If evangelicalism is about proclaiming the good news, evangelical religion has existed since the beginnings of the Christian Church recorded in the book of Acts. At times it has emerged and re-emerged in bursts of renewed intensity as the earlier charisma was seen as having faded. In England, instances might be seen in Wycliffe and the Lollards, the Reformation, and the Cromwellian period. In 1531, for example, Sir Thomas More referred to the advocates of the Reformation as 'Evangelicalles'. Later in the following century Baxter and Bunyan proclaimed the cross and 'justification by faith' with equal forcefulness. Nevertheless, from about the middle of the eighteenth century until about 1860 there seems to have been a much more clearly defined 'evangelicalism' which exhibited several distinctive characteristics. These have been variously stated by a number of recent writers including Rennie, Bebbington, Hilton and Hylson-Smith.\(^1\) Bebbington gives them as four: 'conversionism', 'activism', 'biblicism' and 'crucicentrism'.\(^2\) By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, however, evangelicalism had become a rather more diverse phenomenon and not so easy to delineate. As Lord Shaftesbury in his later years once remarked: 'I knew what constituted an Evangelical in former times. I have no clear notion what constitutes one now'.\(^3\)

Evangelical 'conversionism' within this period had several aspects. It was invariably preceded by acknowledgements of wretchedness, guilt and personal sinfulness. This was followed by a realization of peace and forgiveness and what Hilton calls 'the all important contractual relationship' with Christ.\(^4\) The relationship was made a reality by the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. This aspect the evangelical movement derived from the Wesleys. No longer was conversion seen in terms of intellectual assent to sound doctrine or in

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\(^2\) See Bebbington, *Evangelicals*, 1–19.

\(^3\) Ibid.

subsequent good works which could be inspected; it was also to be experienced in the heart. What Wesley termed ‘personal religion’ came to be the heart of this conversionism. Conversion was often sudden among the Methodists, but Anglican Evangelicals were less committed to this. Charles Simeon, their acknowledged leader, once retorted: ‘we require nothing sudden’.

‘Crucicentrism’ denotes the standard view of the evangelicals that Christ died as a substitute for sinful mankind. This was the sole basis of ‘justification’ or being made right with God. As far as evangelicals were concerned, what Christ had done in the believer, namely effected sanctification, made no contribution to justification; nor did baptism or any sacramental act, as certain high churchmen asserted.

‘Biblicism’ refers to the evangelicals’ devotion to the Bible. They believed it to be unique and divinely inspired, and the sole source book for the doctrine of salvation. This does not mean that they all held eccentric views or were extreme literalists in their interpretation of the text.

The ‘activism’ of evangelicalism sprang to some extent from the conviction of personal accountability. The biblical text which hung over the mantlepiece in many evangelical homes, as E.P. Thompson has reminded us, was ‘Thou God seest me’. Evangelicals believed themselves to be answerable for the way in which they spent every moment of the day. This meant that they threw themselves wholeheartedly into preaching and works of philanthropy. There was little time for rest or relaxation.

These appear to have been the most significant features which marked off evangelicalism as a distinctive phenomenon from approximately the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries. It was a movement which embraced both protestant Nonconformity as well as the established church.

Within nineteenth-century Evangelical Anglicanism, however, it is possible to see two distinctive strands emerging. The earlier phase had its roots in the activities of John Venn, William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect. Their stance, which was fairly broadly based and favoured generous open-hearted social action, was reflected in their journal, Christian Observer, which they had founded in 1802. On the other hand, in the 1820s a new and progressively introverted form of Anglican Evangelicalism began to emerge. Ian Rennie and others have dated this from the time when Robert Haldane took up the editorship of the newly founded periodical, the Record. During the 1830s the ‘Recordites’ moved increasingly into a narrow and withdrawn posture towards contemporary culture. In later years they did battle with Darwin, biblical criticism and ritualism.

Boyd Hilton has distinguished helpfully between the two groups, 5

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5 See S.G. Dimond, The psychology of the Methodist revival (London, 1926), 5.
whom he styles the ‘Clapham Moderates’ and the ‘Extremists’. The ‘Moderates’ preached ‘Christ and him crucified’. The ‘Extremists’ preached the same but stressed also ‘Christ coming very soon’. The Clapham school generally took a more cheerful view of private and national misfortune, believing that in many cases it was the natural consequence of misguided action or error. The ‘Extremists’ sometimes even welcomed disaster as a sign of the last days! The ‘Moderates’ generally had a more cheerful and affirming attitude to the pleasures of living than the ‘Extremists’. They were post-millennialists who saw the need to build and work towards the New Jerusalem. The ‘Extremists’ were pre-millennialists and hence believed that social improvement would only come after the second coming of Christ. Not surprisingly, therefore, many of them became increasingly drawn away from the social activism of the Clapham moderates.

