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Intersecting Sets:

John Venn, Church and University, 1834-1923

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PhD thesis in Religious Studies

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of the religious and academic identities of John Venn (1834-1923), logician and biographer, explored by building up a picture of the series of family, religious and academic communities of which he was a part - from the institutional structures of the Church of England, Gonville and Caius College and the University of Cambridge, to more informal networks of friends and professions; and virtual communities of ideas and intellectual influence.

Venn was heir to a clerical, Evangelical dynasty, but his religious doubts led him to resign orders. He established instead an academic reputation through published works on probability and logic; and in later life concentrated upon historical and biographical researches. Venn's departure from Evangelicalism and his development as an academic is explained in terms of the real and virtual communities he 'inherited', such as the Venn family connexion, Evangelical theology and Church party; and those to which he 'acquired' membership, namely the academic networks signified by interactions with colleagues and mediated through journals, learned societies and the institutional structures of the University.

This biographical study of Venn is an entry point for examining broader historical themes in nineteenth century religion and academia; in particular, the development of mid-Victorian Evangelicalism, the course of University reform and the emergence of clerical and academic professional identities. It is also a case-study of religious doubt against which to compare the literature on crises of faith and the experiences of other sons of Evangelicalism, such as Leslie and Fitzjames Stephen and Henry Sidgwick.

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I must also thank the Master and Fellows of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge and in particular, Professor A.W.F. Edwards, for professional support in the early days of this research and for permission to use the image of the Venn window that has become a metaphor for this thesis.

To Professor C.N.L. Brooke and Dr E.S. Leedham-Green, I owe the inspiration. Thank-you to all those friends in Oxford, Cambridge, Warwick and Bath, who have lent this project and its author a helping hand along the way – in particular, Lyn Bailey and Lynda Stratford, Joan Osborn and Jon Smith, Charles Fonge and Kara Baillie, Gwen van der Velden and Jon Bursey. Each of the above has played a part in supporting, encouraging and strengthening this work. The remaining deficiencies are my own.

Outline chronology

John Venn (1834-1923)

- 1834 Born 4 August, Drypool, Hull
- 1840 Attended Cholmondeley School, Highgate, London
- 1846-47 Attended Highgate School, London
- 1848-53 Attended Islington Proprietary School, London
- 1853 Matriculated Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge
- 1857 Graduated BA, University of Cambridge (6th wrangler)
- 1858 Elected junior fellow, Gonville and Caius College
- Ordained deacon, Diocese of Ely
- Curate of Cheshunt, Hertfordshire
- 1859 Ordained priest, Ely
- 1860 Curate of Mortlake, London
- 1862-97 Catechist and lecturer in Moral Sciences, Gonville and Caius College
- 1864 Dean of Gonville and Caius, College
- Examiner, Moral Sciences Tripos, University of Cambridge
- 1866 Published *Logic of chance*
- 1867 Married Susanna Carnegie Edmonstone
- 1868 Became senior fellow, Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge
- 1869 Hulsean lecturer, University of Cambridge
- 1871-76 Examiner, University of London
- 1881 Published *Symbolic logic*
- 1883 Resigned orders under Clerical Disabilities Act 1870
- Elected fellow of the Royal Society
- Son, John Archibald Venn, born 10 November
- 1884 Admitted ScD, University of Cambridge
- 1888 Donated library of logic books to University Library

- 1889 Published *Principles of empirical or inductive logic*
- 1892 Elected fellow of the Society of Antiquaries
- 1897 Published first volume of *Biographical history of Gonville and Caius*
- 1903-23 President, Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge
- 1907-8 President, Cambridge Society of Antiquaries
- 1922 Published first volume of *Alumni Cantabrigienses*
- 1923 Died 4 April, Cambridge

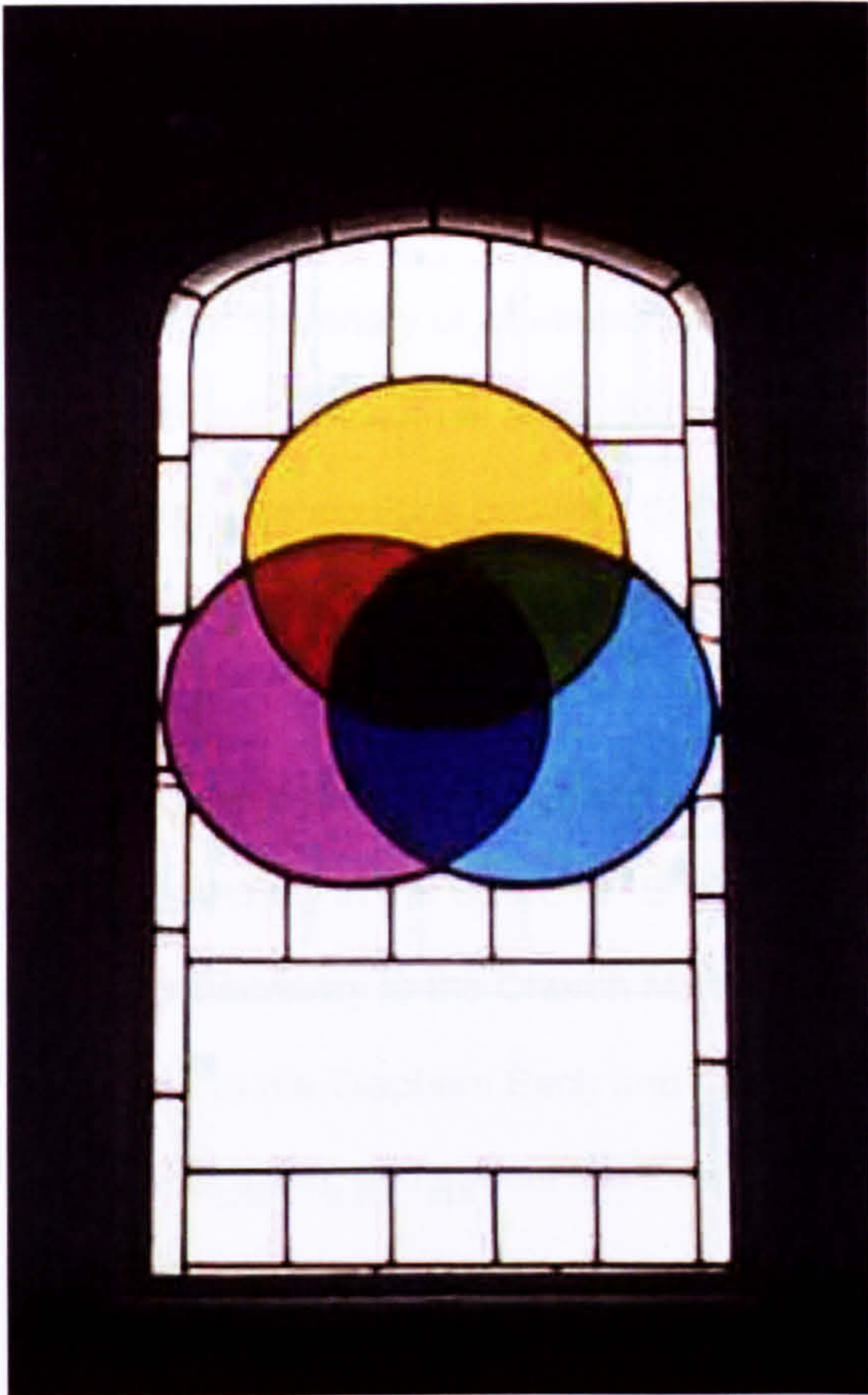


Figure 1: Venn diagram: stained glass window by Maria McClafferty in the Hall of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. Reproduced by kind permission of the Master and Fellows of Gonville and Caius, Cambridge.

1. Introduction

To his contemporaries, John Venn was often introduced as the son of Henry Venn of the Church Missionary Society, or as the grandson of John Venn of Clapham. To academic logicians and recent generations of schoolchildren, his Venn diagrams are instantly recognisable. To historians and genealogists, he is probably best known for his later work, as co-editor with his son, John Archibald Venn, of Part I of *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, the biographical dictionary of all members of the University of Cambridge. This thesis is concerned with the sum of these parts: exploring Venn's religious and academic development through the intersections between the various aspects of his thought, achievements, and the academic, religious and social networks of which he was a part.

John Venn was born into an Evangelical family that was seen as being at the very core of the Evangelical party in the Church of England. His father, Henry Venn, was the long-serving Honorary Secretary to the Church Missionary Society; his grandfather and namesake ministered to the Clapham Sect; and his great-grandfather, another Henry and the first Evangelical Venn, had set out the Evangelical schema of salvation in his *Complete duty of man*.¹ Beyond that the family's clerical line could be traced back to the sixteenth century in a succession that reads like an Old Testament genealogy. Family tradition was strengthened by the inheritance of the Clapham sect, where common theological, social and political interests had been reinforced by inter-marriage between the Venns, the Stephens and the Diceys.² It was this twin heritage of a clerical and Evangelical dynasty that was key to John Venn's

¹ H. Venn (1725-97), *The complete duty of man; or, a system of doctrinal and practical Christianity with prayers for families and individuals* [Select Christian authors with introductory essays No 53] with an introductory essay by Rev. John Brown (Glasgow, 1829).

Where confusion is likely to arise regarding names, members of the Venn family will be identified by name and reference to the place with which they were most closely associated, hence: John Venn (1834-1923); his brother, Henry Venn of Canterbury (1838-1923); his father, Henry Venn of CMS (1796-1873); his uncle, John Venn of Hereford (1802-90); his grandfather, John Venn of Clapham (1759-1813); his great-grandfather, Henry Venn of Huddersfield (1725-97).

² See Venn family tree, p.18.

upbringing and early contacts; and to what was expected of him when he went up to Cambridge in 1853.

To a certain extent he followed the pattern. He took orders in 1859-60, spent time as a curate, married a woman from a sound Evangelical background, preached before the University, and wrote for the Evangelical *Christian Observer*. Yet, like his cousins, Leslie and Fitzjames Stephen, and second cousin, Albert Venn Dicey, he was to part ways with the religion of his youth. In a memoir of the 1880s, Venn was to describe his Evangelicalism as being little more than a natural inclination to be religious, bound up with a set of inherited beliefs and a large amount of respect for his father.³ He defined his position in the 1860s as that of broad churchmanship; but in 1883, he resigned orders under the Clerical Disabilities Act.

It was in the field of logic that Venn was to establish his academic reputation, teaching alongside F.D. Maurice, Henry Sidgwick, Alfred Marshall and Henry Fawcett, for the Moral Sciences Tripos in Cambridge. He also published on probability, and on the diagrammatic representation of logical possibilities – the latter being the Venn diagrams that still bear his name. His achievement was recognised by his election to a fellowship of the Royal Society in 1883 and his admission as Doctor of Sciences in Cambridge in 1884. However, in 1888 he donated his collection of logic books to the University Library, signalling the effective end of his commitment to original logical researches, although he retained his College lectureship until 1897 and was still active in the field of anthropometrical and statistical studies. It was during this period that he began to devote much more time to another pursuit: research and documentation of the histories of his family, College, and University. This was the third strand of Venn's reputation, as a historical biographer. Between 1885 and 1923, Venn compiled a

³ University of Birmingham, Church Missionary Society Archive, Venn papers, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals 1834-66 by John Venn, pp.92-3.

biographical dictionary of Gonville and Caius College; worked on compiling the first part of a similar dictionary for all Cambridge alumni, as well as publishing a history of his family, editing historical records of the University and contributing articles to his College magazine, *The Caian*.⁴

Purpose and key themes

He was the heir to a prominent Evangelical clerical dynasty; underwent a substantial change of religious direction, and left a lasting academic legacy but, hitherto, there has been no extended biographical study of John Venn. His career did warrant substantial obituaries and entries in both the *Dictionary of National Biography* and the *Dictionary of Scientific Biography* but treatments of Venn have tended to concentrate upon particular aspects of his achievements.⁵ For example, the recent entry on Venn in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* covers Venn's religious development and philosophical contribution but barely touches upon the thirty years he spent upon biographical and historical research.⁶ While Venn's contribution to logic and philosophy has been relatively well documented, his religious development has, in comparison, usually been explored with Venn being an ensemble or supporting player.⁷ Thus, Venn's religious development has been explored in the context of his family in a longitudinal study of the Evangelical Venns, and more generally, as a brief additional example in support of hypotheses about the development of religious thought among the descendants of members of the Clapham sect, or biographies about his more

⁴ For a bibliography of these works, see p.239.

⁵ H. T Francis, 'In memoriam: John Venn', *Proceedings of the Royal Society, Series A, Volume CX* (1926); H.T. Francis, 'In memoriam: John Venn' *The Caian*, Volume XXXI (Cambridge, 1922-3); J.A. Venn, 'Venn, John 1834-1923', *Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 1937; CD-Rom edition 1995; T.A.A. Broadbent, 'Venn, John' in C.C. Gillespie (ed.), *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, Volume XIII (New York, 1976).

⁶ J.R. Gibbins, 'Venn, John (1834-1923)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, May 2005 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36639>, accessed 17 Aug 2005]).

⁷ Continuing academic interest in Venn's work on logic is reflected in the survey of Venn diagrams maintained by the *Electronic Journal of Combinatorics*: <http://www.combinatorics.org/Surveys/ds5/VennEJC.html>, which includes a recent monograph on the development and legacy of Venn diagrams by A.W.F. Edwards, *Cogwheels of the mind: the story of Venn diagrams* (Baltimore and London, 2004).

famous cousins, like Leslie Stephen.⁸ There is therefore scope for a more detailed study focusing upon John Venn's religious and academic development.

There is no lack of source material to support this approach. Venn produced a substantial body of published work, ranging from his first article in *Fraser's Magazine* on the 'Science of History' in 1862, via monographs on the *Logic of chance* and *Symbolic logic*; to his final work, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, which started to emerge from the press in 1922, and was finally completed by his son in 1954.⁹ John Venn preserved and added to the family archive, with correspondence with his family, his friends and academic colleagues, although a small proportion of the correspondence between Venn and his wife, Susanna, is rendered inaccessible through being written in a version of the family shorthand.¹⁰ Venn also wrote an unpublished autobiographical account of his religious development.¹¹ These core materials are further supplemented by college and University archives in Cambridge and the papers left by Venn's friends and colleagues.¹²

The aim of this thesis is therefore to explore the landscape of family, religious and academic communities of which Venn was a part. These communities took a variety of forms; from the institutional structures of the Church and the University, to more informal networks of friends, professions or church parties, and virtual communities of ideas and intellectual influence. It is

⁸ For example, W.K. Stockton, 'The Venn family since the mid-eighteenth century' (Brandeis University PhD thesis, 1980); C. Tolley, *Domestic biography: the legacy of Evangelicalism in four nineteenth century families* [Oxford Historical Monographs] (Oxford, 1997); N. Annan, *Leslie Stephen: his thought and character in relation to his time* (London, 1951).

⁹ See p.237 for a bibliography of the works by Venn cited in this thesis.

¹⁰ J.A. Venn divided the Venn archive between three repositories: Gonville and Caius College Archive, John Venn Papers (hereafter referred to as Caius Archive); Society of Genealogists Library Special Collections, Venn Collection (hereafter referred to as Society of Genealogists Library, Venn Collection); University of Birmingham, Church Missionary Society Archive, Venn papers (hereafter referred to as CMS Archive).

¹¹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals 1834-66 by John Venn.

¹² Particularly, Trinity College, Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers; University College London, Papers and Correspondence of Sir Francis Galton; University of Glasgow, Library Special Collections, Albert Venn Dicey papers.

here that Venn's own symbolic representation of intersecting sets seems to provide an apt visual metaphor to encapsulate the nature of these overlapping communities of influence.¹³

The purpose in sketching out these intersecting sets is to build up a multi-faceted picture of Venn's academic and religious identities - of the personal and intellectual, of public association, professional involvement and institutional participation. Venn's religious identity will therefore be traced as an evolving multi-stranded relationship: - to theological ideas, religious values, family tradition, churchmanship and institutional participation, public positions taken in print and on the platform of societies, and membership of a church party. Likewise, academic identity will be viewed as interactions with ideas; with networks of colleagues and collaborators, either on a personal level, at the College table, or mediated through journals and learned societies; as well as institutional connections through colleges and universities.

The primary focus will be to trace the path of and motivation behind Venn's religious development, from Evangelical upbringing, through private religious doubt and to public resignation of orders. One strand of this investigation will be to trace how far Venn departed from the real and virtual communities he 'inherited', such as the Venn family connexion, its associated Evangelical theology, values and party identity. The other strand will be the communities Venn chose or of which he 'acquired' membership, such as his academic approach with its associated networks and research, teaching and publishing activity. For this reason, the investigation of Venn's religious development is pursued alongside an exploration of the background to Venn's logical and biographical work. It will be outside the scope of this thesis to explore in detail the specialised content of Venn's academic work on logic. However,

¹³ See Figure 1 on p.viii. This image is intended solely as a point of visual metaphor, with apologies to historians of logic. The distinctive feature of Venn's diagrams was that they did not rely upon the mutual relationship between two or more classes, but rather the complete classification of all the possible combinations of the classes; providing a number of sub-divisions or compartments which then might be shown to be occupied or unoccupied. Ironically, the sense in which I am employing the image of a Venn diagram here is closer to that of logicians like Euler, whose work was superseded by Venn's.

in highlighting the key influences and networks that underpinned a seemingly diverse collection of works and achievements, it is hoped that common threads between the various aspects of Venn's work and thought will be usefully illuminated. This twin track approach will also build upon the work of historians who have sought to set understanding of religious identity and debate within a broader social and professional context, challenging the compartmentalisation of secular and religious activity.¹⁴

The exploration of Venn's religious and academic identities will also in turn act as an entry point for examining aspects of parallel developments in Evangelicalism, the University of Cambridge, and clerical and academic professions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. John Venn was born in 1834 and lived until 1923. These are facts not only necessary to a biographical text, but also key to placing him in the context of his times. Venn spent nearly seven decades worshipping in the same chapel as a member of the same College – if 'same' is the right word. In that time, he witnessed the change in the cry from 'church in danger' to 'faith in danger'; and the emergence of a more secular, research and teaching University from the remnants of mediaeval academic chantries. Venn was also a witness to the impact of mid-century religious debates, such as the controversy following the publication of *Essays and reviews*, and was an active participant in the implementation of reform at College and University level. Venn's life also provides a useful point of intersection for examining the development of a number of social elites. By birth he was a descendant of the Evangelical elite of Clapham, and by academic achievement, a fellow of both the Royal Society and the Society of Antiquaries, and President of a Cambridge college.

