternatives to soothe their frustration and alienation. They located such an alternative in Hobart's high-churchmanship, finding there a dignified and orderly refuge from the passionate barbarism which was fast becoming a trademark of American life.

The evangelical Episcopalians responded to the high churchmen with a mixture of annoyance and embarrassment. If high churchmanship carried within itself an aristocratic and Old Worldish sense of distaste for American culture, the evangelicals represented one of a number of attempts by Episcopalians after the Revolution to come to terms with their American identity and the influence of republicanism. The republican ideology of the 18th and early 19th centuries in the United States was a compound of secular political philosophy, classical rhetoric, and religious moralism, and its chief attraction was the balance it offered between the unappetizing patriarchal politics of monarchy and the rampant individualism of Locke's Two Treatises on Government. Republicanism preached the supremacy of personal rights; but since the uncontained exercise of personal rights could easily lead to inequality, luxury, and finally corruption, the republicans corralled the anarchy of rights with an obligation to "virtue." Transferred to religious structures, republicanism offered the possibility of holding individual religious interests in tension with the fear of corruption and luxury; and if we can regard the 1789 General Convention as the Glorious Revolution of the Episcopal Church, then the balance struck by the evangelicals between the religious individualism of conversion and the obligation to the larger community of the prayerbook and the episcopate seemed to be as close to the republican ideal of "mixed government" as a church order was likely to get. This also explains the ambiguity the evangelicals felt toward the episcopate: on the one hand, it was the symbol of the most ancient monarchy in Christendom, but on the other, it could be used to diminish and restrain corruption, luxury, and individual religious self-interest. Like government itself in the republican ideology, episcopacy had to be constrained and exalted at the same time.

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20Lee, The Sermon delivered at the Opening of the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church... Wednesday, Oct. 7th, 1868 (New York, 1868), 29.

21Robert Bruce Mullin, Episcopalianism/American Reality: High Church Theology and Social Thought in Evangelical America (New Haven, 1986), 5-9, 60-72.
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The problem of choice for the evangelicals in the 1820s, however, was that there were multiple brands of republicanism on offer in the United States. The most politically successful (at least in terms of winning the American presidency), was the radicalized republicanism which emerged under the banner of Andrew Jackson and the Democratic Republicans; the Democrats, however, recruited comparatively few of the evangelical Episcopalians. As Daniel Walker Howe and Charles G. Sellers have both shown, “Moderate Light” evangelical Protestants occupied much of the same cultural middle ground which was being formed in the 1830s around the National Republicans (or Whigs), who were attempting to pour the new wine of protectionism, industrialism, and nationalism into the old wineskins of republican virtue and independence. Like the Whigs (and like other evangelical Protestants), the Episcopalian evangelicals prided themselves on promoting “simplicity” or “luxury”; their distaste for concentrating church power in the hands of an apostolic episcopate dovetailed finely with the Whig resistance to Jackson’s “imperial” presidency; their affection for pan-evangelical unity echoed the Whig call for national unity against the spectre of state democracy (and the egalitarian localism of the Baptists); and, above all, like the Whigs, they were happy to welcome the rewards of small-producer mercantile prosperity into their fellowship. Like the Whigs again, they derived much of their influence from expanding urban centers and from the border South, the old mid-West, and New England, and the period of evangelical ascendance coincides almost entirely with the rise and collapse of the Whigs.

And so it comes as no surprise to find the leadership of the evangelical Episcopalians turning to the Whigs (and later to the Republicans of the 1850s) for political identity, and the Whigs finding a congenial ally among the evangelical Episcopalians. “Every one now begins to see,” wrote John Alonzo Clark, “that the principles of our church are in most delightful harmony with republican government.”

Henry Clay, who gave the Whigs their name and most of their prestige, turned Episcopalian in 1847 and was confirmed by the evangelical bishop of Kentucky, Benjamin Bosworth Smith; the political “brains” of the Republicans in the 1850s was Salmon Portland Chase, an evangelical Episcopalian and nephew of Philander Chase, the pioneering evangelical bishop of Ohio and Illinois; Anna Pierpont, Charles McIlvaine’s “spiritual friend,” cheered on Whig electors in New York City, and McIlvaine clashed seriously during the war with the Democratic (and anglo-catholic) bishop of Illinois, Henry John Whitehouse, for allowing Ohio priests to preach “republican loyalty” in Illinois; the Episcopal missionaries who sacrificed themselves on the altar of the Liberian mission were martyrs to a cause which was widely understood to be the preparation for that great Whig solution to the slavery question, West African colonization. And so, in distinction to Hobart on the one hand and Andrew Jackson on the other, the American evangelicals sought to cultivate “republican” Whig attitudes, and to advertise their church as the embodiment of what C. M. Butler called, “Republican Loyalty.”