The ‘Moderate’ Anglican Evangelicals tended to be ‘dry’, at least in comparison to the ‘Extremists’ who emphasized emotional experience of a rather more fervent nature including speaking in tongues, prophecy, and the other charismatic gifts. Again, the Moderates were not antipathetic to scientific discovery, whereas the ‘Recordites’ opposed any accommodation with science. The ‘Moderates’ believed the Bible to be inspired, but they were not literalists or fundamentalists as the ‘Extremists’ became in the 1840s.

It is the thesis of this paper that John Bird Sumner was born into the Clapham moderate evangelical tradition and remained firmly within its boundaries until the day that he died as primate of all England in 1862. Indeed, his death might perhaps be regarded as marking the effective end of the moderate school of nineteenth-century Anglican Evangelicalism.

John Bird’s parents were the Reverend Robert and Hannah Sumner. Robert was educated at Eton and then at King’s College, Cambridge, where his father was provost. After receiving his degree he remained as a fellow for three years until 1774, when he left to marry and become incumbent of the parish of Kenilworth in Warwickshire. It is difficult to be certain as to the precise nature of the religion which was lived and preached in the Sumner household, but it is quite likely to have been influenced by the growing Evangelical Movement. Kenilworth itself was touched by the Methodist Revival, and Hannah’s cousin, William Wilberforce, had experienced his evangelical conversion in 1785. It is difficult to imagine that he did not share his

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7 Ibid., 22.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
new-found faith with his close-knit family circle. Certainly we know from extant letters that Hannah Sumner corresponded with William Wilberforce on family and religious matters.\(^{12}\)

John Bird, who was born in 1780, received his earliest education in Kenilworth rectory before the age of twelve, when he was sent to Eton. According to an article in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1798, what religion there was in the school at that time was minimal, dry and formal. Sumner left Eton in 1798. He was top of his year and obtained a scholarship to King's College, Cambridge, where his uncle, Humphrey Sumner, was provost. Among the fellows at this time was the celebrated Charles Simeon (1759–1836) who had earlier undergone an evangelical experience in 1779. Simeon was a man of great grace and charm who had soon endeared himself to the provost, who subsequently appointed him as College dean of Divinity. He was thus in a position to exercise great influence over the lives of the undergraduates and more junior members of the college. Like many of the students of his generation, John Bird was touched by Simeon’s influence,\(^{13}\) and became a convinced evangelical. Simeon’s example had a lasting effect on his care for the poor during his years as a master back at Eton and on his later pastoral zeal as bishop of Chester. Sumner’s younger brother, Charles, was also much influenced by Simeon and this is evident in their correspondence.\(^{14}\)

Sumner’s years at Cambridge were marked by academic distinction. He won the Sir William Browne medal for the Latin ode in 1800 and added the Hulsean Divinity Prize in 1802. He graduated Bachelor of Arts and was briefly a fellow of his College until his marriage with Marianne Robertson in 1803.

By the time Sumner left the gracious surroundings of his College, the habits of study and the religious convictions which were to influence and shape his future career were firmly established. His disciplined academic routine enabled him to devote long hours to reading and writing and this resulted in more than forty published works by the time of his death. Sumner was clearly one of the most fertile authors ever to hold the primacy.

Sumner left Cambridge as a convinced Simeonite evangelical and returned to Eton as a teacher. He was married and made a deacon in 1803 andpriested in 1805. He did what the *Saturday Review* termed ‘party work’\(^{15}\) but it was largely through private rather than public channels.\(^{16}\) His years as an Eton schoolmaster were not altogether happy, and he himself spoke of his duties as an assistant master as ‘a

\(^{12}\) See for example Bodleian Library, Wilberforce Correspondence C3, folio 127.

\(^{13}\) J.A. Atkinson, *A memoir of the Revd Canon James Slade M.A., vicar of Bolton* (1892), 2. See also the *Record*, 8 September 1862.

\(^{14}\) See H.C.G. Moule, *Charles Simeon* (IVP, 1951), 49.

\(^{15}\) *Saturday Review*, 13 September 1862.

\(^{16}\) Moule, *Charles Simeon*, 49.
hateful trade'. He had little opportunity for spiritual conversation with the boys, whose religious instruction and chapel worship was left in the hands of the provost and fellows at Eton College. According to William Gladstone, who was a pupil at the time, 'John Bird Sumner was practically debarred from saying a word about God to 'his pupils'. Sumner divided his time at Eton between his family, the school, writing projects and parochial work. He devoted many hours to visiting the sick and the poor, in and around Eton and Windsor. He took little part in the worship at Eton College, but rather spent most of his time preaching and ministering at the New Windsor chapel of ease which had been erected in 1769 for the needs of the local tradespeople.