It will also be possible to compare Venn's experience with that of his contemporaries, such as Leslie and Fitzjames Stephen, Albert Venn Dicey, John Seeley and Henry Sidgwick. In

¹⁴ For example, J.H. Brooke, *Science and religion : some historical perspectives* [Cambridge History of Science] (Cambridge, 1991); F.M. Turner, *Contesting cultural authority: essays in Victorian intellectual life* (Cambridge, 1993).

comparison with his Stephen and Dicey cousins, Venn was less prominent publicly. Lack of prominence is relative. Venn was a noted academic, a man with a recognised family name; and it is arguable that his academic reputation has retained a general currency that Sidgwick and Dicey have not. However, Venn was not a regular writer for general periodicals as his cousins were, and did not follow them in taking public positions on a range of issues. Subsequently, Venn has not been singled out for the biographical attention which has in contrast been bestowed upon the Stephens and Sidgwick.¹⁵ There is a double opportunity here: both to identify Venn's achievements and contributions, and also to test whether Venn's recorded experience supports or challenges the conclusions that have been drawn in broader surveys and works on more noted figures. The aim is not necessarily to claim that Venn was a leading figure in the development of nineteenth century religion or academia, but rather that any rounded study of the development of post-Claphamite Evangelicalism, 'crises of faith', and University history requires recourse to the secondary figures who were participants rather than necessarily opinion-formers or leaders.

As will be seen, a study of Venn also presents the opportunity to explore a number of strands of existing historical literature. These include definitions of the ways in which Evangelical identity was constructed and was developing; the literature on mid-Victorian crises of faith and vocation; and the emergence of professional identity in clerical and academic circles. A number of these strands will be identified and sketched in outline in the next section, and explored critically in more detail in the context of the individual chapters to which they relate.

¹⁵ For example, J. Colaiaco, *James Fitzjames Stephen and the crisis of Victorian thought* (New York, 1983); N. Annan, *Leslie Stephen; the godless Victorian* (London, 1984); B. Schultz (ed.) *Essays on Henry Sidgwick* (Cambridge, 1992).

Structure

In keeping with a biographical structure, and in support of the aim of exploring the cross-connections between the various strands of Venn's thought and work, a broadly chronological approach has been adopted. Venn's life will be approached through a series of distinct periods of experience: childhood, student life, work as a curate, academic and clerical life in Cambridge prior to the mid 1880s, and academic life from the mid 1880s onwards, which overlaps chronologically with a final chapter on Venn's historical and biographical work. Approaching Venn's life by period rather than by separate strands of activity will allow the cross-connections between aspects of religious and academic identity and thinking to be drawn out more fully; thus enabling the exploration of religious identity to be placed in a broader social context.

At each stage a multi-stranded approach to religious identity will be utilised. Bebbington's identification of biblicism, crucicentrism, conversionism and activism as the main characteristics, or 'special marks', of Evangelicalism gives a sense of the multiple strands that need to be part of any definition of Evangelical identity.¹⁶ Evangelicalism can be taken to mean certain theological tenets, namely, the original sin of humanity, the possibility of redemption through faith in Christ's death as atonement for mankind's sin, and regeneration through the Holy Spirit bringing the repentant sinner into a personal relationship with God.¹⁷ The emphasis placed upon the individual conscience meant that Evangelicalism was as much a way of life exemplified by a set of values, as it was a theological approach. Individuals were exhorted to examine their consciences, to examine constantly their motives, to account for their actions and to live useful and serious lives.¹⁸ Evangelicals looked to the development of a personal relationship with God through Christ following a conversion experience rather than through sacramental grace; and good works were regarded as

¹⁶ D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in modern Britain: a history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), p. 3.

¹⁷ Tolley, *op. cit.*, pp.4-5; D.M. Rosman, *Evangelicals and culture* (London, 1984), pp.10-12; I. Bradley, *The call to seriousness: the Evangelical impact on the Victorians* (London, 1976), pp.20-2.

¹⁸ Tolley, *op. cit.*, pp.27-8, 30; I. Bradley, *op. cit.*, p.20.

evidence of true conversion rather than as essential to salvation.¹⁹ However, as Knight as pointed out, Evangelicalism cannot be narrowed down to adherence to a spiritual position or a religion of individual heroes, but must also be examined in terms of its corresponding organisational, social and political aspects.²⁰ Any definition of Evangelicalism must also include its associational aspect, whether in informal, personal networks, such as the Clapham Sect, or in membership of societies, such as the Church Missionary Society and the Bible Society, which approached every ecclesiastical, political and philanthropic cause systematically.²¹ In moving from a definition of the inner life to that of adherence to a public position, the boundaries of the definition begin to shift, as Burns in his commentary upon Conybeare's 'Church Parties' has pointed out, as a distinction is made between the history of Evangelicalism as a theological position and that of Evangelicalism as a party affiliation.²²

This framework will be applied firstly in the examination of the family environment that gave John Venn his first, and exclusively Evangelical, frame of reference for religion in the 1830s and 1840s. Writers have emphasised the way in which Evangelicalism, and particularly the Clapham families, elevated the religious role of the family and home as the centre of worship and the means to transmit religious values.²³ By looking at John Venn's early family relationships and the ways in which he was exposed to religion during his childhood, it is hoped to gain a clearer view of the elements that constituted his Evangelical upbringing, with points of comparison not only against the ideal that the Venn family set out publicly but also with the recorded experience of other families of Clapham descendants.

¹⁹ Bradley, *op. cit.*, pp.20-2; P. Toon, *Evangelical theology 1833-1856: a response to Tractarianism* (London, 1979), p.5.

²⁰ F. Knight, *The nineteenth century Church and English society* (Cambridge, 1995), pp.8-12.

²¹ Bradley, *op. cit.*, p.136.

²² A. Burns, Introduction to W. Conybeare, 'Church Parties' [1853-5] in S.Taylor (ed.), *From Cranmer to Davidson: a Church of England miscellany* [Church of England Record Society, VII] (Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 1999), pp.251-2.

²³ Tolley, *op. cit.*, pp.2, 11-20.

The Venn family has also been noted for constructing a particular familial ideal around its religious identity.²⁴ Stockton has usefully examined in detail the linkage between family and religious identity for the Venns but his focus upon the vertical lines of family inheritance limited the extent to which he considered the influence of 'horizontal' networks and contacts upon John Venn's development. It is the juxtaposition of these two elements, 'inherited' and 'acquired' communities, that will be explored over later chapters. The Venn family's tradition of projecting particular elements of an Evangelical and clerical identity will also recur as a theme when Venn's motivation and influences as a biographer are explored.

When John Venn matriculated at Gonville and Caius College Cambridge in 1853, the Evangelicalism of his family life ceased to be the sole religious influence in his life. The College was the first source of religious discipline and influence to which John Venn was subject when he emerged from the family home, and thereafter remained a constant element in his life. Caius provided the institutional backdrop against which Venn's personal change of religious perspective took place and added a further element to the emerging picture of his religious development. He entered a University on the cusp of reform. Religious tests still kept all degrees, fellowships and offices as Anglican monopolies. There was close linkage between academic appointments and requirements to take orders and to remain celibate; and the University was a *de facto* clerical seminary despite offering no first degree in Divinity. Each of these elements, which provide the context for Venn's experience as an undergraduate and his preparation for orders, were the subject of challenge or were in the process of being reformed during this period.²⁵ Venn's experience therefore provides a point of contrast for the reforms that were to follow, and in which Venn himself was a participant. Venn's published recollections of his student experience have become a source for accounts

²⁴ Stockton, *op. cit.*

²⁵ P. Searby, *A history of the University of Cambridge, Volume 3 1750-1870* (Cambridge, 1997), pp.260-2; C.N.L. Brooke, *A history of the University of Cambridge, Volume 4 1870-1990* (Cambridge, 1993), pp.102-5.

of the mid-nineteenth century University.²⁶ The unpublished autobiographical narrative and correspondence used here will add further nuance to the picture of College and University life previously published.

Attention will be given to the particular Evangelical reputation and tone lent to Caius during this period under the lead of its tutor, Charles Clayton. The experience of Evangelicalism in a College context formed Venn's introduction to more public elements of Evangelical reputation and party identity. Parallels will be drawn between Venn's observations of 'rigid' Caian Evangelicalism and Conybeare's classification of Evangelicals.²⁷ One theme of Evangelical historiography has been to identify a 'drying out' of Evangelicalism from a vital, positive and outward looking, experiential religion in the late eighteenth century to an introverted, partisan and narrow party in the 1860s.²⁸ Party membership has been defined both as a flag to which one held allegiance and a label externally applied; party boundaries being a result of the ideas to which one positively adhered but also defined negatively by opposition to alternative views.²⁹ Venn's undergraduate experience of collegiate religion offers the opportunity to examine these definitions in a case study of party identity in microcosm.

A further stage in Venn's religious development will be explored in a chapter on Venn's preparation for orders and time as a curate between 1859 and 1862. Publicly during this period, Venn fulfilled familial expectation by taking orders and serving under Evangelical clergymen. Venn's preparation for orders and experience of sustained clerical duty will be placed in the context not only of his family's clerical tradition, but also developments in the understanding of clerical education and identity, and the emergence of a distinct and self-

²⁶ J. Venn, 'College life and ways sixty years ago' in *Early collegiate life* (Cambridge 1913) has been used, for example, in Chapter 11 in C.N.L. Brooke, *A history of Gonville and Caius College* (Bury St Edmunds, 1985).

²⁷ Conybeare, *op. cit.*

²⁸ Bradley, *op. cit.*, pp.15-16; J. Wolfe, *The Protestant crusade in Great Britain 1829-1860* [Oxford Historical Monographs] (Oxford, 1991), pp.29-31.

²⁹ Conybeare, *op. cit.*, p.181.

conscious clerical professionalism.³⁰ This is also the period in which Venn had his party allegiance to Evangelicalism tested, in the debate that followed the publication of *Essays and reviews*. Therefore Venn's local and personal experience of the debate will be related to the polarisation in party identity that resulted from controversy between Tractarian and Evangelical groups, as the struggle for the upper hand within the Church of England served to polarise theological groupings.³¹

Meanwhile, privately, Venn was becoming conscious of a divergence between his public and private positions. He spent time with a circle of his own friends, including John Seeley, through whom he was introduced to and discussed new texts, most notably, the works of J.S. Mill. Venn later recognised that this was the period in which certain of the foundations of his departure from Evangelicalism were laid. It is therefore pertinent to frame Venn's religious development in terms of the literature on 'crises of faith' and 'unconversion' narratives. Crises of faith have been defined variously: in terms of the impacts of particular developments in science, philosophy or biblical criticism; and a reaction against an increase in religious intensity that had made either faith or vocation a greater burden. Party conflict has been seen to have polarised the religious choices being offered; while an intellectual revolt has been observed against the ethical implications of certain elements of Christian dogma.³² Broader definitions, which have related religious activity to the surrounding social and professional context, examining competing scientific and religious claims for cultural and academic leadership, will be picked up in the following chapters on Venn's emerging academic

³⁰ A. Russell, *The clerical profession* (London, 1984); B. Heeney, *A different kind of gentleman: parish clergy as professional men in early and mid-Victorian England* [Studies in British history and culture Volume 5] (Ohio, 1976).

³¹ Bradley, *op. cit.*, pp.70-2; Wolffe, *op. cit.*, p.64.

³² R.J. Helmstadter & B. Lightman (eds.), *Victorian faith in crisis : essays on continuity and change in nineteenth century religious belief* (Stanford, 1990); J. L. Altholz, 'The warfare of conscience with theology', in G. Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain, Volume IV Interpretations* (Manchester, 1988); Toon, *op. cit.*, p.205; Bradley, *op. cit.*, p.195; M. Bartholomew, 'The moral critique of Christian orthodoxy' in G. Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain, Volume II Controversies* (Manchester, 1988).

identity.³³ There is an obvious parallel to be explored with the development of Leslie Stephen, who at this time resigned his chaplaincy and fellowship. This in turn opens up an exploration of the demands of what has been described by Willey as 'honest doubt'.³⁴ Honesty demanded not only the examination of belief but also what constituted grounds for ceasing to call oneself a Christian, attend worship or practise as a clergyman.³⁵ This issue of honesty and conscience will recur in the examination of Venn's career on his return to Cambridge.

The mature stages of Venn's religious development will be explored in an examination of his academic career in Cambridge, with his resignation of orders in 1883 providing the fulcrum point. The aim is to draw together the factors that seem to explain Venn's eventual resignation of orders, not least the timing of his actions, and to provide a picture of his religious position in later life, comparing Venn's mature religious position with that of his wife, his generation of Clapham descendents, and his friends in Cambridge.

Initially, Venn continued to take clerical duty around Cambridge and was prepared to take to the University pulpit, delivering the Hulsean lectures in 1869. He was also being cultivated by his father as a potential Evangelical thinker; an interesting development in the context of a movement that has often been labelled as anti-intellectual in character. Contemporary critics like Newman were disparaging that 'Evangelical Religion or Puritanism ... had no intellectual basis; no internal idea or principle of unity, no theology'.³⁶ Subsequent historians have pointed to the relative lack of Evangelical involvement in the production of works of higher theology in comparison to high church and broad churchmen.³⁷ The direction of Evangelical scholarship has been seen to be shaped negatively by external challenges, such as the

³³ J.H. Brooke, *op. cit.*; Turner, *op. cit.*

³⁴ B. Willey, *Nineteenth century studies* (Harmondsworth, 1969), p.231.

³⁵ G. Parsons, 'On speaking plainly: 'Honest doubt' and the ethics of belief', in G. Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain, Volume II Controversies* (Manchester, 1988).

³⁶ J.H. Newman, *Apologia pro vita sua* Pt. V, p.200, quoted in W.E. Houghton, *The Victorian frame of mind 1830-70* (Yale, 1957), p.125.

³⁷ D.W. Bebbington, *The dominance of Evangelicalism: the age of Spurgeon and Moody* [A history of Evangelicalism] (Leicester, 2005), p.120.

perceived threat of Tractarianism and debate over *Essays and reviews*.³⁸ However, Bebbington and Brown have also pointed to the positive engagement of individual Evangelicals, such as Thomas Rawson Birks, with theological and scientific thinking.³⁹ Venn's contribution as a theological writer will be examined within the context of this debate; with a particular focus on the tensions that became apparent between his academic identity and the Evangelical expectations of his father.

Venn's religious development will also be analysed alongside the elements of the academic identity he was simultaneously developing. From the 1860s, Venn's main base was in Cambridge, where he established his household and his academic reputation; supporting his own family with the income from his fellowship, teaching and examining. He also developed an independent circle of friends and colleagues, men like John Grote, Henry Sidgwick and Francis Galton, alongside whom he taught, published and debated ideas. There are comparisons to be drawn here between the characteristics of family at the different stages in Venn's life: between the ideal of the Evangelical family of Venn's upbringing and the intellectual elite of University families he had joined by the 1880s, characterised by Annan as an 'intellectual aristocracy'.⁴⁰ Links forged by men through academic contacts and shared political interests such as Liberal Unionism, were reinforced over the dinner table as well as by the social and campaigning activities of their wives, and cemented by inter-marriage of their children. The Evangelical consolation of heavenly reunion of the family had also developed; into a scientific search for empirical evidence of survival beyond death through psychical research.

³⁸ Toon, *op. cit.*, pp.204-5.

³⁹ Bebbington, *The dominance of Evangelicalism*, pp.109-21; R.S. Brown, 'Evangelicalism, cultural references and theological change; considered with special reference to the thought of Thomas Rawson Birks (1810-1883)' (Open University PhD thesis, 1996).

⁴⁰ N. Annan, 'The intellectual aristocracy', *The dons: mentors, eccentrics and geniuses* (London, 2000), pp.304-41.

Venn's personal development as an academic will be viewed against an institutional environment being changed by University reforms, such as the end of religious tests, relaxation of requirements of celibacy and provision for teaching in new disciplines. Alongside these institutional reforms came the emergence of a distinct academic profession. Venn came to Caius expecting, and expected, to use his fellowship as a foundation for a clerical career, but spent his life instead in academic service. His career seems to embody the change that has been described as that from clergyman to don. Emergent academic identity has in part been defined in terms of expectation: where academic activity could form a career in itself with gentlemanly status, rather than as a mere precursor to clerical work.⁴¹

Distinctions have been drawn between academic identity associated primarily with teaching and that associated primarily with research and scholarship.⁴² Academic identity has also been approached in terms of function, with a distinction being drawn between the focus of University teaching upon specialised communication of academic knowledge; and the element of moral leadership inherent in College teaching.⁴³ The professionalisation of academia has also been explored in the context of approaches to knowledge; both through the changing understanding of what constituted a liberal education at a time of disciplinary specialisation, but also a rejection of the Anglican and moral presuppositions that had previously offered a framework for knowledge.⁴⁴ Venn's work as a lecturer and examiner, as an original contributor to the published corpus in logic, and as a member of academic and social networks such as the Royal Society, forms a basis on which to examine and test the ways in which academic professionalisation has been characterised.

⁴¹ A. J Engel, *From clergyman to don: the rise of the academic profession in nineteenth century Oxford* (Oxford, 1993).

⁴² J.W. Burrow, 'Victorian historians and the Royal Historical Society', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, Volume 39 (1989).

⁴³ S. Rothblatt, *The revolution of the dons: Cambridge and society in Victorian England* (London, 1968).

⁴⁴ P. Slee, *Learning and a liberal education: the study of modern history in the Universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Manchester, 1800-1914* (Manchester, 1986); R. Soffer, 'The development of disciplines in the modern English university', *Historical Journal*, Volume 31 (1988); D.S. Palfrey, 'The Moral Sciences Tripos at Cambridge 1848-1860' (University of Cambridge PhD thesis, 2002); Houghton, *op. cit.*, p.71.

Resignation of orders was not Venn's only change of direction in the 1880s. It was during this period that he began to devote much more time to historical and biographical research on the communities of which he was a member. The aim of exploring Venn's work as a historian and biographer will be to locate him in the context of the networks of friends, family and colleagues who assisted in the production of his works, as well as the intellectual communities which influenced his writing. Venn's works will also be examined in the context of the Victorian passion for biographical and autobiographical forms, and the contemporary fashion for antiquarian activity and the networks which underpinned it, as well as the particular historical tradition of his family.⁴⁵ Finally, Venn's biographical and historical work will be related to his logical and statistical works; looking at connections to the thought of Buckle, Mill and Galton in relation to scientific approaches to history. Venn's engagement in antiquarian activity, as a professional academic committed to scientific method, potentially throws further sidelights on the redefinition of the boundaries between the professional and amateur in academic life.

As well as the real and intellectual networks in which Venn operated as a historian, there were also the virtual communities that he helped to create in the course of his narratives: the historical dimension Venn gave to what it meant to be a Venn, a Caian or a Cambridge man. The importance of what MacFarlane termed the 'myth of community', the need to create a connection in face of change, has also been noted with regard to the role of biographies and family archives among descendants of Clapham families.⁴⁶ This construct will be tested not only in relation to Venn's historical works on his clerical inheritance but also his contribution to the (re)construction of college identity following the College and University reforms of the Royal Commissions.

⁴⁵ Houghton, *op. cit.*, pp.316-23; P. Levine, *The amateur and the professional: antiquarians, historians and archaeologists in Victorian England 1838-1886* (Cambridge, 1986).

⁴⁶ A. Macfarlane, *Reconstructing historical communities* (Cambridge, 1977), pp.1-3; Tolley, *op. cit.*, pp.2-5.