And yet it would be wrong to overlook the differences that separated the high churchmen from the evangelical Episcopalians. Despite Hobart’s suspicions, the evangelicals’ republicanism, like Whig political culture, was reluctant to criticize authoritarian symbols of cultural discipline, and it cultivated cultural uniformity. The prayer book or the episcopate held undeniable power for the evangelicals for the value they had as symbols of restraint, virtue


23Clark, A Walk About Zion (New York, 1869), 59.


26Howe, Political Culture of the American Whigs, 20.
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Anglo-catholicism is a long story, and not one which can be told in this short space; suffice it to say, however, that anglo-catholicism's rediscovery of pre-Reformation sacramental doctrine and the notion of apostolic succession through the Church of England represented a challenge to Protestant evangelicalism that made John Henry Hobart pale by comparison.29 Bishop McIlvaine struck savagely at anglo-catholicism as "a lamentable departure from the true doctrines of the Gospel, and of the Church of England . . . to those doctrinal corruptions of the Church of Rome of which the Temple of God, in England, was cleansed, at the blessed era of the protestant Reformation."30 McIlvaine's alarm was quickly taken up by John Johns,

Stephen H. Tyng, Alfred Lee, William Meade, and Manton Eastburn.31 "A very moderate degree of penetration," announced Bishop Lee, "suffices to discern the legitimate issue of this . . . scheme in avowed Romanism."32 Merely by itself, the concept of priesthood promoted by the anglo-catholics, Lee added, "is an invasion and usurpation of the exclusive priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ."33 One evangelical rector, R. W. Harris, erupted:

We ask . . . what there is, that is imposing in the spectacle of men, of supposed sense and profession education, dressing themselves up in attire, strange and ludicrous, as well from its fantastic shape, as from its flimsy material . . . and increased yet more in its absurdity by posture and grimace, and little boys dressed up in gay or sad garb, as the feast day or fast day may demand . . . Nor can I understand how two such pretended priests, arrayed like mountebanks, when they look at each other in the vestry, and form their little cortège with their boys to go into church, before the people, can keep their countenances, in the solemn sham, and go through their parade without crimson cheeks, for the very effeminacy. No—if ever device deserved to be driven from the temple with a whip of small cords, it is this presumptuous folly of stage performance by ministers in a Protestant-Church—nor can it be denounced, ever, in terms too severe.34

As the echoes of gender hostility and public performance in Harris's complaint indicate, the anglo-catholics posed a threat to the evangelicals on a deeper and more disorienting level than confessional theology. They knew, or sensed, from the start that anglo-catholicism, with its medieval ritual and Gothic vestments, promoted a visual sense of a passion and an intensity which easily surpassed bourgeois evangelical respectability or sterile high churchmanship. They offered in other words, what the republican simplicity of the

28Stevens, The Past and the Present at St. Andrew's: Two Discourses preached in St. Andrew's Church, Philadelphia, on the 12th and 19th of September, 1858 (Philadelphia, 1858), 75.
29Chadwick, The Victorian Church, 213.
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They transform the pure and simple worship of an Evangelical Church . . . into a routine of bowings and prostrations, of chantings and processions, of decorations and varied robes, of albs, dalmatics, chasubles and maniples, of variegated altar cloths, and frontals and super-frontals, until the whole of that which our fathers established, as a pure dignified and spiritual worship becomes a confused and shifting scene of debasing and ridiculous superstition far in aspect and influence, from that "worship of the Father in spirit and in truth" which our glorious Lord appointed and our reformed and Evangelical Church received.35

The late 19th century contained a number of anti-modern movements, some of which were secular (like William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement) or religious (like Horace Bushnell's romantic "organicism"), and like them anglo-catholicism provided its followers and admirers with a sense of accommodation with the modern world of industrial and finance capitalism, while still granting them the illusion of protest against it. The sacred symbols of the anglo-catholics—like Ralph Adams Cram's Gothic cathedrals—were also the ultimate symbols of Victorian affluence, and taken together, they suggest a new attempt to rationalize the aggressive power of Anglo-American capitalism without wholly repudiating it. Anglo-catholicism created, as it were, an embarrassment of ritual—a combination of excitement, pleasure, and consumption as the solution to the religious doubt which marked off the other major capitalist cultures of northern Europe.36 It offered its devotees an economy of performance, where the religious product could be consumed or viewed by a self-conscious elite bent upon a new ethic of consumption rather than the older republican ethic of production.