Two of Sumner’s most significant published works belong to the Eton period of his life: *Apostolic preaching considered in an examination of St Paul’s epistles* (1815) and *A treatise on the records of Creation and the moral attributes of the Creator* (1816). Both of these works won immediate acclaim and went through numerous reprintings. *Apostolic preaching*, whose section on the sacrament of initiation persuaded both Newman and Gladstone in favour of baptismal regeneration, extended to nine editions. It should be noted, however, that Sumner did to some extent qualify his argument by pointing out, that after baptism many ‘live profane and unholy lives, and perish in their sins’. In view of this, the preacher must ‘lead his hearers to look for some new conversion’. Sumner considered Paul’s epistles as the fit model of instruction for the modern preacher, because ‘they were written to those who had already become Christians, and in general, dwell upon the topics of improvement and proficiency, instead of doctrines of repentance and conversion’. To those members of the congregation whose faith is merely nominal, however, Sumner said ‘the doctrine of conversion must be preached plainly and directly’.

The main body of *Apostolic preaching* was taken up with a detailed consideration of the great doctrines of the Christian faith, predetermination and election, the corruption of human nature, grace, justification and sanctification. On the matter of justification, Sumner was emphatic that all Paul’s epistles teach justification by faith alone. The basis on which this justification is grounded is ‘Christ’s blood alone’.

In dealing with the doctrine of predestination, Sumner was respectful of Calvin's learning, but averse to his system. He shared with other Clapham evangelicals a degree of ambivalence in so far as

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18 Ibid., 388.
21 Ibid., 160.
22 Ibid., 29.
23 Ibid., 207.
predestination was concerned. He did not, he said, 'desire to argue against predestination as believed in the closet, but as taught from the pulpit'. In other words, he concluded that the doctrine may be of private consolation and encouragement, but not appropriate in terms of sermon content. Sumner strongly opposed the doctrine of absolute decrees. 'What feelings of confidence can a congregation have', he wrote, 'which has been accustomed to hear, that a decree has gone out from God by which the final destiny of every man is irrevocably doomed'. Sumner considered the teaching of Paul’s letter to the Romans to be an exploration of God’s conduct to the Jews and not, therefore, a basis by which to justify the general doctrine of decrees. Sumner concluded the volume with a lengthy quotation from Wilberforce’s *Practical view*, which makes the point that the Christian’s strength is the temperate use of all the gifts and resources of the Creator. The Claphamite *Christian Observer*, in reviewing Sumner’s volume, felt duty bound ‘to suggest our doubts as to the soundness of some of his interpretations’. Nevertheless, it concluded on a most positive note considering ‘the merits of this treatise as very far outweighing its imperfections’. E.R. Moore has provided a useful analysis of Sumner’s earlier writings in which he maintains ‘it is not difficult to trace the influence of so great a man as Simeon’. It was the second volume, *A treatise on the records of Creation*, which attracted more public attention, on account of its justifying a hierarchical class system, and its endorsing of Malthusian economic and social theories as acceptable Christian doctrine. Sumner’s overarching aim was to demonstrate that the present world order affirmed ‘that the creator is endued with infinite power, wisdom and goodness’. He stated it in strident form in the first chapter. ‘I contend’, he wrote, ‘that the slightest outline of the constitution of the natural world conveys a proof of the most comprehensive wisdom’. Somewhat strangely, perhaps, Sumner made no attempt to draw a distinction between the wisdom of God, which can be seen in the natural world, and that which can be seen in human and social relationships. Nor did Sumner contrast the original created order before the Fall with that which subsequently emerged. He therefore felt it necessary to defend and justify those civilized nations, such as England of the early nineteenth century, which ‘admits and consists of a gradation of ranks and

24 Ibid., 40.
25 Ibid., 72.
26 Ibid., 55.
27 *Christian Observer*, 1815, 327.
28 Ibid.
unequal conditions'. For example, he argued that: 'the inequality of conditions, which is the foundation of civil society, afford not only the best improvement of human faculties, but best trial of human virtues. It is the nursery most suited to their formation, and the theatre most suited to their exercise'.

The problem with Sumner’s scheme was that it ‘legitimized’ conditions of poverty; indeed it regarded the poor as a God-ordained class. In making this assertion Sumner typified the thinking of his age. As J.R. Poynter observed in his comprehensive survey of pauperism ‘even in Victorian England poverty was viewed as inevitable’.

Sumner maintained that the huge discrepancy between the wealth of the few and the poverty of many would appal us ‘if mankind had no ulterior destination, and their enjoyment on earth was the sole end and purpose of their being’. If one stands back from this argument, it does seem strange that a man of biblical convictions such as John Sumner could have contemplated such an idealized future existence beyond the grave for the largely unchurched working classes.

