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0521520231 - Established Church, Sectarian People: Itinerancy and the Transformation of English Dissent, 1780-1830

Deryck W. Lovegrove

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ESTABLISHED CHURCH, SECTARIAN PEOPLE  
ITINERANCY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF  
ENGLISH DISSENT, 1780–1830

This book examines a neglected aspect of English social history – the operation of itinerant preachers during the period of political and social ferment at the turn of the century. It investigates the nature of their popular brand of Christianity and considers their impact upon existing churches: both the threat apparently posed to the Established Church of England and the consequences of their activity for the smaller Protestant bodies from which they arose.

The particular strength of the book lies in the extensive use it makes of untapped local archives drawn from many English counties – records which include numerous parochial, legal, associational and congregational sources. This is a study of religion in transition which is set against the wider canvas of social change attendant upon the early Industrial Revolution and the political shock waves emanating from France.

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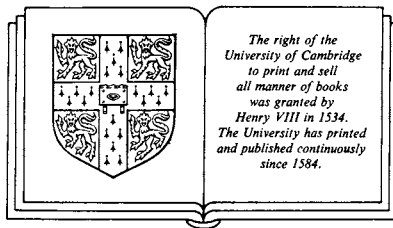
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# Established Church, Sectarian People

Itinerancy and the transformation of  
English Dissent, 1780–1830

DERYCK W. LOVEGROVE

Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History,  
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*For Barbara*

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The Church of England must ever be considered, both by Protestant and Dissenter, as that steady guide which direct[s] the opinions and judgment of the whole nation. But if this part of our national constitution [i]s not better attended to, we sh[all] be in danger of having a nominal Established Church, and a sectarian people.

Viscount Sidmouth proposing the Protestant Dissenting Ministers Bill before the House of Lords, 9 May 1811.  
*Cobbett's Parliamentary Debates*, 19 (1811), 1131.

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## Preface

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There exists within historical scholarship a natural bias towards the great and the powerful. Historians have always concerned themselves with the affairs of leading politicians, society figures and churchmen, persons who by their very nature have tended to leave the most visible testimony to their own importance. Yet, in order to speak with authority, the student of history must also investigate the lower levels of society, asking questions concerning the economic, social and religious practices of ordinary people. The study of English Dissent during its most expansionist and popular phase accords well with this aim, promising to shed light upon the religious habits and circumstances of a large section of English society at a critical point in its evolution. It has the additional attraction of offering authoritative detail chosen from the rich and largely untapped resources of local history.

Yet mere localism, however carefully employed, is inadequate for the wider task. It cannot support useful generalizations. It can only point with certainty to the situation prevailing in a given area. In seeking to avoid this limitation this study attempts to investigate a wide variety of contrasting localities, making equal use of local and national records, as well as the written material left by individuals. The use of these records, drawn as they have been from all parts of the country, has rendered my obligations to individuals and institutions very extensive, and I would like, therefore, in the following paragraphs to record my thanks to those who have helped me.

In the first place, I owe an immense debt to my two former teachers: Professor Alec Cheyne of Edinburgh University who fostered in me a deep and abiding love of ecclesiastical history, and Dr David Thompson of Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge who patiently helped and guided me through my postgraduate work. Both sought to instil into me a concern for sound conceptual analysis based upon meticulous scholarship, both gave unstintingly of their time and wisdom, and to both for their continuing friendship and counsel I am most deeply grateful.

At an early stage in this study I was privileged to make the acquaintance of Dr Geoffrey Nuttall. Apart from facilitating my investigations within the archives then located at New College, London, he allowed me to benefit from his own renowned expertise in the field of English Dissent.

Among the many institutions to which I am indebted two groups in



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## PREFACE

particular deserve special mention. From Preston to Maidstone and from Durham to Dorchester the archivists in almost a score of county record offices have made available by means of diligent collection and preservation many important manuscripts whose existence and whereabouts might otherwise have remained uncertain. In addition a further invaluable institutional source has been the various collections held in denominational archives. In this regard I would like to pay tribute to the unfailing assistance and kindness shown by the staffs of the Baptist Missionary Society, the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland, Bristol Baptist College, Manchester Congregational College, the former New College, London, Regent's Park College, Oxford, and Westminster College, Cambridge, including the Governors of the Cheshunt Foundation for permission to use the papers of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion. Other research centres which have played an important part in the evolution of this book include: in London, the British Library, the Congregational Library, Dr Williams's Library, the Guildhall Library and the Public Record Office; in Oxford, the Bodleian Library; the University Libraries of Cambridge and Southampton; the John Rylands University Library, Manchester; New College Library, Edinburgh; and the University Library, St Andrews. For the help afforded by these bodies and by private custodians who have granted me access to important material I would like to record my sincere gratitude.

Apart from the help received from these sources I have also benefited from the expert advice of a number of scholars whose interests bear upon my own. Among these I would mention Dr John Walsh of Jesus College, Oxford, and Mr Robert Elliot of the University of Dundee. My own university at St Andrews furthered the work by granting a period of study leave which enabled me to examine the episcopal visitation returns for several dioceses. More recently my colleague, Professor James Cameron, very kindly read the completed manuscript. The final stage, the production of the typescript, was relieved of most of its difficulty by the effort of Mrs Helen Smith. For her helpfulness and the quality of her work I wish to express my appreciation.

Finally, it is my greatest pleasure to thank my wife for her love, support and help during the years in which this work has been in preparation, and my sons, Philip and David, for their willingness to tolerate its encroachment upon family life.

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United Reformed church, Andover, for extract on p. 60 from Andover Congregational church minutes, 5 December 1817.

Northern College (United Reformed and Congregational), Manchester, for extract on p. 69 from Sketch for projected autobiography, p. 6, William Roby Papers.

Dr Williams's Library, London, for extracts on pp. 72, 77, 160 and Figure 5 from: (a) English Evangelic Academy, minutes pp. 2, 9, New College MS 126/1; (b) Village Itinerancy, minutes 20 September 1813, New College MS 56/1; (c) Village Itinerancy, report 1811, New College MS 47; (d) Hoxton Academy, report 1824, p. xvii, New College MS 546/3/5; (e) Itinerancy plan enclosed with letter from William Church to John Eyre, 21 February 1797, New College MS 41/7.

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## Abbreviations

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BBC	Bristol Baptist College
BL	British Library
BMS	Baptist Missionary Society
BU	Baptist Union
CL	Congregational Library, London
CRO	County Record Office
DWL	Dr Williams's Library, London
GL	Guildhall Library, London
MCC	Manchester Congregational College
PRO	Public Record Office
RPC	Regent's Park College, Oxford
WC	Westminster College, Cambridge