By contrast, the culture of the evangelicals was predicated on a persistence in a pre-industrial mode of cultural explanation which borrowed and lent freely with natural law and republican Whiggism—or, to put it another way, they viewed liturgy as possessing only the value of production (in that it inculcated the correct relationships and ideas) rather than the value of consumption (which is to be affected or to be displayed). Their contempt for "apostolic succession" and ceremonial, and their enthusiasm for evangelical unity, cut a profile remarkably similar to the Whiggish pre-occupation with a producer (as opposed to a consumer) ethic, while their obsession with the right of private judgment suggests an easy relationship between a Protestant slogan and the tenets of classic eighteenth-century civic republicanism.

The difficulty with this situation for the evangelicals was that it would be exceeding hard for them to attack the anglo-catholic culture without at the same time striking sparks off the theology of the high-churchmen, since the high-churchmen, even though they hugely disliked the anglo-catholics, also remained bleakly suspicious and resistant to the evangelicals. Between 1840 and 1873, evangelical episcopalians grappled with this dilemma by proposing three methods for sealing off the doors of the church to ritualism, each of which partook in varying degree of the cultural conflict as well as the theological and liturgical hostility which separated the two parties. The most ingenious evangelical strategy was an ecumenical one, for the strongest ground the evangelicals possessed in the American republic was their republican fellow-feeling for the other evangelical denominations, and it was possible to use that (at least in terms of public rhetoric) as a stick with which to beat anglo-catholic exclusivism. This strategy took the shape of the 1853 Muhlenberg Memorial, proposed by the eccentric New York City evangelical, William Augustus Muhlenberg.37 The Memorial made three basic recommendations:

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\(^{36}\) Paul A. Carter, The Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age (DeKalb, 1971), 179–189.

(a) the extension of episcopal ordination to non-episcopal clergy; (b) the loosening of restrictions on "opinion, discipline and worship" for those presently within the Episcopal Church; (c) stronger ecumenical ties with other Protestant denominations to effect "a Church unity in the Protestant Christendom of our land." Looked at from the perspective of a century-and-a-half, the Muhlenberg Memorial was one of the finer moments in the history of Anglican ecumenicity. It was also too much an exercise in nationalist republicanism, and the Muhlenberg Memorial won little ground with the high church bishops, who were aghast at Muhlenberg's proposals.

The failure of the Muhlenberg Memorial compelled the evangelicals to look in a different direction for safeguards from the Anglo-catholics, and the direction which the majority found themselves looking toward was revision of the Book of Common Prayer. Prior to the 1840s, the evangelicals had few objections to any aspect of the prayer book. Now, however, the new American converts of the Oxford Movement smilingly opened the Book of Common Prayer and insisted that "regenerate" could only mean moral regeneration; that priest could only mean a full-fledged sacrificial actor after the Roman model; and that these "priests" at their ordinations received "the Holy Ghost" from the hands of the bishop, denying thereby that the Holy Ghost was available to any other than those ordained by bishops in regular succession from the apostles. In reply, the evangelicals began angrily demanding unheard-of changes in the liturgy, and signing petitions begging for relief from the use of regenerate in baptism, priest in ordination, and others—in short, they asked the church to prevent the transformation of the prayer book from a volume of rational theological propositions to a manual for emotive performance. But alteration of the prayer book was precisely what no high churchman was prepared to grant, even in the direst straits and even for the goal of silencing the Anglo-catholic annoyance. High-churchmen prized their prayer book almost as much as their bibles, and they could not see why the Anglo-catholic effort to re-interpret the Book of Common Prayer gave any grounds for the evangelicals to mutilate it. The evangelicals compounded the disastrous impact of their proposals by a fatal inability to present a united front on exactly what revisions were to be made. Diocesan conferences on revision were called, and at least three separate attempts were made to produce an acceptable revision, the first in November, 1867, again in 1868, and yet again in the summer of 1869, until at length a Union Prayer Book was published in 1870. But the proposed revisions failed utterly to meet with the approval of the evangelical bishops, who would inevitably be the key players in any effort to have liturgical revisions adopted by the General Convention.