Sumner drew a distinction between what he termed ‘honourable poverty’ and ‘vagrant’ poverty or ‘indigence’. Honourable poverty was the ‘natural lot of many in a well-constituted society’. ‘Indigence’ which is the result of intemperance, laziness or extravagance cannot be regarded as the work of a wise Creator. Sumner’s point about honourable poverty led him to assert that the Creator had established a principle of population control which ‘will keep a society of various ranks and conditions in a constant state of balance’. Populations will tend to multiply up to the level of food supply and remain fairly static at that point. All this represented a laissez-faire attitude to both economic and social conditions in which Sumner was clearly drawing on the work of political economists such as George Adam Smith.

A.M.C. Waterman has gone considerably further and maintained that by 1833 political economists had themselves constructed a system based on the main features of Sumner’s thinking and produced an ideological system which was to dominate popular if not intellectual thinking to the end of the nineteenth century.

Sumner’s treatise was a significant work in many respects. It revealed a remarkably Calvinistic view of the Universe which contrasted starkly with his Arminian approach to the matter of salvation. His teaching formed the basis of the social thinking of subsequent generations of Victorian churchmen. It also necessitated a great emphasis on paternalistic charity on the part of the wealthy, whose

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32 Ibid., ii, 12.
33 Ibid., ii, 76.
34 J.R. Poynter, Society and pauperism (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), xxv. See also 229 for his comments on Sumner.
35 Sumner, Treatise, ii, 76.
 rôle it was to ensure that the degree of poverty did not fall to unacceptably low levels. In all of this, Sumner typified Claphamite principles, which vigorously affirmed the divine ordering of the hierarchical class-system, and urged the dutiful exercise of philanthropy on behalf of the lowliest elements of society. In short, as R.S. Dell has clearly demonstrated, Sumner’s approach to economic and social theory ‘represented the common approach of churchmen, with its concern to alleviate distress on a charitable basis, but with no questioning of the system which produced such terrible conditions as were to be seen daily in the poorer districts of large towns and cities.’

These two works published in successive years brought Sumner into the public eye as a thoughtful writer and scholar of considerable note. It came as no surprise, therefore, that in 1817 he was elected as a fellow at Eton College. This meant that he was now relieved of his teaching responsibilities in the school and possessed of a substantial income, which enabled him to devote more time to serious academic study and writing. The following year, however, the valuable college living of Mapledurham fell vacant on the death of Edward Tew, and it was duly offered to Sumner. He was instituted on 20 November 1818. Sumner retained his college fellowship until 1820, when Bishop Shute Barrington (1734–1826) of Durham unexpectedly offered him a canonry. For the next ten years, Sumner’s lot was to reside in the delightful Berkshire village of Mapledurham on the north bank of the Thames. Here he lived the life of the conscientious country clergyman, enjoying the company of his wife and his growing clutch of children, as well as visiting his brother Charles at nearby Highclere, and his mother and sister, Maria. Sumner typified the devoted evangelical pastor. He resided in his parish except for brief spells at Durham. He held two services every Sunday, 11.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m. He preached regularly and attended to the majority of the occasional offices himself. In 1820, the parish had 520 souls, about fifty of whom were Roman Catholics, and in addition there were five families of protestant dissenters. In keeping with the practice of the age, Sumner celebrated Holy Communion four times a year. In his 1820 visitation return, he recorded an average attendance of thirty-five. Three years later he reported a slight increase to an average of fifty communicants. Sumner also gave time to the National School in his parish and to the administration of the Allnutt Charity.

A large part of his time at Mapledurham appears to have been given to writing. In 1821, he published *A series of sermons on the Christian faith and character*, and more importantly in 1824, *Evidence

38 See *Visitation returns*, 1820, Oxford Diocese (Oxford County Archives), Msd 579.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
The latter volume was rather less strident than his earlier *Treatise on the records of Creation*. Sumner confined himself to what have been termed the internal evidences of Christianity, pointing, for example, to the way in which prophecies concerning Jerusalem have the ring of truth about them. In his attitude to the poor, Sumner was considerably less optimistic. The end of the Napoleonic Wars had resulted in widespread unemployment, and what Sumner had earlier termed 'honourable poverty' seemed no longer to be even a possibility for many. Life for most would, he observed, remain 'inevitably poor and laborious' and only 'the gentle beauties of faith could provide relief and dignify the lowest stations and the meanest pursuits'.