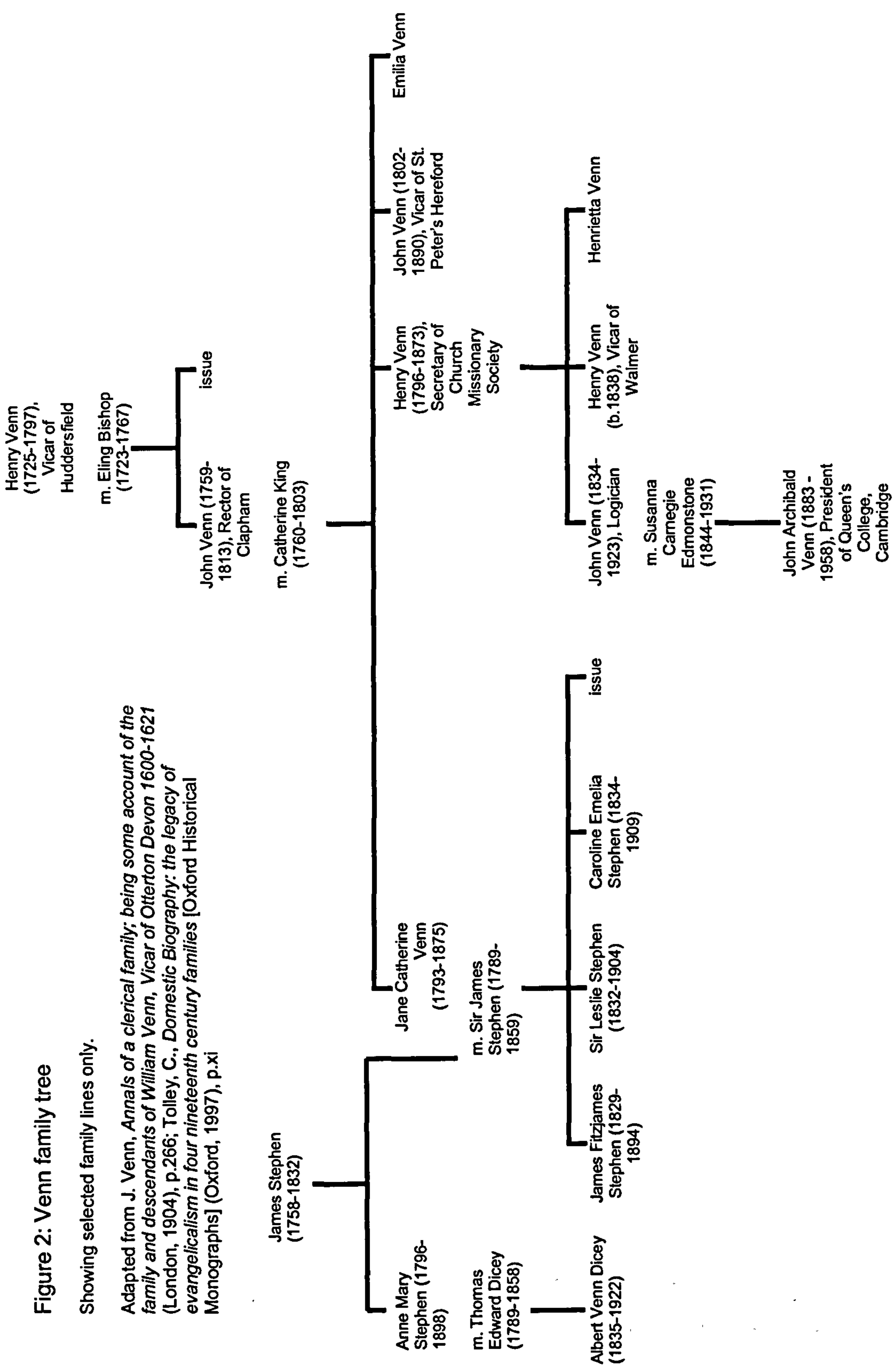
Conclusion

It is intended that a rounded biographical portrait of Venn will be built up, placing him in the context of the changing intellectual, social and institutional groups of which he was a part. This multi-layered approach will be used to draw together an account of Venn's religious development, and through the prism of Venn's experience, make a particular contribution to the understanding of the development of religion and academia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

Figure 2: Venn family tree

Showing selected family lines only.

Adapted from J. Venn, *Annals of a clerical family; being some account of the family and descendants of William Venn, Vicar of Otterton Devon 1600-1621* (London, 1904), p.266; Tolley, C., *Domestic Biography: the legacy of evangelicalism in four nineteenth century families* [Oxford Historical Monographs] (Oxford, 1997), p.xi



2. 'the Evangelical creed seemed the only one in the field': Childhood

In this chapter, the multi-stranded definition of religious identity previously established will be used as a basis for considering the nature of Evangelicalism in John Venn's upbringing and family environment in the 1830s and 1840s. This will draw upon existing literature on the relationship between Evangelicalism and the family as articulated publicly and practised privately by the Venn family, and as considered by historians of Evangelicalism, particularly among the Claphamite families. Drawing upon the extensive family archive and Venn's own autobiographical recollections, the aim will be to develop an understanding of the starting point of Venn's religious identity as a basis on which to build in future chapters, while making a broader contribution to the understanding of the nature of an Evangelical upbringing within a family that was at the heart of moderate Evangelicalism in the Church of England.

It has been argued that Victorian Evangelicalism made its greatest impact in the sphere of family life and values by idealising the family as a divine institution in which religion and the family were mutually reinforcing, and the household was a centre for worship.¹ Tolley has explored this hypothesis in more detail in relation to four Claphamite families where he found family environments in which religion was an integral and natural fact of existence, and where the parents took their religious responsibilities to their children seriously, looking to encourage the conscience and true acceptance of religion rather than a religion of forms. The substance of these families' Evangelicalism was described by Tolley as being mild theologically and engaged in the world, being imbued with a strong sense of duty to employ talents in service to God. Religious lessons were reinforced for the children of these families by the personal examples of committed Evangelical saints before them.² As will be seen, the Venn family took a public role in articulating these ideals and in practising them in private. However, John Venn's upbringing also illustrates two elements to which Tolley has given less emphasis,

¹ P. Jalland, *Death in the Victorian family* (Oxford, 1996), p.2; D.M. Rosman, *Evangelicals and culture* (London, 1984), p.97.

² C. Tolley, *Domestic biography: the legacy of Evangelicalism in four nineteenth century families* [Oxford Historical Monographs] (Clarendon, 1997), pp.8-40.

firstly, the impact of the role of women in a worldview which elevated the relationship between religion and the domestic sphere. Secondly, the Venns were a clerical as well as an Evangelical family, whose activities call into question Tolley's formulation that it was religious seriousness within the home rather than the Church establishment which was more important to the Claphamite families.³

Emphasis has also been placed upon the pride Claphamite families took in their history, the religious examples set by their ancestors and the public reputation of their family names.⁴ Tolley has argued that the religious role accorded to the family also gave rise to certain documentary forms which sustained a corporate ethos beyond the life of the religious ideas with which it had originated.⁵ With regard specifically to the Venn family, it has been argued that a particular familial ideal was created, founded upon generations of clerical service and supplemented from the mid-eighteenth century with the idea of an Evangelical dynasty. This familial ideal has been viewed as reaching a peak in the generation of John Venn's father, Henry; but as disintegrating in the following generation, when John Venn himself broke the clerical continuity by resigning orders.⁶ This sense of historical identity and Stockton's argument for the nature of John Venn's role in articulating it will be explored in more detail in the context of John Venn's work as a biographer and historian, but it will be touched upon here by way of introduction to the values which underpinned John Venn's upbringing and the documentary forms in which they were recorded.

Venn's childhood

John Venn was born into a family that could not only claim to adhere to a particularly Evangelical standard of family life, but had actively participated in articulating and disseminating that standard. John Venn's great-grandfather, Henry Venn of Huddersfield,

³ *Ibid*, pp.47-8.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.54.

⁵ *Ibid*, pp.1-6.

⁶ W.K. Stockton, 'The Venn family since the mid-eighteenth century' (Brandeis University PhD thesis, 1980).

published *The complete duty of man* as a practical handbook of Evangelicalism.⁷ This eighteenth century tract went through multiple editions into the nineteenth century, including one in the late 1830s edited with an introduction by John Venn's father, Henry Venn of CMS. John Venn's grandfather, John Venn of Clapham, began work on a biography of his father, Henry Venn of Huddersfield. It was left to Henry Venn of CMS to complete the work, which presented the life of an Evangelical 'saint' whose life embodied the application of Evangelical principles.⁸ Henry Venn of CMS also added two published sermons reiterating the importance of family religion and the religious responsibilities of family members to each other.⁹ These works provided the framework for, and a strong strand of historical tradition to, the Venn family's Evangelicalism.

Fundamental to the view expressed in these works was the idea that family relationships were divinely ordained to a purpose,

The constitution of families, like all other dispensations of providence, bears the stamp of Divine goodness in its provision for human happiness in this transitory life ... All the dispensations of His providence converge with the dispensations of His grace, to train up a child of light in the way everlasting, and to make him meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. The family relation has this end in view; and when sanctified by Divine grace it admirably subserves this end.¹⁰

As such, natural, temporal relationships were sanctified, with the aim of modelling the earthly family upon the heavenly one. Thus the family unit took on enormous religious significance as the cradle of religion; and the domestic setting became a centre for worship and spiritual

⁷ H. Venn, *The complete duty of man; or, a system of doctrinal and practical Christianity with prayers for families and individuals* [Select Christian authors with introductory essays No 53] with an introductory essay by Rev. John Brown (Glasgow, 1829).

⁸ Venn, H. (ed.), *The life and a selection from the letters of the late Rev. Henry Venn, M.A.* (London, 1834).

⁹ H. Venn & J. Venn, *The hope and joy of re-union in the heavenly state...sermons on the death of Eling Elliott* (London, 1843); H. Venn & W.B. Mackenzie, *Sermons preached on Sunday February 1, 1863 in the parish church of St. Mary Islington on the occasion of the death of Mrs Wilson* (London, 1863).

¹⁰ H. Venn, *Sermons... on the occasion of the death of Mrs Wilson*, pp.14-15.

training.¹¹ Family members had a duty to show concern for each other's spiritual welfare.¹² Most particularly, parents had a duty to their children, not only to educate them to lead active and useful lives but to provide for their spiritual welfare. In the discharge of this duty, parents were accountable to God, who would punish any negligence.¹³ From an early age it was considered possible to convey a sense that God is gracious and good, and that the earth is full of his goodness; then, as the child matured, to convey the doctrines of man's corruption, atoned for by Christ.¹⁴ Alongside these general precepts, the force of example, both scriptural and personal, was paramount. Children were directed to observe the behaviour of true Christians, including the example of the parents themselves. The private application of the familial ideal publicly articulated by the Venns will be explored from the perspective of John Venn's upbringing.

John Venn was born on 4th August 1834 in Hull where his father was then vicar of Drypool. Henry Venn had received the living through the offices of William Wilberforce, with whom he was closely acquainted having been born in Clapham in 1796 and raised among an extended network of Evangelical families including the Wilberforces, Thorntons, Stephens, and Macaulays. After graduating from Queen's College, Cambridge, Henry Venn took orders and served as a curate before returning to Cambridge in 1824 as a fellow of Queen's, receiving his BD in 1828. The Clapham Evangelical connection was perpetuated when Henry married Martha Sykes, a cousin of Marianne Thornton, in January 1829; and Henry's sister, Jane, married James Stephen.

In Martha, Henry Venn found a soulmate to whom he was devoted. From their letters to each other, it is possible to gain a picture not only of their affection for each other, but also of

¹¹ *Ibid*, p.10.

¹² H. Venn, *The complete duty of man*, p.370.

¹³ *Ibid*, p.390.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp.366-7.

aspects of their private religion. Henry was highly conscious of the spiritual aspect of his marriage

It will be no desecration of the hours of this sacred day to begin a letter to you. For thoughts of you have not only mingled with all my most solemn devotional exercises - but have seemed an incentive to their fervency...I often feel amidst many topics of a personal & ministerial kind those of a domestic nature had their place.¹⁵

He did not regard thoughts of his marriage or his wife as distracting from his religion, but rather as complementary to it. His private ministerial duty as a husband and father was added to public ministerial labours. Henry relied upon Martha not only as a temporal but also as a spiritual helpmeet.¹⁶ He looked to her to watch over him spiritually and to point out his faults. Both took their duties as parents seriously, seeing it as a grave responsibility and honour to train a child up in Christian grace.¹⁷ In a process Henry termed 'stirring each other up', he identified the role of family members in mutual help towards a greater level of spirituality, through mutual watchfulness and encouragement.¹⁸

John Venn was the Venns' second child; a daughter, Henrietta, having been born in 1832. Shortly after John's birth, the family relocated to London, when Henry Venn accepted the living of St. John's Holloway, which was in the gift of Daniel Wilson, vicar of Islington. Once there, another child was born in 1837 but did not survive beyond infancy; while Henry, known as Harry, was born in 1838. It was Martha who took charge of the children's early upbringing; Henry Venn describing his wife as 'a spiritual instructor to your husband, children & all in your house'.¹⁹ The Evangelical religious framework which elevated the role of the home can also be seen to have given status to the religious role of a woman within the domestic sphere for which she was traditionally seen to bear responsibility. Martha documented the development of her children in a form of diary begun in 1838, which noted their childhood

¹⁵ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C32, H. Venn to M. Venn, 7/10/1838.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 29/6/1835.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 20/11/1835.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 22/10/1834.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 2/11/1835.

illnesses and vaccinations, but also recorded the incidents which illustrated their religious progress.²⁰ Religion was gently introduced, but no attempt was made to force observance. The emphasis was upon bringing the child to want to pray of his or her own accord, rather than making religion distasteful through coercion.²¹ While wishing to encourage their spiritual development, Martha was reluctant to encourage a religion of forms in her children. Evangelicalism was a religion of motives, in which God judged the spirit in which acts were performed, not just the acts themselves. It was therefore important that the children undertook religious acts in full understanding of their significance, not merely because they knew they would please their parents. Despite the parents' overriding concern to bring their child to God, they were reserved in their communication of religious ideas, preferring through household worship and seizing whatever opportunities were presented, to create a religious environment where it was hoped to educate childish faculties to seek religious truths of their own accord. The religious progress of the children was thus closely observed. In 1843, Henry Venn made an entry into the notebook started by his wife to note the indications in John of a 'lively sense of God's mercy & goodness' and a facility for recollection of the Scripture, while he was careful not to press Harry who disliked church-going and Sunday prayers but delighted in Bible stories and was able to retain the subjects of family prayers for months afterwards.²²

The responsibility for continuing the diary was taken on by Henry Venn after 1839. Martha became ill in August 1838, and during the course of her illness, her husband was diagnosed as having heart disease and took a break from his clerical duties from August 1838 to August 1839. They moved to Brighton and then to Leamington for treatments but Martha was diagnosed as being terminally consumptive. As Henry was still not fit to work, the family moved once more, to Torquay. The progress of Martha's illness and her eventual death were

²⁰ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F22, Notebook about children, 1838-44.

²¹ *Ibid*, 25/5/1838.

²² *Ibid*, 14/5/1843.

extensively documented by her husband. Among the family's archive survive a set of notes charting Martha's illness, recalling their final conversations, thoughts and prayers, and culminating in a list of lessons to be learned from these events.²³ This was supplemented by a memorandum prepared immediately after Martha's death, written primarily for the children and for those who knew Martha, again documenting the decline of her health, her religious observance, and her demeanour in facing illness and death.²⁴ In addition, an unfinished paper addressed to the children from their mother, but in their father's hand, represented an attempt to set out Martha's wishes for her children.²⁵ These documents illustrate the importance which the Venns, like many of their Evangelical contemporaries, placed upon 'dying well', believing that moment of death was close to that of judgement.²⁶ The characteristics that Jalland has identified as offering the reassurance of a 'good death', were conspicuous in the accounts Henry wrote of his wife's final illness, particularly in the memorandum intended for the children. Martha was portrayed as having died in the bosom of her family, cheerfully accepting her illness and death as acts of Divine providence, or as she herself termed it, God's 'chastening hand'.²⁷ She was described as having borne her suffering with fortitude, preparing herself through religious observance for as long as her strength would stand.²⁸ There is a parallel here perhaps with Birks' description of the death of Edward Bickersteth in 1850,

The principles which guided Mr. Bickersteth through life, shone out clearly in his last illness, and sustained him in his dying hours. Even the occasional wandering, which resulted from the nature of his disease, left the graces of the Spirit as transparent as ever,...His death was an illustration of the promise –“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright – for the end of that man is peace.”²⁹

²³ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F11, Diary, 1818-1840.

²⁴ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F18, 'Account of my mother's death by my father', 26/3/1840.

²⁵ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C33, Unfinished paper from Martha Venn to her children, 12/12/1839.

²⁶ Jalland, *op.cit.*, pp.21-36.

²⁷ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C33, Unfinished paper from Martha Venn to her children, 12/12/1839.

²⁸ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F18, 'Account of my mother's death by my father', 26/3/1840.

²⁹ T.R. Birks, *Memoir of the Reverend Edward Bickersteth*, (London, 1852), Volume ii, pp.484-5. I would like to thank Professor John Wolffe for drawing my attention to this extract.

Martha's final illness was stage-managed to a certain extent for the benefit of the children in order that 'they might have no terrific impressions respecting death - but as far as possible those of an opposite kind'.³⁰ As Jalland has argued, there could be a distance between the literary ideal of a good death and the reality.³¹ In reality, Martha was not immune from fear, particularly with regard to the future of her children. She regretted in particular having neglected to set out detailed instructions for Henrietta's benefit. She feared that after her death, Henry might be offered a colonial bishopric, which would lead to the children being doubly bereaved.³² The written accounts and the concern for the children's feelings about death were not borne of solely of parental concern but also had a didactic religious purpose. Henry was certain of the value attendance on the dying could have in terms of the religious development of his children. It was a theme to which he returned following the death of an aunt in 1853

God has brought you into a scene not only of solemn interest but which will I trust through his grace be very profitable to your souls... to have death brought very near to you, which you have only as yet heard about. I pray continually that you may listen to the lesson which God is teaching you.³³

Proximity to the dying was felt to heighten awareness of one's own accountability in the face of eternity, and as well as providing the opportunity to learn from the demeanour of the dying, providing examples for the improvement of one's own conduct.³⁴

After Martha Venn's death in 1840 Henry continued to talk and write of the children's mother in terms of her continuing existence, temporarily separate from them in heaven.

Oh what a meeting that will be when dear Mama & many others whom I have loved as well as you loved her tho you never knew them, all meet together before the throne of

³⁰ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F11, Diary, 1818-1840, 10/3/1840.

³¹ Jalland, *op. cit.*, p.21.

³² CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F11, Diary, 1818-1840, 26/1/1840.

³³ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to his children, 7/7/1853.

³⁴ Jalland, *op. cit.*, p.29.

God & the Lamb! True it is necessary that we die before we can have this joy ...but when we know that Jesus has overcome death & opened unto us the gate of everlasting life – then we shall cease to fear & dislike death – we shall regard it with longing & joy as you do now my return.³⁵

The theme of heavenly reunion within the Venn family's correspondence was not untypical: the reunion of a family divided by death has been identified an increasingly common response to death during this period.³⁶ Henry Venn was later to state the case publicly for heavenly re-union in a funeral sermon of 1863, and in private letters to his children the prospect of heavenly re-union was not only put forward as a comfort following the death of their mother, but also a means of associating death with heaven and reunion as things to be desired.³⁷

It was now left to Henry alone to watch over the spiritual development of his children. He wrote that he heard their prayers every morning and read the scripture with them on Sunday.³⁸ When absent from them he would refer to these shared moments; directing them back to a hymn they had followed together, or asking them to find a particular passage in their bibles. It is not clear who oversaw family prayers in his absence, although the children when younger were under the care of a governess who may have fulfilled this role, and by 1849, the children themselves were given the responsibility of reading prayers to each other.³⁹ Henry sought to convey religious ideas to his children in largely positive terms. Knowledge and love of God was equated with happiness and, although the sinfulness of the earthly world was clearly expressed, happiness in it was to be encouraged when sanctified

³⁵ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C33, H. Venn to his children, 29/7/1841.