The evangelicals' most controversial and repellent strategy was canonical: they began to press for changes in the canon law of the church which would forbid the liturgical innovations (especially in vestments and ceremony) of the Anglo-catholics. This quixotic campaign against ritualism reached its high-water mark in the General Convention of 1868, when the evangelicals submitted for debate nearly twenty memorials calling for new canons which would restrict Anglo-catholic ritualism, culminating in John N. Conyngham's "Canon on the Manner of Conducting Divine Worship." Conyngham's canon, which represented a minority report of the


40William Sparrow, The Christian Ministry: An Address delivered at the Annual Commencement of the Theological Seminary of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Diocese of Virginia, June 24, 1869 (New York, 1869), 8–9, 17; Alfred Lee, Sermon delivered at the Opening of the General Convention, 21–27; Henry Van Dyke Johns, The Protestant Episcopal Pastor Teaching the People Committed to His Charge (Baltimore, 1842), 14–19.

41On the various revision committees, see Benjamin Aycrig, Memoirs of the Reformed Episcopal Church and of the Protestant Episcopal Church (New York, 1880), 127 for 1867. Albright, History of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 276 for 1868, and Benjamin B. Leacock, Personal Recollections Connected with the Reformed Episcopal Church, 15 for 1869.
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Committee on Constitution and Canons, called for the elimination of any vestments beyond "surplice, stole, bands or gown," the suppression of "candlesticks, crucifixes, super-altars," and the prevention of either "bowing at the name of Jesus, except in repeating the Creed" or the elevation of the bread and wine during the communion or "the use of Incense." As such, Conyngham's canon aimed purely and nakedly at restriction, something which ironically contradicted the open-handed and comprehensive proposals of the Muhlenberg Memorial. But irony or no, the Conyngham canon actually illustrated the cultural grievances of the evangelicals at their starkest, since the canon was virtually an evangelical declaration of hostility to the economy of consumption and performance which came to dominate late-19th-century America, an economy which, as T. J. Jackson Lears and W. S. F. Pickering have shown, the anglo-catholics proved themselves superbly equipped to assimilate. What is amazing in retrospect is how close the evangelicals came to pulling it off. The impasse caused by Conyngham's canon was resolved only by referring it to the House of Bishops for a ruling at the next General Convention in 1871. But the House of Bishops as a whole was too badly divided to come to an agreement on its own committee's report, and when the General Convention assembled in Baltimore in October, 1871, the bishops simply handed the committee report back to the lay delegates and waited for them to take the first action. The evangelicals fought a long and tenacious rear-guard action in defense of the canon, but after twenty days of nearly-continuous debate, the canon was finally put to the question, and perished in a narrowly divided vote taken by dioceses and orders.43

On all three counts—ecumenical, liturgical, and canonical—the evangelicals had failed either to exclude anglo-catholic influence from the Episcopal Church, or obtain guarantees to protect themselves within it. "No liberty to Protestant principles—and no restraint on Ritualistic fooleries—this was the spirit of the 1868 Convention," wrote one embittered delegate:

As Evangelical men we have no relief, no help or comfort to expect from the legislation of the Church. We have nothing to look for from the action of our General Convention but oppression, such as has now been inaugurated, increased and intensified, till conscience and loyalty to God and his truth can bear it no longer.45

The failure of the evangelicals to quash the anglo-catholics produced, in turn, two bitter legacies. For one thing, the unwillingness of the high-churchmen to rally against the anglo-catholics destroyed the fragile trust evangelicals and high churchmen had once shared, for neither evangelical nor high churchmen ever fully comprehended the motives for each other's actions. "The High Church men will vote with the Ritualists rather than with the Evangelical men," complained the same anonymous delegate, "These two parties have united; and this union gives them control of the Church."46 This, in turn, left the anglo-catholics free to antagonize the evangelicals pretty much as they pleased. And antagonize they did, for the atmosphere which settled over the Episcopal Church in the 1860s and 1870s was not synthetic, but antithetic. And it was a struggle in which the odds weighed heavily against the evangelicals, for anglo-catholicism possessed a significant tactical advantage over their evangelical brethren in the influence they quickly acquired in church education. The General Theological Seminary in New York City was the Oxford Movement's port of entry into American Episcopalianism, and its prominence as the most important of the three then-existing major Episcopal seminaries (the other two were the evangelical seminaries at Alexandria, Virginia, and Gambier, Ohio) gave the