During his time at Mapledurham, possibly as a result of his personal observations, Sumner began to change his views regarding the Poor Laws. Earlier in *Treatise on the records of Creation*, he had accepted the development of outdoor relief as necessary and beneficial. In the 1820s he became increasingly forceful in his opposition to the system which topped up the wages of the labourers whose income fell below the previously set minimum levels. In practice this often meant that employers paid low wages, or the labourers themselves worked short hours, knowing that their wages would be supplemented by the parish. Sumner encapsulated his feelings in an article written for the *Edinburgh Review* in 1822. Although the article was never published, Sumner wrote in the accompanying letter to the editor, Macvey Napier (1776–1847): 'You will perceive that I am a decided enemy of the system, and in fact I become more so every day, from what I see of its effects'. When the Government later set up a Poor Law Enquiry Commission under the chairmanship of Bishop Blomfield of London, Sumner became one of three episcopal commissioners. Both he and Blomfield were of the view that the Poor Laws were corrupting the labouring classes. Their deliberations eventually resulted in the 1834 Poor Law Act which divided the country into Poor Law Unions, each with a workhouse for the unemployed. The harsh environment of these institutions was designed to deter the poor from getting out of work.

The proposals of the Act, which were met with widespread hostility, were nevertheless in line with Clapham-moderate thinking on the matter. In 1822, Dr Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847) left his Glasgow parish and toured England in support of his campaign against legalized charity. His last port of call was Clapham, where Grenville, Teignmouth, Clarkson, Wilberforce, Bickersteth, and many others of the evangelical establishment feted him. The concomitant of this
abolition of state subsidies to the poor was of course the necessity of charitable distributions. Of these, Sumner, along with Clapham evangelicals, was a confirmed and convinced advocate. In 1841 he published *Christian charity its obligations with reference to the present state of society in a series of sermons.*

Early in 1828 Charles Blomfield was translated from Chester to London after only four years in office. Sumner was appointed his successor. This appointment seems to have come about through the influence of his younger brother, Charles, who tutored the children of the king's mistress, the marchioness of Conyngham. Sumner was consecrated at York on 14 September 1828. The sermon was preached by the Reverend Thomas Gisborne (1758–1846), squire of Yoxhall Lodge. Gisborne, who was an intimate friend of William Wilberforce, was a fellow prebend with Sumner at Durham Cathedral.

Sumner's nineteen years at Chester were widely acclaimed as a model of leadership, pastoral care and clear-sighted strategy. He began his task by appointing Henry Raikes as his chaplain. Two years later, in 1830, Henry, who was the brother of Robert Raikes, the Sunday school pioneer, was made chancellor of the diocese. Many of the projects which Sumner initiated, were done in concert with Raikes, causing Charles Simeon to remark: 'The great diocese of Chester enjoys a sort of double episcopacy in the coadjutorship of the Chancellor with the Bishop of the See'.

Sumner's strategy for the diocese had four key aspects: the greater provision of church accommodation, especially for the poor; the encouragement and support of the clergy; the advocacy of lay visitors and lay helpers; and the provision of education. Sumner promoted the building of churches by initiating and supporting church building societies, such as the Chester Diocesan Building Society which he founded in 1843. In all, he consecrated 233 new churches, which caused Geoffrey Best to describe him as 'one of the greatest promoters of new churches'. Sumner was quick to emphasize, however, that these churches were not built as ends in themselves, or as centres from which the working classes could be civilized and instructed in Christian principles. At the beginning of his first charge to the diocese in 1829, he said: '... wherever an assemblage of men is collected together, provision should be made for their souls; that is provision that they should be brought to God through Jesus Christ'.

Unlike many earlier nineteenth-century prelates, Sumner saw one
of his major rôles as that of ‘pastor pastorium’. Something of his meticulous care for his clergy can be seen by glancing at his detailed notes on the many parishes of his diocese. Besides giving full details about communicant numbers, Sunday schools and mid-week meetings, Sumner adds details about their stipends and snippets of information such as ‘his wife is ill’.49 Although Sumner did address himself to national issues, he invariably made the task of the clergyman one of his central concerns. In his charge of 1829, for example, he urged his clergy that men and women ‘need to be convinced . . . of the sinfulness of sin: to be taught that “the wages of sin is death”, eternal death. And the atonement made by the Son of God, the sacrifice of the cross, is the great instrument of working this conviction’.50

Sumner recognized that many clergy were unable to cope with their task single-handed. He therefore urged them to appoint and use lay helpers and lay visitors in the work of their parishes. In these proposals, Sumner was probably influenced by Charles Simeon’s use of district visitors in his Cambridge parish. Such individuals would lessen the clergyman’s own labour by ‘visiting and examining the schools, by reading and praying with the infirm and aged, by consoling the fatherless and widows of their affliction’.51 Sumner encouraged societies such as the Lancaster District Visiting Society which in 1832 dealt with the needs of 1,250 families.52

Sumner was a remarkable promoter of education. He remained convinced that unless children and young people grew up at least being able to read and write, there was little long-term hope of their spiritual and social well-being improving. He recognized that ‘the most cultivated or intellectual man’ may not be ‘a useful member of the society to which he belongs’.53 As he saw it, therefore, Christianity must be the basis which underpins all other aspects of education. ‘The man who is wise in the things which scripture teaches’, he maintained ‘has also that wisdom which is really to be desired for this world’.54