³⁶ Jalland, *op. cit.*, pp.271-6.

³⁷ H. Venn & J. Venn, *The hope and joy of re-union in the heavenly state*, pp.13-14; CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F22, Notebook about children, 1838-44, 14/5/1843.

³⁸ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F22, Notebook about children, 1838-44, 14/5/1843.

³⁹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C33, H. Venn to his children, 2/1/1849.

through love of God.⁴⁰ Henry Venn's letters were religious in tone, as was the domestic environment he was trying to create, but this environment was by no means intended to be unhappy. The pleasure Henry expressed at his children's progress was always mixed with encouragement to strive harder to follow the example of Jesus.⁴¹ Henry regularly expressed affection in his letters to his children and he tried to entertain them by entering into their games and activities.⁴²

Henry clearly took to heart the advice of his grandfather's writing on conveying religious knowledge to children,

A successful method of doing this, I apprehend, will be to watch the opportunities when outward things and particular providences will give efficacy to their religious instruction.⁴³

He took care to put religion into terms they could understand. A common theme was to use family relationships as a metaphor. Henry's image of God was one of a loving, paternal figure rather than of a stern judge.⁴⁴ He also juxtaposed the love of an earthly father and the infinitely greater care of the heavenly father.⁴⁵ Very few letters were written without taking the opportunity to offer a prayer, draw a religious inference or describe a church service. The children were taught to see God's providence in every action - their father's absences, their worldly comforts and their health.⁴⁶ The children were encouraged in their family duty to watch over each other and 'stir each other up' by encouraging each other and speaking to each other of God.⁴⁷ All of this contributed to the impression that Henry wished to convey, namely that God permeated every part of life.

⁴⁰ H. Venn to children, 27 June 1845 in W. Knight, *Memoir of Henry Venn BD Prebendary of St. Paul's and Honorary Secretary of the Church Missionary Society* (London, 1882), p.119; CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81C33, H. Venn to children, 27/6/1843.

⁴¹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81C33, H. Venn to his children, 3/11/1843.

⁴² *Ibid*, 29/6/1840, 29/2/1842.

⁴³ H. Venn, *The complete duty of man*, p.390.

⁴⁴ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81C33, H. Venn to his children, 13/7/1841, 18/7/1843.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 29/4/1841, 3/11/1843.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 16/6/1840, 21/7/1854.

⁴⁷ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81C33, H. Venn to his children, 13/7/1841.

Henry Venn sought not only to teach his children particular theological ideas and to raise them within a particular religious culture, but to have them absorb and live their life consistently with certain values - to see every aspect of their lives not only from an earthly but also from a spiritual perspective, and to live useful and sober lives doing their duty in service of God.⁴⁸ As Tolley has pointed out, theologically, it was a moderate Evangelicalism; with a stress upon vital religion, premised upon conversion and grace. The means of redemption was provided by Christ's atonement on the cross; justification coming through faith in that atonement. This eschatology meant taking certain positions in this world, as Simeon had described, 'Service to God did not in his eyes require a retreat into other-worldliness, but proper everyday conduct in this world'.⁴⁹ This was not a purely emotional and spiritual Evangelicalism, but a pragmatic and practical religion, distrustful of enthusiasm, engaging with the earthly world with a strong sense of accountability to God and awareness of one's public duty.⁵⁰

The importance placed by Henry Venn upon duty was daily impressed upon the Venn children, when their father explained to them the need for his frequent absences from them in order to fulfil his Christian duty

I have the opportunity of assisting in conferring a great benefit upon the Church of Christ, and I am sure that if I were to sacrifice duty to the exceeding great pleasure of joining you both you and I should suffer rather than gain by it.⁵¹

After a trip abroad to recover his health after the death of his wife, Henry Venn had returned to parish duties in Holloway and undertook an increasing amount of work on behalf of the Church Missionary Society that had been co-founded and chaired by his father in 1799,

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 23/7/1854.

⁴⁹ C. Simeon to a father, 17/7/1823 quoted in B. Hilton, *The age of atonement: the influence of Evangelicalism on social and economic thought, 1765-1865* (Oxford, 1988), p.12.

⁵⁰ Tolley, *op. cit.*, pp.16-18, 38-41; Stockton, *op. cit.*, pp.111-5.

⁵¹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81C34, H. Venn to children, 23/7/1854.

becoming Honorary Secretary in 1841.⁵² In 1846, Henry Venn resigned his living, allowing him to work full-time for the Church Missionary Society. He told his curate, Edmonstone, and remarked in his journal that it would also allow him to spend more time with his children.⁵³ In reality, the work consumed much of his time and attention, to the exclusion of other concerns.⁵⁴ By the 1850s, Henry Venn was a recognised leader of the Evangelical and missionary cause, and the calls upon his time were growing; his son later noting that the pressure of work was only matched by Henry's commitment to it.⁵⁵

John Venn's memories as recorded in his *Annals* began with his mother's final illness but he indicated that he did not at the time fully appreciate what her death meant.⁵⁶ Following her death he remembered being left largely in the charge of governesses, as his father was committed to parish duties and work for the Church Missionary Society.⁵⁷ It was not in John Venn's opinion a strict regime, nor was his complaint one of punishment or deprivation, simply isolation related to the loss of his mother and the increasing absorption of his father in his work.

Our general life at home as children was not, I think, a joyous one, though it was far from being actually unhappy.⁵⁸

It devolved to Henry Venn's sister, Emelia, to provide the main maternal influence following Martha Venn's death, by selecting the children's governesses and their childhood reading.⁵⁹ Her nephew remembered her fondly,

The person to whom we really owed most at the time in question was, I think, our Aunt Emilia.... she was not able to be with us nearly so often or so long as she and we could have wished. Her coming was always a bright and happy incident in our lives.⁶⁰

⁵² W. Knight, *The missionary secretariat of Henry Venn, B.D.* (London, 1880), pp.64-5.

⁵³ Stockton, *op. cit.*, p.315.

⁵⁴ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F21, Henry Venn's journal, 5/1/1850.

⁵⁵ J. Venn, *Annals of a clerical family; being some account of the family and descendants of William Venn, Vicar of Otterton Devon 1600-1621* (Cambridge, 1904), p.173.

⁵⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, *Annals 1834-66* by John Venn, p.2.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp.8-9.

Emelia Venn also had duties elsewhere. In addition to looking after her unmarried brother, John Venn, she had her share of parish, educational and social work in his parish in Hereford. For Emelia, and particularly for Henry Venn, the domestic duty to the Evangelical family was sometimes a conflicting call upon time needed for performance of the public duties of Christian calling.

Despite his absences, Henry Venn was the key religious influence upon John Venn's upbringing. It is notable that in describing his early years John Venn did not emphasise the religious ideas and observances but rather the lasting impression that was made by Evangelicalism as personified by his father and, to a lesser extent, his aunt and uncle:

Unlike many parents of decided Evangelical opinions, he never spoke much to us about religion. Neither he nor our dear uncle ever forced religious advice upon us...Indeed it was needless for them to preach to us. Their lives spoke far more plainly and convincingly than any words.⁶¹

The Venn children were directed to observe the behaviour of true Christians, and had before them the examples of their own living Evangelical saints within the home. Venn's words echoed Leslie Stephen's description of the influence of his own father,

[We] could not but be continuously conscious that we were under the eye of a father governed by the loftiest and purest motives and devoting himself without stint to what he regarded as his duty.⁶²

Sir James Stephen's relationship to Evangelical theology may have been more ambivalent than Henry Venn's, but what was important to their children was the power of the religious example set by their parents. Venn was impressed by and in awe of what he perceived to be the consistent way in which his father lived his life according to his faith, and also the sheer strength of his father's personality and example.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.8.

⁶¹ J. Venn, *Annals of a clerical family*, p.174.

⁶² L. Stephen, *The life of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen* (London, 1895), p.63.

I think that my case was that of a mind dominated up to a certain stage by another mind of a totally different kind. This superior influence with me was found in my father...He held, with the most unswerving faith the Evangelical opinions he had inherited, and his whole life was an absolutely consistent display of the working of this faith... It was not so much dogmatic teaching on my father's part as his strong personality that gave me the initial start in the direction of his own opinions.⁶³

For John Venn it was not taught theology, but religion in practice, in the shape of his father, that was the most important religious influence. The force of that example will be seen to be an important strand in Venn's continuing relationship to Evangelical churchmanship.

Furthermore, Henry Venn as exemplar stood not only for Evangelical faith but also personified a particular brand of Protestant churchmanship, devoted successively to the demands of the parish and supporting missionary activity. Henry Venn upheld the importance of the Church as a visible institution - helping to preach the gospel, bringing the faithful together in worship and promoting the virtues of an ordered life - and the importance of the Protestant church as a protection against the 'superstition' he observed in the Catholic Church.⁶⁴ It has been argued that the visible Church took on additional importance for Evangelicals from the 1830s onwards as part of a Protestant defence against the perceived threat from Roman Catholicism and Tractarianism.⁶⁵ An argument has also been made for the particular importance of Church order for moderate Evangelicals like Henry Venn, by offering a necessary counterbalance to the sentimentality and individualism which were becoming more apparent in contemporary Evangelicalism as influenced by Irving.⁶⁶ In the Venn family, the importance of churchmanship and the Anglican ministry was not just an expression of spirituality and religious discipline or a reaction to contemporary events, but was reinforced

⁶³ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.39.

⁶⁴ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C33, H. Venn to his children, 23/6/1841.

⁶⁵ R.S.Brown, 'Evangelicalism, cultural references and theological change; considered with special reference to the thought of Thomas Rawson Birks (1810-1883)' (Open University PhD thesis, 1996), p.72.

⁶⁶ T. E. Yates, *Venn and the Victorian bishops abroad; the missionary politics of Henry Venn and their repercussions upon the Anglican episcopate of the colonial period 1841-1872* (London, 1978), p.192.

and integrated into family tradition. It was Henry Venn's hope for his sons in maturity that they would not only play their part in 'advancing the Kingdom of Xt' and prove to be the fourth generation of the family with an Evangelical calling, but also that they would be useful in the Church.⁶⁷

Henry Venn may have been the dominating influence of John Venn's childhood but this did not mean that he felt he shared an intimacy of discourse and spiritual confidence with his father. Recalling an overseas tour of Switzerland with his father in 1855, John Venn blamed himself that he did not make more of this time with his father, and in his *Annals* deliberately quoted a letter from Henry Venn to his brother, John Venn of Hereford, in October 1855 in which he noted 'Dear John seemed to enjoy everything in his quiet way:- but he did not quite wake up as I had hoped'.⁶⁸ Henry Venn, like other Claphamite parents, set great store publicly in the role of parents in breaking down any spiritual reserve in relationships with their children, but appears to have been aware that his public duties had restricted the time he had had available to engage in such a way with his own son. He later regretted that 'the pressure of my employment when at home has so much interfered with any advantage which you might otherwise have derived from our mutual intercourse'.⁶⁹

When writing of his father, John wrote of his father's affection and thoughtfulness regarding his children, but emphasised the awe and reverence he felt towards Henry Venn. This contributed to an inability to communicate freely with his father

He was however very tolerant, and would I am certain, have been ready and willing to listen to any doubts and difficulties which lay within certain limits. But the awe which I

⁶⁷ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 27/7/1854, 22/10/1862.

⁶⁸ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, *Annals*, p.63.

⁶⁹ H. Venn, *Sermons preached...on the death of Mrs Wilson*, p.17; CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 2/8/1861.

always felt for him, from the earliest days, made it quite impossible for me ever to argue with him except upon matters in which I knew that he had no strong feelings.⁷⁰

For John, Henry Venn personified Evangelicalism, and in the face of his father's religious example, John found himself wanting:

I can never recall the time when my feelings towards him were not those of the profoundest reverence, in fact of awe. It is quite possible that with some very exceptional kind of boy - of unusual maturity of character & moral strength -, the relations between father and son might in consequence have been those of perfect confidence and affection. As it was, in my own case, I must admit that there was a very strong infusion of fear; not the fear as of a master, but rather that of a being of a superior order.⁷¹

A revealing deletion from the autobiographical text quoted above indicates that John Venn felt his sister, Henrietta, was of the 'higher moral stamp' that would permit of such intimacy and confidence with their father.⁷²

The theme Venn chose to emphasise in his own narrative of his childhood was of a certain narrowness and isolation, not only in terms of distance from his father, but also socially and intellectually. There were in John Venn's later opinion 'very few companions of our youth whom, owing to their mental qualities and their social position we could regard as permanent acquaintances'. The exception were summers spent in Hereford when the children of local gentlemen and clergymen provided a source of suitable acquaintance.⁷³ It was a state he contrasted with the envy of his father's upbringing at the Clapham rectory with a 'host of eminent and lifelong friends'.⁷⁴ This might be termed 'golden age' thinking - referring back to a time past when things were seen to have been better.⁷⁵ Venn's concern to convey his feeling

⁷⁰ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.38.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.16.

⁷² *Ibid*, p.16.

⁷³ *Ibid*, pp.9, 15.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.15.

⁷⁵ Tolley, *op. cit.*, p.54.

of isolation has to be tempered with the evidence from elsewhere within the Annals and the family archive. John Venn was part of a network of Claphamite cousins. He recollected going to Brighton to join Elliott and Stephen cousins; and some of Leslie Stephen's earliest memories were of playing with the Venn children at Highgate.⁷⁶ Various of the Gurneys, Stephens and Diceys joined the Venn children when they spent summers with John and Emelia Venn at Hereford.⁷⁷ The link with the Stephen family was particularly strong. Leslie Stephen later recalled that his father's respect for Henry Venn was such that when Fitzjames Stephen made up his mind to take up law rather than to take orders he was required first to discuss and justify his decision in discussion with Henry Venn.⁷⁸ The close geographical association centred on Clapham had been lost, but family, and at this point, religious, ties remained.

The religious ideas, examples and values of John Venn's youth were conveyed within a particular cultural setting. John Venn's residual impression was of a certain narrowness in his upbringing as a result of his family's Evangelicalism. His father was remembered to have had a distrust of 'worldly amusements',

Theatres, novel-reading, dancing, cards, etc., were never, to the best of my recollection, named or denounced, but the understanding was none the less clear that such things were not for him or his.⁷⁹

This was not a straightforward rejection of all cultural amusements on the grounds that they appealed to the senses and detracted from religious seriousness and work.⁸⁰ Henry Venn approved of selected painters, particularly Rubens, and enjoyed the poetry of Pope and Dryden, but did hold 'the old Evangelical objection to novel'.⁸¹ However, the Venn household was not one of puritan austerity nor cultural philistinism. As Rosman has shown, class and

⁷⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.3; Caius Archive, Venn papers, C02/04, L. Stephen to J. Venn, 2/9/1902.

⁷⁷ Stockton, *op. cit.*, p.254.

⁷⁸ Stephen, *op. cit.*, pp.33-73.

⁷⁹ Venn, *Annals of a clerical family*, p.169.

⁸⁰ D.M. Rosman, *op. cit.*, pp.178-93.

⁸¹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.28.

social milieu were important factors alongside religion. The Venn family had a comfortable existence in material terms, and the comments about 'suitable' companionship, illustrate Venn's awareness of their social privilege and position. Henry Venn had a private income, sufficient to provide for his family, while allowing him to work for the Church Missionary Society without drawing a salary. It also gave him the freedom to indulge the children in a variety of pursuits. Henry may not have encouraged the children in the activity of novel-reading but this was in contrast with the way in which he facilitated their riding and interest in nature. They were also provided with a drawing master for art lessons, tutors for languages, tools for gardening and carpentry, and equipment for electrical and mechanical experiments.⁸² This was not perhaps the cultured and literary environment Christopher Tolley has found within the Stephen family, but it certainly parallels what he found in terms of a nurturing and materially comfortable family environment.⁸³ Part of the difference in cultures between the families may have been as much a matter of intellectual taste as religious belief - where the Stephens were the writers and men of letters, Venn interests over three generations lay in mathematics and mechanics.⁸⁴

There is also possibly a distinction between the culture of a lay family like the Stephens and the concerns of a clerical family like the Venns. Venn later recalled that his father had a somewhat old-fashioned sense of clerical as well as social etiquette.⁸⁵ There was limited opportunity for broader social contact. Henry Venn's Evangelical churchmanship defined his social circle and the choices he made for his sons' education. John Venn later recalled that his acquaintance was defined by immediate family and the broader circle of clergymen and missionaries who came to visit Henry Venn in his capacity as the Secretary of the Church Missionary Society. He had not, prior to University, met a high churchman or a broad

⁸² *Ibid*, pp.17, 20, 22.

⁸³ Tolley, *op. cit.*, pp.11-20.

⁸⁴ Tolley, *op. cit.*, pp.19-20.

⁸⁵ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.15; Caius Archive, John Venn papers C02/36, J. Venn to J.A. Venn, 28/7/1922.

churchman nor had his own reading made him familiar with their ideas except through the filter of an Evangelical perspective.⁸⁶

Following his own somewhat patchy education at home by his own father, Henry Venn wanted his sons to have what he saw as the double advantage of home influence and school education.⁸⁷ And so for John and Harry, the governess regime came to an end in 1846, when they were sent to Cholmondely School, Highgate, a school for boys from upper middle class homes, where the sons of gentlemen, lawyers, clergy, medics and members of the armed forces outnumbered those of tradesmen and merchants. The views of the clerical headmaster, John Bradley Dyne, would seem to have been acceptable to Henry Venn, as Dyne was opposed to the Oxford Movement.⁸⁸ In June 1848, Henry Venn gave up the house at Highgate and moved the family two miles closer to London, to Highbury Crescent, in order to bring the children closer to a better school and himself closer to his work at the Church Missionary Society. It was a move John remembered with distaste, mainly regretting the loss of the Highbury garden.⁸⁹

The boys' new school, Islington Proprietary School, had soundly Evangelical credentials. Daniel Wilson, vicar of Islington, was the chair of the proprietors; and the Venns themselves had had an active interest in the school as in 1837 John Venn of Hereford had been listed as a proprietor and Henry Venn as a director.⁹⁰ A certain amount of anti-Romanist drilling was included in the curriculum in response to the 'Papal Aggression' of 1851, with the pupils being kept back after school to take notes of arguments against Roman Catholic doctrines. The partisan nature of the teaching did not have the impact intended in the long term. Venn recalled his surprise and consternation later in the 1850s when he came across arguments

⁸⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.39.

⁸⁷ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F17, Autobiographical sketch by Henry Venn, 1840.

⁸⁸ T. Hinde, *Highgate School, a history* (London, 1993).

⁸⁹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, pp.16-17.