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The process is simple. A Rector dies or removes. An active minority under outside influence rise up, to oppose the election of a successor of like decided principles. They propose a high churchman. A contest follows which ends in the election of a compromise man who is called by his friends, not a Bible Christian and spiritual minister, but a "Prayer Book churchman," and a "no party man." Under his influence and work, there is a rapid "toning up" in church views. Chancel furniture, church decorations, church services undergo a revolution, and soon the parish is absorbed by the prevailing system. Any observing man . . . can count such cases almost by scores.\(^47\)

The evangelicals, already angered at Anglo-catholic doctrinal curiosities and restricted by their agreement to stay out of domestic missions, were reduced to gibbering fury by such liturgical naughtiness. One apoplectic evangelical clergyman warned in the columns of The Episcopalian in 1869 that the policy of the Anglo-catholics "is to drive out the evangelical party, to drive them to the sects, to get possession of their churches, to crush their braver spirits singly, and to annoy and harass as far as practicable where they cannot cajole, and bring into line."\(^48\) And throughout the 1860s, prominent evangelicals like Stephen H. Tyng, Jr., Charles E. Cheney, and John W. Cracraft were targeted for trial for canonical "offenses" (Cheney's crime was the deliberate omission of the word regenerate from the baptismal office) and deposition.

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Forty years ago, the vast majority of the laity, a goodly proportion of the clergy, and nearly one-half of the House of Bishops, were avowedly evangelical low churchmen. To-day the old evangelical party is like the race of moundbuilders of our Western plains. It is hopelessly extinct.\(^49\)

Others, like the Tyngs and Heman Dyer, hung on in the church and retired. A number of others, like Phillips Brooks, joined the emerging broad church party in the 1890s, although given the theological liberalism of the broad churchers, the only continuity which would exist between them and the old evangelicals would be their mutual distaste for Oxford finery. What is certain, is that by the 1880s, the old Episcopal evangelicalism had virtually ceased to exist.

The Episcopal Church thus provided no refuge from war and contest in the 19th century, war which the evangelicals lost and in which they suffered what can only be called destruction as a movement and as a religious culture. That destruction was partially their own responsibility. The new forms of communication, sensibility, and display created by the rise of commercial culture could not be satisfied with the spare simplicity of the evangelicals, and so their once-great audience in the Episcopal Church melted away to the elaborate edifices and costly ceremonial of the Anglo-catholics, where the status needs of a consumer culture could find greater solace. It did not help, either, that the evangelicals were also plagued by dissension and poor leadership; that their bishops were harassed by the competing clamor of liberalism and sectarian revivalism and

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Finally, at what was really the last gasp of the old Episcopal evangelicalism, one evangelical bishop—George David Cummins of Kentucky—decided that the only alternative to the complete suffocation of evangelical Anglicanism in America was the organization of a new Episcopal Church. The occasion of his decision arrived without warning in October 1873, when, as one of the participants in the worldwide convention of the Evangelical Alliance in New York City, Cummins presided at an inter-church communion at the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. He awoke to find in the New York papers attacks on his integrity and threats of trial and deposition for having violated the canons. This, for Cummins, was the straw laid on top of a great deal of grief he had endured over anglo-catholicism in Kentucky, and on November 10th he resigned his bishopric with the announced intention of “transferring” his episcopate to “another sphere.” On 2 December 1873, he presided at the organization of the Reformed Episcopal Church. Forty-three years has passed since 1830, and Cummins had at his back only six clergy and twenty laypeople. For the old evangelicals, it was much too little, much too late.