During Sumner’s time in Chester, 671 new day schools were built and many Sunday schools strengthened and improved. Sumner also emerged as possibly the major influence in the founding of Chester Training College in January 1830.55 It was the first of its kind in the country and was soon ‘able to send forth its 30 masters annually’.56

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49 J.B. Sumner, Handwritten notes on the parishes of the diocese of Chester, Chester City Record Office, Ms EDR 5 Box 5.
50 Sumner, Charge 1829, 11.
51 Ibid., 23.
53 J.B. Sumner, A charge delivered to the clergy of the diocese of Chester 1838 (London: J. Hatchard, 1838), 11.
54 Ibid.
55 See J.L. Bradbury, Chester College and the training of teachers 1839–75 (Governors of Chester College, 1975), 25
56 J.B. Sumner, A charge delivered to the clergy of the diocese of Chester 1832 (London: J. Hatchard, 1832).
With such strenuous and effective leadership of the diocese it was small wonder that Sumner soon began to receive public acclaim. In 1843 Sir Robert Peel paid him this tribute in the House of Commons: '... it would not be just, were I not to express in strong terms, my admiration of the conduct of the Bishop of Chester who has effected so much improvement in the diocese which has the good fortune to be under his charge, and to witness his example'.

Sumner's years in Chester have been well recounted by E.R. Moore, who summarized them as follows: 'As for Sumner it is this word service which is the keynote of . . . the twenty eventful years as Bishop of Chester'. It is clearly, however, also the case, as has been shown, that Sumner was a forward-thinking diocesan strategist who paved the way for a new pattern of industrial episcopacy which attempted to grapple with the issues of the growing manufacturing towns and cities.

During Sumner's Chester episcopate, the Oxford Movement became a cause of national concern. Although he had voted for the Catholic Emancipation Bill, he had done so because he believed the Roman Catholic population was a declining one and never likely to be a significant body within the nation. However, along with evangelicals of his generation he was wedded to the doctrines of the Reformation, and had an instinctive fear of things Roman. As early as his charge of 1832, Sumner had warned that the practices of the Romish Church 'deviated into superstition, and became the "form of godliness" without "the power"'.

By the time of his charge in 1838, Sumner spoke out in strident terms against the Oxford Movement because it 'threatened a revival of the worst evils of the Romish system'. He continued: 'Under the specious pretence of deference to antiquity, and respect for primitive models, the foundations of our protestant Church are undermined by men who dwell within her walls'. Sumner's opposition was two-fold. In his view, the Tractarians did not regard the Bible as 'sufficient to make a man wise unto salvation' and they were undermining 'the main article of our national confession, justification by faith'. Sumner renewed this theme in his charge of 1841, declaring that: 'those have now risen up who . . . involve the article of our justification in obscurity; what has been done for us and what is wrought in us are confused together; and practically man is induced to look to himself and not to the Redeemer for acceptance with God'. Two years later,

57 Hansard, lxviii, 5 May 1843.
58 Moore, John Bird Sumner, 223.
59 Sumner, Charge, 1832, 26.
60 Sumner, Charge, 1838, 1f.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 J.B. Sumner, A charge delivered to the clergy of the diocese of Chester 1841 (London: J. Hatchard, 1841), 22.
Sumner published *The doctrine of justification briefly stated*, in which, among other things, he sought on the basis of the New Testament to distinguish justification and sanctification. The former, he argued, is the work of ‘an external agency’, the latter ‘effected by ‘an intrinsic process’.\(^{64}\) He summarized the situation as he perceived it, by stating that ‘to follow what is in effect, the Romish system, and unite together two things so distinctly separated in the Christian scheme, as man’s justification and his sanctification, is in effect, to devise a scheme of salvation for ourselves’.\(^{65}\) Throughout his later years, Sumner stood out against the Ritualists. Among other things, he did battle with Bishop Henry Phillpotts over his refusal to institute George Gorham on account of his denial of baptismal regeneration. He also presided over the condemnation of Archdeacon Denison for his views that the body and blood of Christ were ‘really present in an immaterial and spiritual manner in the consecrated bread and wine, and therefore given to all who come to the Lord’s Table’ and that ‘worship is due to the real though invisible and supernatural presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Holy Eucharist under the form of bread and wine’.\(^{66}\) Three years later, in 1858, Sumner supported Bishop Tait of London in his opposition to the use of the confessional at St Barnabas, Pimlico.\(^{67}\)

As a parliamentarian, Sumner took his duties very seriously. His speeches reveal a considered approach based on careful preparation. Sumner was present in the House for all the major religious and social debates which took place during his episcopate and he addressed the house on fifty-two separate occasions. It is clear that a great deal of Sumner’s parliamentary debating was influenced by his firm evangelical convictions, and on occasions by his ‘laissez-faire’ economic theories. With two or three exceptions, all of Sumner’s speeches were on issues which were overtly related to church affairs or Christian doctrine.