⁹⁰ Islington Public Library, YA160 ISL, Newspaper clippings, 1837.

presented by a Romanist rather than for him.⁹¹ The school had a similar social mix to Highgate with sons of professionals, and a 'sprinkling' of clergymen's sons.⁹² Venn found there a small number of 'superior and intelligent boys', but these were not enough to 'leaven the mass' and Venn recalled performing badly during his first couple of years at the school.⁹³

In the choice of schools, Venn felt in retrospect that he would have done better elsewhere, but backed away from attributing direct blame to his father,

I do not imply the slightest blame to my father. His anxious watchfulness for all our interest was far too sincere for him not to have considered the matter; but it was a very difficult thing for one who was not inside scholastic circles to have known how to choose aright.⁹⁴

Regret about lost opportunities was to be a recurring theme of Venn's autobiography, as illustrated by the complaints about the childhood isolation, his education at school, and his inability to discuss his doubts with his father. As Stockton has pointed out, given the reverence with which John Venn regarded his father, it was difficult for him to express criticism of Henry Venn.⁹⁵ The particular perspective from which the Annals were composed must be borne in mind. From a distance of four decades, Venn was attempting to explain his eventual departure from Evangelical churchmanship. With this end in view, a negative view of early opportunities and influences might be expected.

Venn did however form two friendships with fellow pupils that lasted into the 1890s.⁹⁶ It was

⁹¹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, pp.26-27.

⁹² *Ibid*, pp.17-18.

⁹³ *Ibid*, pp.18-19.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p.25.

⁹⁵ Stockton, *op. cit.*, p.343.

⁹⁶ William Berkley and Francis Jourdain proceeded to Oxford rather than Cambridge; and both remained within the ministry. Berkley became a fellow of Trinity and vicar of Navestock in Essex, and Jourdain vicar of Ashbourne. Berkley identified himself with Broad Church efforts to redefine and reform the National Church in the 1860s, contributing an essay on 'The Church and the Universities' to a collection of *Essays on Church policy*, edited by W.L. Clay in 1868.

also during this period that Venn discovered an interest in mathematics; an occasion he described in terms reminiscent of conversion experiences,

Suddenly one day an impulse came over me to spend an hour at home in doing some algebra ...The impulse came as the whim of the moment, and seemed rather strange to me I remember, even at this time, so as to seem to call for some sort of explanation to my younger brother... I regard it as the first dawn of intellectual activity or interest.⁹⁷

It was this interest that was cultivated to prepare Venn for entry to Cambridge to read Mathematics in 1853.

Conclusions

In Venn's childhood, we have the first building blocks of his religious identity in place: a set of Evangelical values, the saintly example of his father, a social circle defined by family and religious connexion. This was reinforced by the Venn family's Evangelical and clerical tradition.

There was considerable congruence between the public and private expression of the Evangelical domestic ideal within John Venn's upbringing. Henry Venn took seriously the Christian duty of the parent in providing for the spiritual welfare of the child. He regarded family relationships as divinely ordained, the home as a centre of worship, and imparted religious ideas as part of everyday discourse. Henry Venn never missed an opportunity to put events into their spiritual as well as their temporal perspective. There are clear parallels here with the religious themes that have been found by Tolley within other Claphamite families where religion was an assumed fact of everyday life. It was a positive yet serious Evangelicalism that was underpinned by a strong sense of history and tradition, relayed through spiritual narratives preserved in family archives, and linked with a clear sense of duty within the world.

⁹⁷ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.22.

The Venn children had before them the example of a father whose conduct repeatedly reinforced the impression of constant religious duty both within and outside the home. However, the call of this worldly duty set up a tension with familial duty particularly in a household where, following the early death of Martha Venn, an important source of parental religious influence in the domestic environment was lost.

Nevertheless, Henry Venn was the single most important element in John Venn's early religious development. It was a religious influence that rested more upon the example of family role models rather than upon particular theological tenets. However, the strength of the paternal example in particular may have woven a weak thread into the garment of Venn's Evangelicalism, as the awe with which he regarded his father provided not only an unattainable ideal but also closed off the future likelihood of seeking paternal guidance in light of doubts.

The paternal example and the Venn family's religious tradition was clerical as well as Evangelical. This was an element that distinguished the Venns from other Claphamite families and may, taken together with inclination of temperament and taste, account for a certain narrowness in John Venn's upbringing. Narrowness in this sense is meant less in terms of cultural narrowness but more in the sense of being the only brand of Christianity which was 'traditionally familiar' to John Venn and with which he had 'practical acquaintance'.⁹⁸ The real narrowness of John Venn's upbringing lay in terms of the influences to which he was exposed, the people he met and the theological views with which he was acquainted firsthand. There was an absence of any counterbalancing viewpoints. As Venn was to express it when reviewing his religious position at the point of matriculation,

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p.38.

To me, who wished to be religious, the Evangelical creed seemed the only one in the field.⁹⁹

This understanding, combined with a recognition of the key influence of clerical and Evangelical tradition, provides a baseline against which to contrast Venn's exposure as a student to a wider variety of Evangelicalism and to a sense of contemporary developments in Evangelicalism; and as a curate, to a broader spectrum of thought.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p.39.

3. 'the Evangelical College in popular estimate' - Student Life

John Venn matriculated as a pensioner of Gonville and Caius College Cambridge in 1853. The College was thereafter a constant element in his religious and academic life. Venn remained a member of Caius for nearly seven decades, as a student and fellow, as clergyman and layman. Any examination of Venn's development must therefore take into account the institutional backdrop against which Venn's personal change of religious perspective took place, and examine the significance of collegiate religious participation to his development. Venn's entry into Caius was important symbolically in being the first source of religious and academic influence and structure to which he was exposed outside his family environment, with the potential to broaden the social, religious and academic influences to which he was exposed.

Venn's experience also has a broader significance in providing a useful perspective from which to view the changing role of religious participation in the ancient universities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When, in 1853, John Venn matriculated at Caius, he was entering an institution that still owed much to its mediaeval religious origins as an academic chantry. The College was an Anglican monopoly shaped by a close linkage between academic and clerical identity and expectations. It was also an institution in the midst of reform as many of these elements were the subject of external and internal challenge. By the time of Venn's death in 1923, many of these religious structures and attitudes had been reformed or recast. Venn's experience as a student will set the scene for the reforms that defined the shape of his later academic life.

The requirements of institutional religion sat alongside the lead and direction that was given to religious participation and religious tone within Caius by key individuals such as the Deans and Tutors. The religious tone they set was a projection of their private spirituality, but by

virtue of their positions as fellows and College officers, their influence became quasi-official. Taken together, these different levels may be seen as points upon a continuum of religious participation, stretching from institutional participation to personal observance, and allowing for an understanding that one act of religious or quasi-religious observance could operate upon more than one level, both religious and secular, simultaneously.¹

Caius during the 1850s had the reputation of being the Evangelical college in Cambridge. The nature of this reputation will be explored, highlighting Venn's role in perpetuating it as part of the historical record. In so doing, it is hoped that a contribution will be made to understanding the variety and range of religious opinion that could exist within a college community. Key to understanding Venn's religious development will be the contrast between the Evangelicalism that Venn encountered within Caius and that of his upbringing. Parallels will also be drawn between the microcosm of collegiate religion and broader themes of Evangelical historiography, namely the manner in which party identity was formed, the perception of a 'drying out' of Evangelicalism, and the differentiation that has been observed between the Claphamite and Recordite traditions.

Academic and religious framework

Venn entered a University which in the first half of the century had increasingly been the object of public criticism. Critics compared the standard of scholarship at Cambridge unfavourably with that in the German universities and pointed to the narrowness of the range of disciplines in a University where, until the introduction of the Classical Tripos in 1822, the only honours degree was in Mathematics. The system was in turn defended by those who argued that Mathematics, like *Literae Humaniores* in Oxford, was the only true foundation of the liberal education. The minority of reading men preparing for the Tripos relied upon coaching rather than college or University teaching to achieve success in the competitive

¹ This draws upon the formulation of religious participation outlined in J. Wolfe, *God and greater Britain: religion and national life in Britain and Ireland 1843-1945* (London, 1994), pp.6-18.

Tripes examinations, while for the half of the student body that was destined for a career in the Church, there was little in the way of formal theological teaching.² These curricular concerns were in turn linked to criticism of the way in which the University's considerable wealth was distributed to its members according to the seemingly eccentric demands of ancient benefactors. The financial rewards of college fellowships were bestowed on the basis of success in the Tripos rather than to encourage scholarship or recognise teaching obligations, and could often be held for life with no further obligation other than the taking of Holy Orders after a set period and the holder remaining unmarried.³ The celibacy requirement was seen to act as a disincentive to those men who might have considered a career in the University. Furthermore, while the Repeal of the Tests and Corporations Acts and Catholic Emancipation had opened up other areas of national life to non-Anglicans, Cambridge degrees, fellowships, college and University offices remained an Anglican monopoly. The continued existence of religious tests both angered dissenters and dismayed those Anglicans who valued conscience rather than conformity. These feelings were exacerbated by the contrast with the newer foundations, such as UCL and Liverpool, which defended religious freedom.⁴ Venn's experience as a student in the 1850s illustrates the operation of these frameworks from a personal perspective.

Venn was required to spend ten terms in residence for his degree and it was common for the 'reading men' like him to spend the Long Vacation in residence. Yet the University and the College had provided very little in terms of teaching to prepare him for the final examinations which were his focus. He began by studying both Classics and Mathematics, the two subjects in which College scholarships were awarded. Having lived out in lodgings in his first year,

² P. Searby, *A history of the University of Cambridge*, Volume 3 1750-1870 (Cambridge, 1997), pp.2-5; E.S. Leedham-Green, *A concise history of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1996), pp.148 -51; A.J. Engel, *From clergyman to don: the rise of the academic profession in nineteenth century Oxford* (Oxford, 1983), p.2.

³ S. Rothblatt, *The revolution of the dons: Cambridge and society in Victorian England* (London, 1968), p.181.

⁴ C.N.L. Brooke, *A history of the University of Cambridge*, Volume 4 1870-1990 (Cambridge, 1993), pp.99-102.

Venn performed well in College examinations and was awarded a scholarship with rooms in College.⁵ He was judged the leading student of his year, but in one of the examples of the eccentricities of endowment that drew external criticism, the best College scholarship was not open to Venn because by the terms of its endowment it was only open to those born in Norfolk.⁶ In the absence of any University or intercollegiate lectures, Venn found the formal College teaching in Classics and Mathematics to be competent. However, such teaching was delivered to the whole College, from the poll men to the honours men. He received no teaching or direction of his studies from the College Tutor and, in common with other reading men, relied instead upon the services of private coaches. Initially, he was coached by William Hopkins, a respected private tutor known as the 'senior wrangler-maker', but seeking more individual attention and discussion, Venn changed to a fellow of Caius, Jameson. Venn found Jameson 'fairly well up in his subject' but lacking 'the power of originality that was desirable' and after two terms sought his father's approval for a move to Isaac Todhunter, a former pupil of Hopkins.⁷ Looking back, with a perspective informed by his own participation in Cambridge reform, Venn felt that the emphasis upon preparation on 'one great examination' had resulted in a loss of any real enjoyment of the subject and a feeling of repulsion towards mathematics.⁸

Colleges were religious institutions in origin and the sixteenth century statutes of Dr Caius, which were still in force in 1853, imposed a requirement of daily 'common prayers' which was observed through a regime of compulsory chapel for all students.⁹ Regular attendance at College chapel was upheld not only on religious grounds, but as an important part of the general disciplinary structure of the College alongside attendance of dinner in hall and observance of the curfew. The shared experience of religious association and ritual in

⁵ Francis, H.T., 'In memoriam: John Venn' *The Caius*, Volume XXXI (Cambridge, 1922-3), p.111.

⁶ J. Venn, 'College life and ways fifty years ago' *The Caius*, Volume XIV (1904-5), p.113.

⁷ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals 1834-1866 by John Venn, p.56.

⁸ *Ibid*, p.74.

⁹ *Excerpta e Statutis Collegii de Gonville et Caius in Academia Cantabrigiensi et e Statutis Academiae* (Cambridge, 1843) XLV Concerning Prayers.

universities has been identified as a significant unifying factor among nineteenth century clergy; and shared experience, texts and rituals have been seen as an important underpinning to the formation of an intellectual elite.¹⁰ More generally, religious participation has been examined in the context of the formation of community, particularly national and imperial identity.¹¹ Fellows, acting in loco parentis, regarded the discipline of enforced attendance as potentially beneficial; believing that the common experience of the chapel ritual would facilitate the transmission of the common values of the College and of Anglicanism. The religious and community-building functions of religious observance were thus closely entwined.

The element of religious compulsion did not necessarily equate with a lack of religious commitment. In addition to College chapel, many men, including Venn, chose to attend additional sermons in local parish churches.¹² The College rules gave a practical incentive to conform. The testimonials required from the College by a bishop prior to ordination were said to be drawn up on the basis of the student's record of attendance of chapel and Communion, hall and lectures, and observance of the curfew.¹³ Venn was one of the majority of students who were from clerical backgrounds and had clerical aspirations of their own,

A decided majority of us - in our College at least - contemplated taking orders, or had come to College with that hope on the part of our parents. Nearly half of us were the sons of clergymen.¹⁴

Of the 33 students who were admitted in the same year as John Venn, 1852-3, 17 were to be ordained and hold some sort of cure.¹⁵ This bears out the impression given by the general average produced by Anderson and Schnaper for 1752-1886, which shows 54.3% of

¹⁰ A. Haig, *The Victorian clergy* (Croom Helm, 1984), p.27; D. Newsome, *Godliness and good learning: four studies on a Victorian ideal* (London, 1961), pp.4-12.

¹¹ J. Wolffe, *God and greater Britain*.

¹² CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.39.

¹³ *Statutis Collegii de Gonville et Caius* (Cambridge, 1843), Rules of College XII.

¹⁴ J. Venn, *Early collegiate life* (Cambridge 1913), p.268.

¹⁵ Data drawn from J. Venn, *Biographical history of Gonville and Caius College 1349-1897*, Volume II 1713-1897 (Cambridge 1898).

Cambridge alumni in the occupational group of clergy.¹⁶ Institutional requirements for religious observance were combined with religious expectations, and reinforced by the religious leadership of the College.

Religious tone in Caius

The striking impression from the historical narrative of Caius at the time of Venn's matriculation in the 1850s is the College's reputation for Evangelicalism. The reputation as the Evangelical college in Cambridge had passed from Magdalene under Samuel Hey at the start of the nineteenth century to Queen's under Isaac Milner up to the 1820s, before passing to Caius in the middle of the century. This reputation was built around Charles Clayton, tutor of Caius between 1848 and 1865, vicar of Holy Trinity, and the successor to Simeon and Carus as the leader of the Evangelical party in Cambridge. From 1852, Clayton's tutorship coincided with the mastership of Edwin Guest, who was also recorded as of Evangelical sympathies. However, it was with Clayton's name, not that of the Master, or the Deans who oversaw religious discipline, that this phase in the College's history is associated. As Venn himself recorded

The name and reputation of Mr Clayton... had made it the Evangelical College in popular estimate.¹⁷

Venn was to play his part in sustaining this reputation on the historical record. Although his autobiographical annals were not published, the recollections of his student days formed the basis for a chapter on the mid-nineteenth century College in *Early collegiate life*.¹⁸ This in turn has formed the basis of a similar chapter in the published history of Gonville and Caius College and has been utilised as evidence of the academic and religious state of the mid-

¹⁶ Figures from C. Anderson and M.D. Schnaper, *School and society in England* (Washington, 1952) reproduced in Searby, *op. cit.*, pp.76-7.

¹⁷ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.35.

¹⁸ J. Venn, 'College life and ways fifty years ago' *The Caiian*, Volume XIV (1904-5); J. Venn, *Early collegiate life* (Cambridge 1913).

century University in its official history.¹⁹ Thus it is Venn's perspective that has become the most widely circulated analysis of this period in the College's religious history. It was a perspective informed by Venn's departure from Evangelicalism, and the regret he was expressing at what he regarded as the missed opportunities with his father and with Clayton for averting that change. Both the perspective of those for whom Clayton may have remained an inspiration and the religious diversity that could exist within a College community may have been underplayed. Furthermore, there are also distinctions between the published and private narratives. In the autobiographical annals that were written to account for a change in religious position, Venn was more openly critical about the religious elements of the College, such as the rigid Evangelicalism of the students and the lack of intellectual content in Clayton's preaching.²⁰ However, in the published narrative based upon an address to turn of the century Caians, he concentrated more upon the contrasts in academic and student life that could be illustrated between his own experience and that of his audience.²¹

Charles Clayton operated at the centre of a broader Evangelical network which connected Church and University through his recommendations of suitable University men for parishes around the country. This broader reputation made him a nucleus around whom Evangelical fathers paid for their sons to gather, while several older men of Evangelical opinions gave up work in other areas to come to the College with a view to taking orders.²² The College's reputation for Evangelicalism thus became self-fulfilling. The impact of fathers choosing a college for their sons to suit their own religious views has been pointed out by Haig and had previously changed the religious tone of a number of other colleges.²³ For the Venns, Caius

¹⁹ C.N.L. Brooke, *A history of Gonville and Caius College*, (Bury St Edmunds, 1985), pp.218-222; C.N.L. Brooke, *A history of the University of Cambridge*, Volume 4 1870-1990 (Cambridge, 1993), pp.xv-xvii, 82-3.

²⁰ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, pp.35, 39.

²¹ J. Venn, 'College life and ways fifty years ago' published in *The Caius* in 1904/5 and reworked as part of *Early collegiate life*.

²² *Ibid*, p.35.

²³ Haig, *op. cit.*, p.47.

was the obvious choice not only by virtue of public reputation but also personal contact. John Venn had previously met Clayton when he stayed with the family and preached at Hereford in 1850, and Clayton was in regular contact with Henry Venn, passing on the names of men interested in missionary work.²⁴ It must therefore have seemed a natural step that it should be with Charles Clayton's brother that John Venn lodged during his first year at University.²⁵

As vicar of Holy Trinity, Clayton's preaching attracted a large audience of undergraduates after evening chapel on Sundays, while his tutorship gave him the opportunity to press his religious concerns within Caius. Surviving notes for his introductory address to freshmen in 1859 cover the expected topics of study, expenditure, religious discipline and moral conduct, resembling the standard advice issued by William Whewell to the tutors of Trinity regarding the instruction they should give their students.²⁶ However, Clayton's notes proceeded further on recognisably Evangelical lines, emphasising the importance of the Bible as a 'mainspring' and the 'only safeguard', the need for personal piety and Sunday observance. He also took the opportunity to advertise the opportunities for missionary effort, with its related round of collections, terminal meetings and sermons.²⁷

Missionary enthusiasm was not confined to the Evangelical element, nor was it specific to Caius and to Clayton's tutorship, but it was particularly pertinent to the son of the Honorary Secretary to the Church Missionary Society. Henry Venn urged his son to send accounts of the speakers he heard at missionary meetings in the University, and in late 1857 Venn attended a meeting addressed by David Livingstone.²⁸ Livingstone's address on this occasion made a great impression upon the undergraduates present and has been cited as the

²⁴ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C40, J. Venn to H. Venn, 15/7/1850; C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 9/12/1856.

²⁵ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.35.