And so their story dropped into an oblivion which 19th-century anglo-catholics, and 20th-century liberal catholic church historians, were only too relieved to cover over with the myth of synthesis. To be sure, some of this oblivion, like their fall from grace, was the fault of the evangelicals themselves. They inscribed too much of their discourse in the minutes and records of societies and conferences which have now been entirely lost, and in an extensive pamphlet literature which has proven difficult (if not downright impossible) for archivists and librarians to save or re-locate. And even though they published numerous magazines and newspapers, it is difficult for modern historians to decode the peculiar language system of Episcopalians, or to outflank the fatal evangelical habit of relying on anonymous correspondents. Above all, comparatively few of the evangelicals made the critical transition from weekly or monthly periodicals to the more durable form of the book.50

But the single most obvious difficulty in decoding the disappearance of the old evangelicals was the urge of 20th century Episcopal church historians to apply the myth of synthesis as the principal cultural mechanism for establishing, not merely the better manners of Episcopalians when compared to their fractious Protestant competitors, but also how virtuous, natural and uncontested the modern paradigms of Episcopal theology were. As late as 1946, the Episcopal bishop of California, Edward L. Parsons, could review E. Clowes Chorley’s account of the evangelicals in Men and Movements in the American Episcopal Church with a dismissive wave of the hand. The evangelicals were simply the last moment of a Hegelian swing toward individualism, wrote Parsons, and in the downswing toward “community,” they had merely been absorbed into the larger movement of the social dialectic. “The futility of it all is clear enough today,” Parsons sighed, and even though “one can sympathize with these men who seemed to see everything for which they stood swept away,” the reality was that “they did not know that they belonged to a past age.” The saving grace of this story for Parsons was the triumph of synthesis, for as soon as the evangelicals one-by-one came to realize that history was not on their side, they also realized that it was time to move with the dialectic and find within themselves the substance of a long-unrealized catholicism. “All intelligent Evangelicals,” said Parsons, in one of

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50 Compare the similarities between the accessibility of evangelical texts and the difficulties Michael O'Brien described in penetrating the cultural texts of the antebellum South, in "On the Mind of the Old South and Its Accessibility," in Intellectual History Newsletter 4 (Spring 1982), 3–12.
the most well-meaning but imperialistic statements of the myth of synthesis, were "essentially Anglo-Catholics" anyway.\(^{31}\) The moral of the story was, of course, that just as evangelicalism was capable of an unbleeding synthesis into catholicism, so the process should continue to move forward as Episcopal theology turned to ever newer and more liberal configurations. The job of the church historian, as a result, was assumed to be the task of tidying up the debris of such re-configurations, so that synthesis rather than conflict became the stuff of the historical record. No wonder that, when Paul A. Carter tried to unearth material on Cummins's 1873 schism for a chapter in what became The Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age (1971), he was frustrated to find Episcopalians "reluctant" even to admit the existence of the evangelicals.\(^{32}\)

But like the myth of "consensus" in American secular historiography, the myth of Episcopal synthesis could survive only so long as the politics of the Episcopal Church itself could maintain some verisimilitude of synthesis. When newer theological winds began blowing through the Episcopal Church in the 1960s (not the least of which was a wholly unlooked-for revival of charismatic evangelicalism) large blocs of Episcopalians, many of whom were uncomplicated theological and liturgical heirs of the anglo-catholics, found themselves confronted, marginalized, and complaining in ways strangely reminiscent of the evangelicals a century before. While many of the consequences of this conflict still await ultimate resolution, the renewed discovery of contradictory, and sometimes destructive, visions within the Episcopal Church may help along the project of questioning the myth of synthesis, and compel acknowledgement (a) that the disappearance of the evangelical Episcopalians was a deliberate act of choice to forego genuine cultural hegemony in American life, (b) that Episcopal history cannot be told as a story of serene exceptionalism from the broader tides of American cultural

and religious history, and (c) that Episcopalians, even since the days of Seabury and White, have enjoyed no immunity from cultural strife.

For some people, however, this painful recognition may still come too late. Twenty years ago, when the Philadelphia Divinity School (where James May had briefly taught) closed its doors for the last time and merged with the Episcopal seminary in Cambridge to become the Episcopal Divinity School, nearly every bell, book, and candle, and even the memorial tablets in the walkways, were removed. They left behind only two modest memorials, which are still fixed onto the wall of the deserted St. Mark's Chapel. They memorialize Gregory Townsend Bedell and John Alonzo Clark, the two most beloved evangelical Episcopal priests of the 19th century. And they stayed behind in Philadelphia, amid the bare ruin'd choirs, because nobody any longer remembered who the men they memorialized had been.

Allen C. Guelzo, is the Grace F. Kea associate professor of American history, Eastern College, St. David's, Pennsylvania.

\(^{31}\) Parsons, in his review of Chorley, in HMPEC 15 (September 1946), 7–8.

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