In his maiden speech on the Catholic Emancipation Bill Sumner made clear that his sympathies were with the moderates. Unlike his mentor, Charles Simeon, and his brother, the bishop of Winchester, he supported the measure which *The Record* declared to have been ‘quickened by Jesuitical leaven’.\(^{68}\) He later wrote to the duke of Wellington, ‘the safety of the whole measure depends very much on the presumption that the papal cause is a declining cause and will become so more and more’.\(^{69}\) He voted for the Great Reform Bill of 1832, and the new Poor Law Bill of 1834, whose provisions he had

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\(^{64}\) J. B. Sumner, *The doctrine of justification briefly stated* (London: J. Hatchard, 1843), 7

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 23.


\(^{68}\) *Record*, 15 February 1829.

\(^{69}\) Chadwick, Ibid., Part 1, 10.
helped to shape. He also keenly supported the Corn Law Repeal Bill of 1846. Sumner spoke at some length in the debate on Lord Cranworth's Divorce Bill of 1847 and argued on the basis of the Matthean exception clause\textsuperscript{70} that divorce should be permitted on the grounds of adultery. He was also willing that the injured party be allowed to re-marry, but was adamant against the proposed provision to extend this to the guilty party.\textsuperscript{71}

In the debates on ecclesiastical issues, Sumner demonstrated a wise concern that the Church's assets should be well-administered. He spoke in favour of the Ecclesiastical Commission Bill's proposal to appoint three full-time commissioners to manage the Church's estates and monies.\textsuperscript{72} He was very critical of the Episcopal and Capitular Estates Bill which sought to give the lessees of Church property the right of perpetual renewal. In his view it amounted to little short of total possession.\textsuperscript{73} He spoke against the Church Rates Abolition Bill in 1858\textsuperscript{74} but stated that 'he was not of the opinion that the church rates should remain as they are'.\textsuperscript{75} His evangelical colours showed most clearly in his stirring speech in support of the Bill (promoted by the Vice Society) to Prevent the Sale of Obscene Books.\textsuperscript{76}

Throughout his life, Sumner was a supporter and encourager of evangelical societies. His presence seems to have been most prominent on the platforms and at meetings of those societies which had their roots in Clapham – namely the Church Missionary Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Lord's Day Observance Society.

Eugene Stock, in his history of C.M.S., wrote that John Bird Sumner and his brother, Charles 'threw themselves “heart and soul” into the work of the Church Missionary Society'.\textsuperscript{77} He noted that John Bird Sumner was the national anniversary speaker no less than twelve times between 1815 and 1848. After his elevation to the primacy, however, he made a conscious decision to restrict his attendance at Society anniversaries, though he gave the C.M.S. jubilee sermon at St Anne's, Blackfriars.\textsuperscript{78} As primate, Sumner gave considerable time and support to Henry Venn (1796–1873), the C.M.S. general secretary, discussing strategies and helping him to establish new dioceses overseas. Like Venn, Sumner was wedded to the principle of self-governing, self-sustaining, and self-propagating national churches. Speaking in the Colonial Church Regulation Bill debate in 1853, he urged the importance of the Church overseas being able to determine

\textsuperscript{70} Matthew, Chapter 5, verse 2.
\textsuperscript{71} Hansard, cxlv, 19 May 1857
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Hansard, cviii, 11 February 1850.
\textsuperscript{74} Hansard, cli, 2 July 1858.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Hansard, cxlvi, 10 July 1857
\textsuperscript{77} E. Stock, History of the Church Missionary Society, 3 vols. (C.M.S., 1899), i. 258.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., i, 492.
its own affairs and of laymen in particular having 'a considerable share in the administration of its affairs'.

Sumner, who had written on the subject of the Sabbath, was an ardent supporter of the Lord's Day Observance Society, and took the chair at a number of their annual general meetings. In his work in Chester diocese, he had anticipated many of the concerns of the Church Pastoral Aid Society which was founded in 1836. He became their trusted adviser and a frequent speaker and preacher on their behalf. The S.P.C.K. also enjoyed his patronage, and during his time in Chester, he took the chair at the annual meeting of the diocesan S.P.C.K. every year from 1830 to 1847. In the latter year, however, Sumner's relationship with the Society was soured by a published attack from one of the members on his S.P.C.K. Tract No. 619, on the subject of justification. The critic declared it to be 'ultra-Lutheran' and 'opposed to the sentiments of the society'.

Sumner's continuing enthusiasm for the British and Foreign Bible Society was demonstrated at their 1862 A.G.M., when a letter from him was read from the platform. Sumner had written: 'My sentiments respecting the Bible Society are the same which I held for fifty years ... I rejoice from year to year to read the accounts of what God has wrought through its means'.