²⁶ M. Garland, *Cambridge before Darwin; the ideal of a liberal education 1800-1860* (Cambridge, 1980), p.132.

²⁷ Gonville and Caius College Library, Charles Clayton papers, Notes on address to freshmen, 1859.

²⁸ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 9/5/1857, 6/12/1857.

effective start of a period of enthusiasm for overseas mission in the University, prompting as it did the establishment of the Cambridge University Church Missionary Union.²⁹

The twin responsibilities of parish and College limited the time Clayton had to spare to get to know Caius undergraduates individually. Privately Venn was disappointed that given his position of influence in Evangelical circles and his experience as a clergyman, Clayton found little time to guide his students except 'as to what church I had better attend or avoid' and did not advise those of his pupils who intended to take orders.³⁰ However, publicly he defended Clayton on the grounds that the very demands of that position of influence meant that much of his time was taken up with party matters

To prevent any wrong impression I should like to say that this was not due to indolence or neglect. He was a very kind-hearted and worthy man; and I am convinced that if any of us had gone to him in any difficulty or in doubt, he would have given all the assistance in his power. But that was not the custom.³¹

As Venn noted, even the limited contacts with his students that Clayton did attempt were unusual for resident fellows and clergy of the 1850s.³²

Venn doubted the efficacy of Clayton's efforts to engage students through Evangelical meetings and parties:

They were not cheerful or profitable occasions, and the evening ones in particular were apt to be avoided if possible, as it was about as easy to escape the public meeting which followed on the tea as to desert after taking a recruiting sergeant's shilling.³³

²⁹ V.H.H. Green, *Religion at Oxford and Cambridge* (London, 1964) pp.321-2.

The ongoing development of interest in mission and Empire within Caius will be explored further in the context of the religious identity of the College in the later part of the century. See p.158.

³⁰ J. Venn, *Early collegiate life*, p.259; CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.92.

³¹ J. Venn, *Early collegiate life*, p. 263.

³² Rothblatt, *op. cit.*, p.190.

³³ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.70.

Venn was also dissatisfied with Clayton's presentation of Evangelicalism, describing his sermons as 'platitudes...redeemed by his extreme earnestness, sincerity, and absence of any display or push'. Venn contrasted Clayton's preaching unfavourably with that of the high churchman, Harvey Goodwin, who was the 'only preacher in Cambridge then with any spark of originality or power'. However, the momentum of Venn's Evangelical upbringing still held strong: 'conscience (as I understood it) told me that Clayton was the right man, and so I mostly went to hear him' and shunned Goodwin's church as in some way heterodox.³⁴ Even allowing for the perspective of the Annals as the negative account of a man who had departed from the religious position of his family, it is clear that with hindsight Venn felt that Clayton did not measure up to the paternal example he used as his yardstick.

Caius' reputation as the home of the Evangelical party in the 1850s and early 1860s can be viewed on a number of levels. Burns has distinguished between churchmanship and Church party, pointing out how a party label could be externally applied as well as being a matter of personal adherence.³⁵ So it was for Venn. As a student with religious feeling, conditioned from birth to be receptive to Evangelical views, Venn initially joined the Evangelical grouping within Caius. He attended their prayer meetings, taking afternoon walks with one or other of them, particularly an older student, Charles Renshaw Ord, who was later to offer himself to Henry Venn as a missionary.³⁶ However, Evangelicalism was not only a matter of allegiance but also a label that was applied to him by observers by virtue of his ancestry and association. The Venn family's Evangelicalism encompassed public reputation as well as personal faith and connexion. As Leslie Stephen termed it, 'The Venns were of the very blue blood of the party'.³⁷ The Venn name also synonymous in public estimation with the Evangelical party, not only as a result of the reputation of the Clapham connexion but also through Henry and John Venn's continued association with Evangelical ideas, causes and

³⁴ *Ibid*, p.68.

³⁵ A. Burns, Introduction to W. Conybeare, 'Church Parties' [1853-5] in S. Taylor (ed.), *From Cranmer to Davidson: A Church of England Miscellany* [Church of England Record Society, VII] (Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 1999), p.218.

³⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals 1834-1866 by John Venn, pp.35-6.

³⁷ L. Stephen, *The life of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen* (London, 1895), p.33.

associations in the pulpit, and via public platforms such as the Church Missionary Society and the *Christian Observer*. Thus, by both personal allegiance and by public association John Venn and his family could be characterised as of the Evangelical party.

Venn came to Caius having been greatly influenced in terms of personal religion by the example of his father, Henry. To his inherited beliefs were added inherited contacts as several of the seniors in the College called on him, 'at Clayton's instigation or for my name's sake'.³⁸ The social weight attached to the Venn name was evident at one of Clayton's Evangelical gatherings, when the typical mode of introduction was by reference to one's Evangelical credentials, and H.T. Francis noted:

having no Evangelical connexions to boast of, I feared that, like the man without a wedding garment, I might be rejected, but after some humming and hawing Clayton was struck with a happy thought and I was announced as "A friend of Mr John Venn".³⁹

Venn's public Evangelical credentials were also evident in 1856 when he discovered that his name had been included in a Union list of 'tips' predicting the success of various men in attaining fellowships

with a rather contemptuous remark that it was only referred to in consequence of my claims being pressed by the Evangelicals. I was much disturbed at this confident forecast.⁴⁰

Venn's instant and natural reaction to this prediction was to vow to become a missionary and he continued to regard this vow as binding for several more years.⁴¹

Overall, the striking impression was of the religious orthodoxy of the part of the student body with which Venn was in contact as an undergraduate. Partly as the result of shared clerical

³⁸ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.37.

³⁹ H.T. Francis, *op. cit* (1923), p.119.

⁴⁰ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.72.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp.72-3.

background and ambition, he found himself part of a 'very church-going, sermon-attending folk'.⁴² On reflection, he was aware that religious enquiry and scepticism must have started to touch those he termed 'the more thoughtful students' and he identified a few men who had read under Maurice in London, but they did not become influential men within Caius, nor did he number any such men among his personal acquaintance. From his experience as one of 'the average quiet reading men', the College was a rather sheltered environment.

Caius' reputation for Evangelicalism has disguised the diversity of religious opinion which co-existed within the College. Among the religious, there was diversity in churchmanship. Just as the Evangelical set attended Clayton's parish sermons at Holy Trinity on Sunday after College chapel, there were those like Edward Hillyard, later a ritualist, whose higher churchmanship led them to attend the sermons of Harvey Goodwin at St. Edward's.⁴³ There could also be considerable difference between the churchmanship of the Fellowship and that of the undergraduate body. As a junior fellow, Venn was to witness the contempt with which certain of the fellows, like Norman Ferrers, regarded Clayton's religion, remarking that

On religious matters, the only strong feeling felt, or at any rate expressed, was that of aversion to Evangelical opinions rather than of attachment to any other opinions.

Ferrers especially was a leader in this direction; and never lost the opportunity of a gibe at the obnoxious opinions, especially if Clayton were present.⁴⁴

Ferrers' mentor, Harvey Goodwin, a fellow between 1841 and 1855, had come to the College holding Evangelical opinions. Following a personal religious crisis, he developed higher church convictions and became involved in the establishment of the Ecclesiological Society, later the Cambridge Camden Society.⁴⁵ Goodwin was a close friend of Charles Mackenzie, who migrated to Caius from St. John's in 1845. Mackenzie was considered by Henry Venn to

⁴² J. Venn, *Early collegiate life*, p.267.

⁴³ Reminiscences of E. Hillyard (1857) by his friend H.P. Knapton, *The Caiian*, Volume VII (1897-8), pp.181-2.

⁴⁴ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.76.

⁴⁵ H.D. Rawnsley, *Harvey Goodwin, Bishop of Carlisle: a biographical memoir* (London, 1896), p.52.

be a Tractarian and admirer of Pusey.⁴⁶ As a clerical fellow, Mackenzie preached in the College chapel, and in 1853 took services on Sundays during the Long Vacation in order to release Clayton for his parish duties.⁴⁷ There was clearly a network among the Fellows for whom higher church principles rather than Evangelicalism were predominant. Yet Caius retained its Evangelical reputation. There was no one in Caius with a reputation comparable to that of Clayton's; which rested not so much upon his activity within the College itself, but upon his external reputation in broader Evangelical circles. However, religious tone as influenced by the Evangelicalism and public reputation of one man, was of a fleeting nature. By the early 1870s, Clayton had resigned his fellowship and taken up full-time parish work, and the contemporary Evangelical reputation of the College departed with him. Indeed, there was reported to be something of a reaction against his party. One Caian graduate was to recall a rhyme from c.1870:

And as for the Sims, with their psalms and their hymns

We'll kick 'em right out of College.⁴⁸

Varieties of Evangelicalism

In his autobiographical narrative, Venn referred to the Evangelical students within Caius in the 1850s as the 'strict party or the 'rigid party' attracting 'narrow-minded' men, who 'formed a strong party which kept entirely to itself, holding aloof from the boat-club and from almost every other form of social amusement.'⁴⁹ Venn observed that the strong sense of identity within the Rigid party in turn polarised broader opinion within the College,

Most of the men with any religious feeling joined this party; by natural reaction the opposite party gathered in its ranks all that was idle and noisy. The result was that the

⁴⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C37, H. Venn to C. Clayton, 24/11/1859.

⁴⁷ H. Goodwin, *Memoir of Bishop Mackenzie*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, 1865), p.69.

⁴⁸ Caius Archive, PPC/GUI/01, F.H.H. Guillemard, 'The years that the locusts have eaten' (1922), Chapter VIII Cambridge Then c.1870.

⁴⁹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.35.

College was split into two distinct camps, as it were, which had little communication with each other.⁵⁰

Venn did make an exception for Clayton himself, reporting that Clayton was not an extreme Evangelical; a characterisation that was in marked contrast with some of the serious and narrow young men that his reputation was attracting to the College.⁵¹

Within Caius, Venn encountered various indications of the creation of party allegiance. Membership was defined on a number of levels: in part positively, through entry into the College of Evangelical reputation, regular attendance at sermons by and meetings with the acknowledged Evangelical leader. However, it could also be defined negatively, by shunning those of tainted by heterodox High Church views; holding apart from the company of the ungodly, 'idle and noisy' members of the College; and ostracising those like H.T. Francis, who would not attend prayer meetings.⁵² Evangelicalism could be a badge worn proudly by the strongest of its adherents to the exclusion of the less committed.

The vocabulary Venn used in describing the Evangelical grouping in Caius - rigid, strict, narrow - resembled that of Conybeare in relation to the 'Recordites' in his analysis of Church Parties first published in 1853. Conybeare was contributing to the contemporary debate upon the future of the Church of England, identifying the characteristics, both theological and pastoral, of the various groupings within the Church. He analysed their impact, both negative and positive, upon the work of the Church, recognising that parties were not simply theological groupings but that party allegiance was also shaped by confrontation and concluding that the 'mischief is...not in theological idiosyncrasies, but in unscrupulous partisanship'.⁵³ Conybeare's tripartite division of the Church into high, broad and low, was

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.35.

⁵¹ *Ibid* p.39.

⁵² Guillemard, *op cit*.

⁵³ W. Conybeare, 'Church Parties' [1853-5], edited and with an introduction by A. Burns, in S.Taylor (ed.), *From Cranmer to Davidson: a Church of England miscellany* [Church of England Record Society, VII] (Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 1999), pp.233, 251, 359.

further subdivided in the case of the latter into Evangelical, Recordite and slow or stagnant. Conybeare praised the contribution the old Evangelicals, exemplified by the Clapham Sect, had made to the regeneration of the Church through their simple piety but saw the old Evangelical party as diminishing in strength as their creed became a hereditary system adopted more by habit than conviction.

This may be accounted for partly by a certain narrowness and rigidity its teaching, which has increased as its traditional doctrines have become more fixed and technical...This neglect, and especially the want of critical study of the text of the Scripture, has paved the way for the extravagances of the extreme party...the Recordite party.⁵⁴

He described the Recordites as exaggerating the original vital doctrines of Evangelicalism, elaborating upon the core doctrines and employing the resulting theological superstructure as badges of membership of an exclusive and intolerant, rigid and inward-looking sect.⁵⁵ Like Conybeare, the Claphamites themselves perceived a change in the tone of Evangelicalism - a drying out of the enthusiasm with which the movement had originally been associated. James Stephen, in his account of the golden age of the Clapham Sect, admitted that the second generation of Evangelicals, the Clapham Sect themselves, had been more sober and more worldly wise than their fathers, but drew a sharp contrast between the sincerity of their thought and philanthropy and the 'intellectual coxcombry' and 'mere ballet of tender attitudes' he now found to be prevalent.⁵⁶

The changing face of Evangelicalism has an extensive historiography. The vital and emotional religion of the founding Evangelical fathers, with an outward-looking social dynamism has been contrasted with the mid-century party which was more introverted and

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.271.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.236.

⁵⁶ J. Stephen, 'The Clapham Sect', *Essays in ecclesiastical biography*, Volume II (London, 1849), p.307.

partisan.⁵⁷ Rosman and Wolffe have described a process of radicalisation of Evangelicalism whereby a less optimistic eschatology developed concentrating upon pre-millennial beliefs and with an increased interest in prophecy. Its followers feared the worldly expediency they perceived in the older Anglican Evangelicalism, and looked to define more rigidly what Evangelicalism was, in order to distinguish adherents and to make the movement more exclusive.⁵⁸ For some, this has been seen as an exaggeration of the natural tendencies within the theological and value system of Evangelicalism, with the development of partisan tendencies being inherent in an Evangelical elect wishing to set themselves apart from a sinful world.⁵⁹ Balleine pointed to the success of Evangelicalism as inevitably increasing the number of its unworthy adherents, which, when taken together with the effect of the adversarial nature of the *Record*, had a detrimental impact upon perceptions of Evangelicals as hypocrites and controversialists.⁶⁰ The importance of reaction to external factors in the development has also been highlighted. For example, until issues of authority and inspiration of the Bible arose it had been sufficient to accept the Bible as authoritative. However, once that veracity was threatened, the response was the development of the hypothesis of Divine inspiration.⁶¹ Further to this was the Evangelical reaction to the perceived danger of the rise of the Oxford Movement. Opposition to Tractarian views on doctrine, ritual and tradition has been seen to harden opposition to innovation in worship; and moderate Evangelicals were rallied to a party cause as the battle cry to defend the Protestant nature of the Reformation settlement was sounded. The result of this clash was polarisation; a move away from the pragmatic politics, mild Calvinism and outward-looking Evangelicalism of the Clapham Sect as party boundaries were clearly marked and a reaction against innovation and co-operation.

⁵⁷ I. Bradley, *The call to seriousness: the Evangelical impact upon the Victorians* (London, 1976), pp 15-59.

⁵⁸ D.M. Rosman, *Evangelicals and culture* (London, 1983), pp.25-30; J. Wolffe, *The Protestant crusade in Great Britain 1829-1860* [Oxford Historical Monographs] (Oxford, 1991), pp.30-32.

⁵⁹ N. Annan, *Leslie Stephen: his thought and character in relation to his time* (London, 1951), pp.119-120; Bradley, *op.cit.*, pp.70-72.

⁶⁰ G. R. Balleine, *A history of the Evangelical party in the Church of England* (London, 1933), pp.187 - 210.

⁶¹ D.M. Rosman, *op. cit.*, pp.25-30.

Evangelicalism went on the defensive, concentrating all energies upon the perceived Catholic threat rather than the advancing forces of liberalism and secularism.⁶²

Venn's observations on the characteristics of Caiian Evangelicals appear to reflect these broader themes in the contemporary and historical debate on the nature and development of Evangelicalism and church parties. Venn did not define clearly what he meant by 'rigid' or 'strict' and there is no firm evidence from which to assert that Venn was familiar with the work of Conybeare. However, he did become familiar with contemporary party polemic through the pages of the *Christian Observer* under his father's editorship and as his family's historian is likely to have been aware of James Stephen's assessment of the development of Evangelicalism.

In part, Venn can be seen to be describing the development of an exclusive party resulting from the exaggeration of partisan tendencies of Evangelicals wishing to set themselves apart from a sinful world. Venn's own explanation of the Evangelical culture he observed in Caius was that Evangelicalism in 1850s Cambridge was in transition, and that Evangelicalism was adapting to the change in its relative position in the University community:

A generation or two earlier the Evangelicals were very few, and scattered at various Colleges, and were consequently somewhat in the position of a persecuted party. By my time they had become numerous, (and so far as Caius was concerned) almost aggressive.⁶³

In this, Venn pinpoints a transition that was taking place in Evangelicalism, as recognised by Bradley, from a small group pre-1830, to a narrow party post-1860.⁶⁴ Venn did not, however, recognise in his narrative the role that contemporary controversy with the Oxford Movement may have played in the creation of party identity and the polarisation of Evangelical attitudes.

⁶² P. Toon, *Evangelical theology 1833-1856: a response to Tractarianism* (London, 1979), pp.16-77; Bradley, *op. cit.*, pp.70-72; Wolfe, *The Protestant crusade*, p.304.

⁶³ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.37.

⁶⁴ Bradley, *op. cit.*, p.16.

This would not have been from a lack of awareness of the disputes themselves. Throughout this period, Henry Venn wrote to his son about the contemporary controversies in the Church filtered through his particular standpoint on Evangelical churchmanship.⁶⁵

Venn's characterisation of Caian Evangelicals not only resembled Conybeare's description of the Recordites but also implicitly contrasted Caian Evangelicals with the practical and positive aspects of older Evangelicalism as represented by his family. For John Venn, the rigid Evangelicalism of Caius was not the Evangelicalism of his father. This goes beyond Conybeare's literary categorisation as it was a contrast that touched upon Venn's personal experience. Venn's family was closely and publicly associated with all that represented the older strand of Evangelicalism, from theological perspective to the public platforms of the *Christian Observer* and the Church Missionary Society. The Rigid party, inward-looking and theologically narrow, was contrasted unfavourably by Venn with the pragmatic, outward looking, theologically moderate outlook of the Claphamites. Venn declared that the senior men who called on him found that he did not have 'sufficient sympathy with them to keep up any intimacy'.⁶⁶ The differences were probably in part theological; Venn described his main associate in the first term, Charles Renshaw Ord, as a strict Calvinist, whereas the Evangelical tradition within his own family was that of moderate Calvinism. Furthermore, Venn's upbringing, while serious and sober, had not completely rejected the social amusements from which he found Caian Evangelicals were holding themselves aloof. Henry Venn sent weekly letters to his son containing a constant stream of religious guidance and discussing the work on which he was engaged for the Church Missionary Society, including organisation of missions to India, colonial bishoprics, African commerce and deputations to the Government, reinforcing the impression of a man fulfilling his duty of Christian service.⁶⁷ The way in which the Caian Evangelicals sought to hold themselves apart from the

⁶⁵ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 6/2/1856.

⁶⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.37.

⁶⁷ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, Letters from H. Venn to J. Venn.

amusements of a sinful world contrasted with the Claphamite mission to engage with that world.

The differences were also likely to have had a social element. The Evangelicalism of Venn's youth was nurtured in the comfortable environment of a network of cultured upper-middle class families and tempered by the assurance of salvation passed down over three previous generations. Venn's father could afford to send him to Cambridge as a pensioner and, even when his son was elected to a scholarship following his first year examinations, continued to supplement his funds to allow him additional money for books and charitable giving. Venn did not necessarily have much in common with the men who had given up business in order to return to University.⁶⁸

Venn's descriptions of such men as 'rigid', 'narrow-minded' and 'bigoted' point to the real variation he perceived within the bounds of a party label. They also have to be put into the context of what he was seeking to achieve in his autobiographical narrative - an account of his departure from Evangelicalism. As has already been seen, Henry Venn personified for his son the meaning of the Evangelicalism of his childhood and was an example he regarded with awe and reverence. At College, Venn encountered Evangelical examples he did not admire and who were not beyond reproach, and he can be seen to be distancing himself from sharing the label they bore. Half a century later, when describing the experience of his uncle John Venn at University, Venn wrote that his uncle associated with Simeon 'from grounds of hereditary friendship, as well as community of sentiment'.⁶⁹ During his own time as an undergraduate, Venn had the opportunity for 'hereditary' friendship with both Clayton and the Evangelical undergraduates, but seemed to have failed to find community of sentiment.

⁶⁸ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.35; C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 17/10/1855.

⁶⁹ J. Venn, *Annals of a clerical family*, p.187.

New directions

Venn's later recollection was that he received little academic direction from his seniors, but was instead reliant upon the tips and advice received from his coach and most of all from discussion with his friends.⁷⁰ When he moved into College rooms in 1854 following the award of a scholarship, Venn started to move on from the 'narrow and bigoted set' who had been his principal acquaintance in his first year. He began to develop a circle of friends of his own but in so doing, still chose a largely orthodox set. Men like William Wilberforce Gedge, as the name suggests, were of impeccable Evangelical pedigree, and Gedge was to offer himself as a missionary. Others, like James Garrick and Joseph Gould, went on to conventional careers as parish clergy, becoming holders of College livings. Garrick in common with Venn was in the process of drifting away from the companionship of Ord and the rigid party, and it was with Garrick that Venn, to the delight of his father, conducted private prayers and bible studies and alongside whom he was ordained.⁷¹ Venn's acquaintance with D.B. Panton also pleased Henry Venn, on the grounds of the extension of a connexion in the previous generation with his father.⁷²

It was to his friends that Venn owed the first steps in the broadening of his intellectual horizons. During his first year at University, Venn estimated that the only text on his shelf not of a classical or mathematical variety was his great grandfather's book, *The complete duty of man*.⁷³ Through Garrick he was introduced to the works of Byron, and through Charles Monro to Tennyson. However, at this stage, Venn's experience of a greater variety of religious ideas came from their demolition in orthodox papers rather than from exposure to the works themselves, and he was content at this stage simply to accept them as conclusive.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ J. Venn, 'College life and ways fifty years ago', pp.109-114; J. Venn, *Early collegiate life*, pp.263-4.

⁷¹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 6/2/1858.

⁷² *Ibid*, 9/12/1856.

⁷³ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.41.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p.64.

In January 1857, Venn was placed sixth Wrangler in the Mathematical Tripos. As a result of the passing of the Cambridge University Act in 1856, he was one of a new generation of bachelors not to have a religious test or declaration of faith attached to his degree. On the basis of his Tripos result, Venn was elected to a junior fellowship in 1858, and as such was still required to swear upon election that he was a bona fide a member of the Church of England. The Graham Commission in 1862 recommended the outright abolition of the tests, but although it achieved the establishment of University lectureships without the ties of celibacy and orders, the obligation that fellows should declare themselves to be members of the Church of England was not repealed until the University Tests Act of 1871. Given the close connection between the Church of England and Oxford and Cambridge, repeal of the tests seemed to conservatives like William Whewell tantamount to disestablishment and secularisation.⁷⁵

In the year that Venn spent in Cambridge following the Tripos examination, he gave over considerable time to continued study seeking to address what he perceived as the previous lack in his education. The one or two mathematical pupils Venn took on did not absorb all of his time, leaving him free to take lessons in German and Italian in preparation for a summer tour of the Continent. In the course of reading to two friends with poor eyesight, Venn became familiar with Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* and his uncle, James Stephen's Lectures on French History, but it was with Ruskin and with Buckle that he was most taken.⁷⁶ Venn was much impressed by Ruskin's works on art and architecture and credited to him such understanding as he had of art. Given Venn's fondness for walking and mountaineering, it is possible to see how he could appreciate Ruskin's capacity for appreciation of nature at first rather than second hand. The other text which drew Venn's attention was Buckle's *History of civilisation in England* published between 1857 and 1861. Influenced by Mill, Comte and the statistician Quetelet, Buckle had concluded that all human behaviour was subject to laws like

⁷⁵ Searby, *op. cit.*, p.500.

⁷⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, pp.88-9.

those for the physical sciences and that there could therefore be a science of history. This hypothesis was criticised by Christian writers on the basis of its apparent denial of free will and for its characterisation of clergy as barriers to science, while academic writers like Pattison dismissed Buckle's methodology and expertise.⁷⁷ But for Venn, Buckle represented a starting point for some of his future studies, particularly the closer examination of inductive logic and statistics which informed his future work on the *Logic of chance*.⁷⁸

Conclusions

This chapter has sketched out what might be seen as a continuum of religious participation, stretching from institutional participation on one hand through party identity and personal faith and observance on the other. At any one time it was possible for an individual to participate in College religion at a number of levels; through compulsory chapel, following the Evangelical lead given by Clayton, or joining a subset of Evangelical students. An act of religious observance potentially holding a variety of meaning: signifying an intent for a clerical career, marking membership of the College or University community, or indicating a narrower adherence to a particular party view.

Venn was part of a generation emerging at the tail end of the old Anglican orthodoxy, whose career mirrored the shift in the College. He was a successful product of what might be termed the old University system. He had mastered the mathematical knowledge that was valued in an examination system; strong performance in which determined subsequent award of the prize of a fellowship. He conformed to the requirements of compulsory chapel and religious tests. He came to Caius expecting, and expected, to use his fellowship as a foundation for a clerical career. In following chapters, Venn's realisation of his early clerical ambition followed by his development into a teaching academic, who spent his life in University and College

⁷⁷ T.W. Heyck, 'Buckle, Thomas Henry (1821-1862)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3861>, accessed 17 August 2005].

⁷⁸ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.89.

service, will be explored in the context of broader developments in the consideration of the academic and religious roles of the College and University. Likewise, the combination of compulsory institutional religion and exclusive Evangelical party identity of mid century Caius will be contrasted with the retreat of religious compulsion and the growth of a more diffuse, manly Christian tone that characterised the College in the latter part of the century.

Venn's participation in and observations on the Evangelical party within Caius provide evidence in support of the arguments that have been made for the drying out of Evangelicalism. The distinctions between Caian Evangelicalism and that of his upbringing, reinforced by social class and outlook upon the world as much as theological difference, clearly made an impression upon Venn. It has also been illustrated that party affiliation could take a number of forms, not only as adherence to particular ideas and rituals, but also, as in Venn's case, labels that were applied externally by virtue of a family name. Identification with a particular party could also be prolonged by lack of acquaintance with alternative views.

In terms of Venn's personal development, during his undergraduate years the Evangelical sympathies cultivated within the home, anchored by Venn's reverence for his father remained firmly in place. He had not been moved to question his 'hereditary religious sentiments' or to challenge the authority either of the regime of compulsory chapel or of his father's example. Nor had any other strong influence, written or personal, yet come to light which would cause such a challenge. College life had provided a new sphere of Evangelical association, providing Venn with the opportunity to observe the 'rigid' form of Evangelicalism and the operation in microcosm of party feeling, with which he found he had little sympathy. The Evangelicalism inherited from his family was not being reinforced or refreshed by this contact with Evangelicals of his own generation or the leadership of Clayton. At this stage, Venn's acquaintance with alternative standpoints was still being formed not by direct contact with new ideas but was filtered through orthodox refutations of them. Undergraduate life at Caius

provided no new saints either to threaten or to shore up the influence of the saints of Clapham.

In assessing his religious position at the end of his undergraduate years, Venn stated that:

I still belonged nominally to the Evangelical party, - I shall say something presently as to the extent to which this adherence was merely nominal and traditional - but I had made other friends outside their ranks, with whom my time was mostly spent.⁷⁹

Venn can be seen as a nominal Evangelical in that he was still fulfilling the family and public expectations of one who bore the Venn name; and was a traditional Evangelical in that the Evangelicalism of his father, his grandfather and great-grandfather still held sway with him.

As a fellow and as a curate, Venn was to examine more closely whether, to apply Conybeare's words, his Evangelicalism was a hereditary system adopted more from habit than conviction.

What the College did offer was the first potential for contact with a broader range of acquaintance and opinion than had been Venn's experience in the family home; and the start of an academic training which rested upon critical analysis and reasoning. The men and texts to which Venn was exposed during his time as a student were no immediate threat to his faith. The nature of the personal influence to which Venn was exposed at Caius seems to have been largely orthodox. However, these were friends and ideas Venn felt he had acquired on his own account rather than simply inherited. He was open to new ideas and experiences offered by these friends and had men with whom he felt able to discuss and develop his own views.

⁷⁹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.64.

4. 'none of those mental or moral crises' – Curate

Following his graduation, Venn prepared for orders and took a succession of curacies. This was a period in which Venn publicly followed family tradition in taking orders and taking to a pulpit as an Evangelical. However, he was later to comment negatively upon the adequacy of his training for this role and on the personal example of two of the Evangelical clergymen under whom he served. Venn's observations of his clerical preparation and experience will therefore be framed in light of familial expectation and also contemporary developments in expectations of clerical education and clerical identity.

Meanwhile, privately, Venn gave over considerable time during each of his curacies to wide-ranging reading. He came into contact with new ideas and discussed these ideas with friends of his own choosing. Venn was later to trace back a number of strands of his later thought to this period and to these shared texts. He also associated his reading and friends with his divergence from certain Evangelical tenets. This theological departure from Evangelicalism will be related to the wider literature on crises of faith and vocation in order to seek to define the nature of the change taking place. Contrasts will also be drawn with the parallel experience of Leslie Stephen and his accounts of his departure from Evangelicalism.

For Venn, there was a growing disparity between public practice and private discussion; two aspects of which will be examined in detail here. Firstly, Venn's personal process of theological questioning took place against a background of religious ferment. Venn had the opportunity to observe the interaction between religious controversy and party identity, and also to consider his own public party allegiance, in the dispute over *Essays and reviews*. Secondly, the demands of intellectual honesty will be considered, comparing Venn's justification of his own continuation of clerical duty with his cousin's decision to relinquish clerical and academic duty.

Clerical and family expectation

In common with many of his contemporaries Venn did not initially take his fellowship with the view of it being a lifelong post. He expected to take orders and then to take a living. It has been estimated that 87% of fellowships in Cambridge were linked with an obligation to take orders within a number of years of election.¹ However, the obligation to take orders was not so generally incumbent upon the Fellows of Caius, where two thirds of fellowships were open to laymen. Nevertheless as a clerical fellow of sufficient seniority, Venn would be able to count upon the continuation of his fellowship until he had the option of a College living of the annual value of 300/.² The College had almost twenty livings within its gift; which were in effect pensions for clerical fellows, offering an alternative means of support to those who wished to marry. However, clerical numbers were on the point of declining. Of the 23 fellows elected in the 1850s, 17 were ordained, 10 of whom went on to hold College livings. This was a high water mark. In the 1860s, of the 16 new fellows elected only 3 were ordained, and only 2 went on to College livings.³

After a summer tour abroad, Venn returned to Cambridge at the end of the Long Vacation in 1858 to cram for the only available University test in theology, the 'Voluntary Theological'. The fact of Venn's being a graduate in the Mathematical Tripos was no barrier to ordination. Despite the majority of the seniors being clergymen and clerical aspirations being common to many students, the University offered no first degree in Divinity at this point. Indeed, there was much resistance to specialist theological training, with men like William Whewell defending the value of the generalist training of the Tripos. Venn's formal theological education as an undergraduate had largely consisted of the Previous examination which was obligatory for all undergraduates in the Lent term of the second year, and included a paper on

¹ P. Searby, *A history of the University of Cambridge*, Volume 3 1750-1870 (Cambridge, 1997), p.100.

² *Statutes of Gonville and Caius College* (1860), Statute 15 Of Fellows, Duties and Conditions of Tenure.

³ Derived from J. Venn, *Biographical history of Gonville and Caius College 1349-1897*, Volume II 1713-1897 (Cambridge, 1897-8).

Paley's *Evidences of Christianity* and one of the Gospels or Acts of the Apostles in Greek. In the absence of University lecturers in the 1850s, theological teaching for the Previous was offered by College lecturers and the standard of the teaching available reminded Venn of being back at school.⁴ In order to pass the examination on Paley, Venn and his circle relied upon their own reading; and Venn was unable to recall receiving any lectures on the work.⁵

The 'Voluntary Theological', taken in the Michaelmas term of the fourth year, was, as Venn himself noted, rather less than voluntary. Many bishops had made its certificate a requirement of Cambridge men before accepting them for ordination. Venn would have been required to take eight papers, consisting of a selected portion of the Epistles, the 39 Articles, church liturgy, ecclesiastical history, early fathers, portions of the Septuagint and Greek Testament and works of the standard theological writers. All of this was covered within a month of study, and in Venn's opinion, 'this month represented almost the only preparation for my profession which I underwent'.⁶ This was a slight exaggeration, by 1850, candidates for the examination were also required to show by certificate that they had attended lectures delivered during one term by at least two of the three Theology professors.⁷ As Bullock has pointed out, college life offered a number of opportunities for religious education to a motivated, intelligent man; access to the best libraries, opportunities to attend lectures by Divinity Professors, the leisure to pursue reading and the chance to gain parochial experience in surrounding parishes.⁸ However, formal requirements for clerical education were still minimal. As a College fellow, Venn could be ordained on the title of his fellowship, making the Bishop's examination for him the 'merest farce'.⁹

⁴ J. Venn, *Early collegiate life* (Cambridge 1913), p.257.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.265.

⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.91.

⁷ Searby, *op. cit.*, p.268.

⁸ F.W.B. Bullock, *A history of the training for the ministry of the church of England in England and Wales from 1870 to 1874* (St Leonards on Sea, 1955), pp.142-4.

⁹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.91.

Venn argued that he and his contemporaries emerged from this process ill-prepared pastorally and practically,

I had never attempted a sermon or address of any kind, written or spoken, to any class of persons; of course I knew not a word of Hebrew; knew nothing of the tenets or constitution of any of the dissenting bodies in contact with whom every Church of England clergyman has to work; and beyond the minimum of experience gained from having taught in the Jesus Lane Sunday School during one Long Vacation I had experienced no sort of relation with the poor from a religious or any other point of view.¹⁰

Venn's situation was by no means a unique product of the early Victorian system - a gentleman with intellectual interests, but with a lack of pastoral or theological training.¹¹

Venn's complaints echoed a broader dissatisfaction with the preparation the ancient universities were providing for ordination and ministry.¹² The tenor of criticisms tended to reflect the concerns of particular Church groupings - high churchmen argued that proper spiritual preparation was not possible in the mixed society of the University, while broad churchmen argued that the lack of accurate theological knowledge and specialist intellectual training made it difficult for clergymen to deal with emerging new ideas. Evangelicals, as evidenced by Venn's concerns, focused upon the lack of preparation for preaching and for pastoral parochial work.¹³ Venn's criticisms reflected the contemporary concerns about clerical education but his experience also illustrated the small steps that were beginning to be taken. The 'Voluntary Theological' examination had been established in 1843 in response to the demands of those who argued that the clergy needed more specialist preparation for Orders beyond the general BA degree. By the 1850s there was strong support for the idea that an ordinand should be prepared with something more than a general BA degree. It was

¹⁰ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.91.

¹¹ B. Heeney, *A different kind of gentleman: parish clergy as professional men in early and mid-Victorian England* [Studies in British History and Culture Volume 5] (Ohio, 1976), p.98.

¹² Bullock, *op. cit.*, p.97.

¹³ A. Haig, *The Victorian clergy* (Croom Helm, 1984), pp.72-3.

only as the Anglican monopoly of the University was broken that a departure was made from the generalist, non-professional model, and Cambridge became a centre of specialist theological study. The 'Voluntary Theological' survived under the auspices of the newly established Board of Theological Studies until a specialist Theological Tripos was introduced in 1873 and separate clerical training colleges were established in the University in the 1880s.¹⁴ By 1900, the practice of entering orders as a matter of course had virtually ceased – both the ordinand and the bishop expected evidence of a particular vocation and clear elements of vocational training prior to ordination.¹⁵

Venn was ordained deacon at Ely in 1858. He later attempted to assess the state of his belief at the time of taking orders. He labelled himself 'unhesitatingly' as an Evangelical, both in terms of the theological content of his beliefs and his preaching. He opined that it would not have occurred to him to question the truth of his creed, having not encountered at that stage religion in any other form either among his immediate circle or in his reading.¹⁶ What is not apparent from his narrative is a sense of personal calling or vocation to the ministry. This omission could be seen to support Conybeare's assertion that Evangelical churchmanship was becoming a hereditary system adopted more from habit than conviction, or Annan's contention that Evangelicalism had failed to make a fresh appeal to the educated Evangelicals of Venn and Leslie Stephen's generation.¹⁷ It could also be the editorial slant of one who is writing a narrative to explore a departure from clerical status rather than its original adoption. There are no surviving letters from Venn for the period to illuminate his position further.

¹⁴ Bullock, *op. cit.*, pp.80-1.

¹⁵ C.N.L. Brooke, *A history of the University of Cambridge*, Volume IV 1870-1990 (Cambridge, 1993), pp105-106, 145.

¹⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.93.

¹⁷ W. Conybeare, 'Church Parties' [1853-5], edited and with an introduction by A Burns, in S. Taylor (ed.), *From Cranmer to Davidson: A Church of England Miscellany* (Church of England Record Society, VII, Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 1999), p.268; N. Annan, *Leslie Stephen: his thought and character in relation to his time* (London, 1951), p.120.

What is evident from Henry Venn's letters to his son was the weight of family tradition and parental expectation. Similarly, a recurring theme of the Annals was the influence that familial expectation, particularly that of his father, had upon Venn. Parental pride was overwhelming when Henry attended John's ordination in 1858,

I have now to thank God for the fulfilment of the desire nearest to my heart of any ever cherished by me, that I might witness the self dedication of a son in the right spirit to the work of the Ministry.¹⁸

That pride was further increased when Harry followed his elder brother's example, and was ordained in 1867. For Henry, satisfaction that a son had found his Evangelical calling in the ministry, was combined with pride in the family tradition it represented.

The position I occupy as the 3rd & which you occupy as the 4th generation of those who have endeavoured to witness to the truths of the blessed Gospel which bring salvation & peace to the soul of fallen man.¹⁹

As Turner and Ward have suggested, personal, professional and religious expectations were entwined when bonds between parents and their children were rooted in religious expectations, resulting from the connection forged by Evangelicalism between religion and family.²⁰ The Venn family's Evangelical and clerical traditions, taken together with Henry Venn's personal influence over his son, were a powerful combination. In his review of his religious position at the time of his ordination, Venn described himself as being carried along by the momentum of his father's influence and his profound reverence for him. It seems reasonable to suggest that it was this, rather than a strong sense of personal vocation, that played a large part in his decision to take Orders.²¹

¹⁸ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to Henrietta Venn, 14/11/1858.