In 1848 Sumner was elevated to the primacy, a move which delighted Queen Victoria. A major factor in his appointment was his earlier refusal to sign the Remonstrance organized by Samuel Wilberforce against the appointment of Renn Hampden to the see of Hereford. All but a handful of bishops signed the protest which was forwarded to Lord John Russell. Sumner's view, however, was that Hampden had lectured competently at Oxford University for twelve years without causing protest, and that his recent published works were perfectly orthodox. Commenting later on Sumner's appointment in a letter to a friend, Wilberforce wrote: 'I am very glad it is Chester, not the others ... I feel it had not been for the Hampden controversy I should have very probably been put there'.

The Hampden affair set the pattern of things to come, since
Sumner's time as archbishop was beset with controversies which included the Gorham affair, the restoration of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, the revival of the convocations and the publication of *Essays and reviews*. Other issues of less national import included the Ecclesiastical Commission Bill and the rising tide of ritualism. In his handling of all these issues, the ageing prelate trailed his Simeonite coat-tails for all to see. He presided over the secular court which declared in opposition to the Arches' decision that Gorham's denial of baptismal regeneration was contrary to the teaching of the Church of England.\(^90\) He further directed Gorham's institution to the living of Bramford Speke against the wishes of Bishop Phillpotts, who had opposed him.

The Gorham judgement led to strenuous calls for a revival of convocations. Like Lord John Russell, Sumner opposed these proposals, believing that they would result in growing Romeward moves.\(^91\) In his charge of 1853, Sumner urged that the revival of convocations would not 'promote the great interests of our ministry' which were to seek the lost sheep 'who are in the midst of this naughty world, that they may be saved through Christ'.\(^92\)

When *Essays and reviews* was published in 1860, there was an immediate outcry against its liberal views on the inspiration of scripture,\(^93\) and its acceptance of recent scientific discoveries. Although Sumner had never been committed to biblical geology,\(^94\) he held strongly to the inspiration of scripture and drafted a critical response on behalf of the bishops. It included the following lines: 'We cannot understand how these opinions can be held consistently with an honest subscription to the formularies of our church, with many fundamental doctrines of which they appear to us essentially at variance'.\(^95\)

Despite his strictures against the essayists, Sumner sided with the moderate evangelicals in theological issues. In his writings about the return of Christ, his emphasis was almost always on the need for Christ's people to be working faithfully in their callings so that they may be found acceptable. There is little in his biblical lectures on Jesus coming suddenly in judgement.\(^96\) Like the Claphamites, Sumner inclined to post-millenarian ideas. He steered away from interest in charismatic phenomena or spiritual gifts which were associated with the pre-millenial school. He did not align himself with the biblical

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\(^{92}\) See J.B. Sumner, *The charge of John Bird lord archbishop of Canterbury to the clergy of the diocese at his visitation of 1853* (London: J. Hatchard, 1853), 11.
\(^{94}\) See for example Sumner, *Treatise on the records of Creation*, 39.
\(^{95}\) Wilberforce, *Life*, iii (1881), 5.
\(^{96}\) J.B. Sumner, *A practical exposition of the general epistles of James, Peter, John and Jude* (London: J. Hatchard, 1840), 253.
geologists, and in his earliest writings he interpreted the Genesis account of Creation in a symbolic manner. Sumner spoke of the scripture as ‘the word of God’ but he clearly did not countenance any notions of its being ‘inerrant’ or ‘infallible’. If Hilton’s point is correct, that the Claphamites enjoyed the pleasures of life in a way which the extremer evangelicals did not, Sumner was certainly a Claphamite. At all times he delighted in his family circle and entertained his clergy and friends warmly and graciously.

It has often been supposed that no nineteenth-century biography of Sumner was produced on account of his ineffectual primacy. However, with hindsight it is clear that even in his fading years as archbishop, Sumner had much to commend him. He was a man of enlightened opinions, as was witnessed in his stance on issues such as Roman Catholic Emancipation, the Great Reform Bill and the repeal of the Corn Laws. The controversies which he was called upon to handle demanded a gracious fair-mindedness of the kind which Sumner displayed in his dealings over the Hampden and Gorham affairs. At the same time he stood firm in the face of threats from the writers of Essays and reviews and the rising tide of ritualism. Sumner was widely respected in the House of Lords to the end of his days and remembered by his generation as a thoughtful scholar and a man given to prayer and the habits of study and writing.

Sumner’s obituary in The Times reported: ‘if it cannot be said that he was a great leader, he was, at least, a discreet one and discretion in such cases is of more avail than enterprise’. It commented further that he was ‘a ripe scholar, a fluent writer, a sound divine, a not illiberal thinker with moderate views’. The Record, in its obituary, felt similarly that Sumner was a ‘safe man’.

97 The Times, 8 September 1862.
98 Record, 8 September 1862.