¹⁹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 22/10/1862.

²⁰ F. M. Turner 'The Victorian crisis of faith and the faith that was lost' and W. R. Ward, 'Faith and fallacy: English and German perspectives in the nineteenth century' in R.J. Helmstadter & B. Lightman (eds.), *Victorian faith in crisis: essays on continuity and change in nineteenth century religious belief* (Stanford, 1990).

²¹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, pp.92-3.

Venn became a curate to James Faithfull, vicar of Cheshunt, Hertfordshire. He described his year at Cheshunt as a happy and prosperous one. He counted James Faithfull and his family as his friends, his main criticism of his vicar being that he was

...too kindly and sensitively courteous to give me the constant hints and advice which I sorely needed.²²

It was in this role that the deficiencies of Venn's professional clerical preparation became apparent. Venn found himself unable to prepare his first sermon.

I tried to fill a number of sheets of paper with remarks which could be spun out for 20 minutes if possible: but no platitudes which I could venture to put down into writing would come into my head.²³

His immediate solution was to trade duties with the other, more senior, curate, in order to speak in front of a poorer, rural congregation by whom he was less intimidated. When John admitted to lacking expertise and confidence in the writing and preaching of sermons, his father responded with reassurance that such difficulties were not uncommon, offered practical tips on the construction of a sermon around a simple text and a stream of encouragement to his son to persevere.²⁴ Henry Venn was also eager to help in practical terms, to the extent of sending some of his own sermons for reference and by offering to supply for John on two Sundays in Cheshunt, to allow him to travel to Hereford to see his sister.²⁵

Again, what is evident are the key influences and demands of the family network. As Bullock has suggested, the dominating personage in the life of the ordinand was not the college tutor, divinity professor or bishop, but the father as the person settling the bills who generally had a deciding influence upon where and how the son was educated.²⁶ At his father's insistence, Venn had taken the position at Cheshunt as an unpaid curacy; it being his father's intention that he should not be prevented by heavy duties from continuing his education. Henry Venn

²² *Ibid*, p.95.

²³ *Ibid*, p.93.

²⁴ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 22/1/1859, 2/4/1859.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 25/11/1858, 2/4/1859.

²⁶ Bullock, *op. cit.*, p.144.

also offered his son a window through which to view contemporary events in the wider Church and encouraged him to make the appropriate ecclesiastical connections. Thus in January 1859, Henry enjoined John to keep an evening free in order that he might dine at home and so meet Bishop McIlwaine whom he described as 'one of a thousand among good men'.²⁷ To further his practical clerical training, Henry also encouraged his son to spend time at Hereford, in order that he might increase receive tips to improve his effectiveness as an Evangelical preacher by learning the art of sermon delivery from his uncle,

These are just what you want - Strachan said your sermons were delightful - all they wanted was to be preached rather than said.²⁸

Following his time at Cheshunt in November 1859, Venn returned briefly to Cambridge to be ordained priest before taking a temporary curacy for the winter with William Tilson Marsh at St. Leonard's, Hastings. Tilson Marsh was the son of Dr William Marsh, a follower of Simeon and acquaintance of Henry Venn; and his sister, Catherine, had an independent reputation as a writer and promoter of Evangelicalism. Once again, Venn found fault with his position, describing Tilson Marsh as 'vain and foolish'.²⁹ However, the curacy enabled Venn to be near to his sister, Henrietta, who was being cared for during an illness by a cousin from their mother's family and was close enough for Henry Venn to visit his children at weekends. Having no regular curacy following his departure from Hastings in March, Venn was free to spend the summer of 1860 at St Peter's Hereford with his aunt and uncle. Emelia and John Venn were initially absent from the parish, and it was the younger Venn's responsibility to take services. He compared himself unfavourably as a preacher with his uncle:

What defects his congregation found in my doctrines I do not know, but they must have noticed a terrible contrast as far as voice and delivery were concerned.³⁰

²⁷ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 25/1/1859.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 16/6/1860

²⁹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.100.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p.104.

Expressing his regret that he had no living of his own to offer to his son, Henry Venn also actively participated in the search for further curacies, canvassing friends and associates for their suggestions.³¹ It was Henry Venn's strong desire that his son should find a conveniently located curacy that would enable John to be able to share a family home with himself and Henrietta. John Venn found that this placed considerable restrictions upon the opportunities this opened up to him, and, when turning down an opening at Holberton on the grounds that it did not offer 'something settled', concluded,

I can see nothing else to be done therefore than to take any curacy that may offer itself and to give up the hope of finding a place where you and H could live.³²

This may have reflected something more than pragmatism in the face of a lack of options. In response to an offer of a situation from his father's former curate, Venn wrote,

I certainly should not feel much inclined to accept Edmonstone's proposal, it would be more agreeable, if nothing else, to go to some new place rather than begin as there amidst friends and acquaintances.³³

There was clearly a desire on Venn's part for a fresh start away from the eyes, and the expectations, of those who knew him.

Whatever John Venn's reservations might have been, Henry Venn's desires prevailed. John had evidently advertised for a curacy and received a response in September 1860 from Thomas Manley, perpetual curate of Mortlake.³⁴ It was Henry Venn who visited Mortlake to investigate the opportunity, reporting back that the church and parish were 'agreeable', having the 'richest people of a higher class - and none of the very poor'. Mr Manley's credentials were also investigated by the elder Venn and were pronounced satisfactory following positive accounts of his preaching and his views being 'very decidedly on the right

³¹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 16/6/1860.

³² CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C40, J. Venn to H. Venn, 14/6/1860.

³³ *Ibid*, [Sep 1858].

³⁴ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 6/9/1860.

side'.³⁵ In late 1860, John Venn became curate of Mortlake and Henry Venn moved the family home from Highbury to East Sheen, giving his son a home while retaining sufficient proximity to the headquarters of the Church Missionary Society. It was to be a time that Henry Venn was to look back upon with considerable nostalgia and affection.³⁶

His son, on the other hand, once again found reason to be dissatisfied with the incumbent, later describing him as 'a thorough humbug'. He summed Manley up as someone who had the talent to compose and deliver a decent sermon but who was too indolent to carry out parish duties such as visiting or to give adequate guidance to his curate:

A few words of oily speech, and an affectionate shake of the hand in the vestry, once a week, constituted almost our whole intercourse from month to month.³⁷

Venn stayed at Mortlake for over a year, a length of time he justified through a sense of obligation to his father who had taken a house in the parish in order to be nearby and by the lack of any direct quarrel with a vicar whose neglect left Venn time for the private study and reading he evidently preferred.

The recurring theme of Venn's narrative was, once again, his sense of dissatisfaction - with himself and with those around him. In his own assessment, Venn found himself wanting as a clergyman, making repeated reference to the disappointment his early congregations must have had in his performance. He was quick to declare his professional training insufficient on the basis of the early difficulties he had as a preacher. He found fault with each of the incumbents under whom he served. Allowing for the slant of the Annals written from the perspective of an apostate clergyman, Venn's view may also have been shaped by the hindsight of one who was conscious of rising contemporary expectations of the clergy and who witnessed the subsequent development of clerical and other professions.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 11/9/1860.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 16/10/1862.

³⁷ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.107.

Venn was ordained in a generation in which it has been argued that the clergy as a group were acquiring professional characteristics with more closely defined functions and duties. The Evangelical emphasis upon the spiritual nature and authority of clerical office and the Tractarian doctrine of apostolic succession have been observed to have imbued clerical vocation with a new seriousness and a distinct identity set apart from the laity.³⁸ The clergyman has been observed to have been increasingly defined less by his status as a gentleman and more by a distinct occupational role requiring particular knowledge and skills. A higher level of theological knowledge was encouraged along with a greater emphasis upon pastoral skills and the development of a distinctively clerical style of life.

In Venn's case, contemporary professional expectations of the clergy and of clerical vocation have to be understood within the context of the more personal expectation imposed by family tradition. For Venn, religious and clerical expectations were always closely entwined with his family and with the importance of personal role models. John Venn's father and his uncle were the very models of Evangelical clergymen with a longstanding strong sense of the seriousness of their own vocation. Venn may not have evinced a strong sense of personal ministerial calling but he regarded these men with awe and reverence and he seems to have assumed their high expectations of the seriousness of ministerial endeavour. To be an Evangelical clergyman was to bear the solemn responsibility to preach God's word and to be the Reverend Mr Venn was to uphold the longstanding familial tradition.

However, it is possible to see evidence of the professionalising trend over time at a level broader than family role models. This is evident in a number of ways. In retrospect, Venn appears to have expected that he should have been prepared for his ministerial task by specialist professional training. His father, on the other hand, evidently regarded development

³⁸ P. Elliott, *The sociology of the professions* (London, 1972), p.43; A. Russell, *The clerical profession* (London, 1984), p.39.

of ministerial skills as an ongoing, practical process; hence his concern that his son should have time for continued study during his curacy and his encouragement to develop the art of effective preaching through practice. Henry Venn's approach was illustrative of the older tradition of ministerial training where the curate without specialist professional training was developed under the benign guidance of a more experienced clergyman of acceptable views. Furthermore, while at Mortlake, Venn started to participate in a local clerical society headed by the rector of Barnes.³⁹ This type of closer association between clergy, coming together in societies to discuss matters of common interest, has been seen as a key component in developing professional clerical identity.⁴⁰ In his Annals, Venn also observed the changing expectations of clerical activity. He contrasted his own relatively light burden of services and parish visiting with the 'innumerable parish meetings and committees which occupy so much time nowadays' and his over-abundance of time for study with his successors who, in his opinion, devoted far too little time to such pursuits.⁴¹ The family and professional imperatives were of course intertwined: Henry Venn of CMS and John Venn of Hereford were exemplars of the seriousness with which clerical vocation and activity were coming to be viewed.

'Acquired' Ideas and networks

During each of his curacies at Cheshunt, Hastings and Mortlake, Venn gave over considerable time to continued study. It was at this point that he first encountered many of the works that were to influence not only his religious position but also opened up the paths he was later to pursue in his academic career.

At Cheshunt, he furthered his theological knowledge learning Hebrew, working on the Greek Testament and commentaries, and during mornings and evenings at Hastings, he continued his theological work. Of his studies at Cheshunt, Venn commented that,

³⁹ *Ibid*, p.112.

⁴⁰ Russell, *op. cit.*, p.42; Heeney, *op. cit.*, pp.5, 95.

⁴¹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.107.

It was a time of considerable progress mentally, but scarcely spiritually, to me. I mean that I did not at all change my religious convictions here, but simply gained more theological knowledge.⁴²

Venn's old schoolfriend and fellow of Trinity College Oxford, William Berkley, had heard some of Mansel's Bampton Lectures, and introduced Mansel's work to Venn. Mansel's aim was a philosophical defence of Christianity against contemporary attacks on the grounds that given the limitations of the human mind, God was unknowable and that revelation, which was not knowledge of God but rather knowledge adapted to the limitations of man, was simply to be accepted. Mansel's argument had stimulated considerable public debate. J.S.Mill, Spencer and Maurice each attacked Mansel's 'philosophical agnosticism'.⁴³ Venn, however, found himself carried away by the 'elaborate and pompous rhetoric of the work, and almost overwhelmed by the display of learning and the summary way in which he [Mansel] knocked over one heterodox German after another'. Coming from an Evangelical background founded on the idea of a personal relationship to God, this was Venn's first introduction to the idea that the human mind could not grasp the infinite. Venn noted in his *Annals* that Mansel had pushed this to the conclusion that man could not know what was meant by God's mercy. Venn was picking up on one strand of the considerable public debate on Mansel's argument, namely the distinction that seemed to be drawn between divine and human morality. Venn may not have found Mansel's argument ultimately satisfactory but he did owe to it an introduction to the Scottish philosophers, McCosh, Reid and Stewart and also a return to 'an old friend', Butler, with whose work he had been familiar since school.⁴⁴

⁴² CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, *Annals*, p.95.

⁴³ B.M.G. Reardon, 'Maurice, (John) Frederick Denison (1805-1872)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18384>, accessed 17 August 2005]; O. Chadwick, *The Victorian church*, Second edition [An ecclesiastical history of England] (London, 1970), Part 1, pp.556-8.

⁴⁴ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, *Annals*, pp.96-7.

In 1859, a College friend introduced Venn to the works of J.S. Mill; an introduction Venn described in his *Annals* as intellectually a 'great event' in his life:

I found myself from beginning to end in an entirely new world of thought and feeling. I was not shocked or in any way religiously disturbed, but simply interested and almost bewildered.⁴⁵

Venn was captivated by Mill, beginning with *On liberty* and proceeding to his *System of logic* and *Political economy*. To a young man raised in almost exclusively Evangelical thinking and society, the novelty and challenge of Mill's writing was clear. In *On liberty*, Mill protested against the prevailing moralism of Victorian society which drew upon narrowing tendencies of Protestantism and sought to quash individualism by inculcating a 'pinched and hidebound type of character'.⁴⁶ This was a direct and perhaps shocking challenge to the religion of Venn's own experience which drew a good deal of its motive force from the constant struggle to curb man's innate sinfulness. Mill's description of the narrowing and restrictive tendencies of Evangelical Protestantism may well have resonated with Venn, who as an undergraduate and as a curate had observed what he himself described as the 'narrow' and 'rigid' tendencies of Evangelicals outside his own family circle. Venn certainly seems to have been influenced by Mill's defence of freedom of thought and discussion, not only as a means of pushing at the boundaries of knowledge but also on the grounds that it was desirable for beliefs to be tested, articulated and defended otherwise they would become 'enfeebled'.⁴⁷ In his autobiographical narrative Venn utilised Mill's argument as part of the explanation of his own religious journey:

Free expression of one's opinions, is, I feel sure, one of the best ways of forming and stiffening them. This free expression I never had; partly owing to the potential coercive

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.112.

⁴⁶ J.S. Mill, *On liberty*, edited by S. Collini [Cambridge texts in the history of political thought] (Cambridge, 1989), pp.xi-xiii.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p.xii, 41-4.

restraint of my vicar, and partly owing to the actual restraint which my reverence for my father imposed upon me.⁴⁸

Mill's *System of logic* potentially posed a far more fundamental challenge. Mill took the empiricist line that, traditional sentiments should be set aside and the evidence for Christianity should be examined scientifically and impartially. Such an approach directly challenged the evidences for Christian belief and traditional approaches to believing.

Venn was not of course the only young man to be influenced by Mill. Collini has described Mill as an 'inescapable presence' on the intellectual landscape of the mid nineteenth century, whose systematic approach to science and society as set out in Book VI of *System of logic* had 'an authority in England that as positively papal'.⁴⁹ Mill has been observed to have had a particular appeal to the young men of Cambridge who found themselves in sympathy with the tone of earnest and open enquiry which characterised Mill's work, seeing his work as a basis for social enquiry on the social and political questions of their generation.⁵⁰ Leslie and Fitzjames Stephen, Albert Venn Dicey and Venn's future colleague and friend in Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick, were each impressed by Mill's *System of logic* and *Political economy*, drawing upon elements of his reasoning and thought in defining their own secular or scientific identities. However, these men eventually took issue with elements of Mill's work, moving on from their youthful adherence. For example, Fitzjames Stephen was inspired by Mill to write a study of criminal law in the manner of social science, but dissented on the attribution of the decline of society to Calvinist Christianity. Perhaps mindful of his own family upbringing, Stephen distinguished between the crushing of individual will and the encouragement of self-discipline.⁵¹ Although they were influenced by Mill's works, none of these men were ever what

⁴⁸ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.121.

⁴⁹ S. Collini, *Public moralists: political thought and intellectual life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford, 1993), p.121; S. Collini, D. Winch & J. Burrow, *That noble science of politics; a study in nineteenth century intellectual history* (Cambridge, 1983), pp.129-30.

⁵⁰ N.B. de Marchi, 'The success of Mill's *Principles*', *History of Political Economy*, Volume 6 (1974), pp.154-6.

⁵¹ K.J.M. Smith, *James Fitzjames Stephen: portrait of a Victorian rationalist* (Cambridge, 1988), pp.111-2.

Collini has described as full 'disciples' of all his work on political and social issues, such as the enfranchisement of women or land tenure reform.⁵²

The position with Venn was slightly different. The surviving evidence does not cast light upon Venn's views of the remainder of Mill's work, but Mill's *System of logic* and *Political economy* were central to the field Venn chose to pursue academically over the next quarter century. Mill's aim of formulating a scientific system of investigation of social sciences was also one of the foundations on which the reformed Moral Sciences Tripos was later to be developed by men like Venn and Sidgwick. Although by no means an uncritical disciple of Mill's thought, Venn was perceived to be a continuing and close follower of Mill by both his friends and colleagues.⁵³ Mill himself, while recognising that he and Venn differed on a number of points, recognised Venn's allegiance in 1868 when he praised Venn's work on the *Logic of chance* as

one of the highest compliments which could have been paid to mine; for I have scarcely met with any thinker who seems to have so completely assimilated the best thoughts and principles of my book.⁵⁴

Mill subsequently provided a testimonial in support of Venn's candidature for the Knightbridge Professorship in 1872.⁵⁵

Venn also became acquainted with theological works outside the range of his Evangelical experience hitherto, including newer works of liberal theology, such as Strachey's *Hebrew polity*, which

⁵² Collini, *Public moralists*, pp.176-8.

⁵³ Caius Archive, Venn papers, C45/2, W. Jevons to J. Venn, 26/3/1876; Review of 2nd edition of *Logic of chance* in *Mind: a quarterly review of psychology and philosophy*, Volume I (1876), p.434.

⁵⁴ Caius Archive, Venn papers, C52/ 1, J.S. Mill to J. Venn, 4/2/1868.

⁵⁵ Caius Archive, Venn papers, C52/4, 14/5/1872.

...advised us, - to use a phrase once so denounced by opponents of the *Essays and Reviews* - to 'read the Bible as we should read any other book'.⁵⁶

Venn also had the leisure to tap into older philosophical traditions outside Evangelicalism, devoting time to Locke and Bacon.⁵⁷ Such works were part of an older Cambridge tradition that emphasised mathematics and latitudinarian theology; the systematic approach of which may well have held an appeal to Venn's orderly mind. In contrast, Venn also became familiar with Coleridge's *Aids to reflection* which provided a challenge to authors like Paley and Locke through its emphasis upon a reflective progression into Christian truth.⁵⁸ Venn continued the habit, learnt as an undergraduate, of carefully abstracting each of the books he read in order to absorb their contents more completely. In this manner he read Coleridge over and over and indexed it carefully.⁵⁹

While aware of the publication of *The origin of species* in 1859 and of *Essays and reviews* in 1860, Venn was at that time more struck by the subject matter of Maine's *Ancient law* and John Austin's *Jurisprudence*.⁶⁰ Maine's comparative and historical approach influenced a generation of writers, like Fitzjames Stephen, Henry Sidgwick and John Seeley. Stephen undertook a comparative review of Maine and Austin: recognising Maine's contribution in bringing historical perspective to the study of law and viewing this as complementary to the scientific method of Austin, whose 'legal positivism' emphasised the classificatory but static nature of jurisprudence.⁶¹ Maine's approach had drawn the respect of J.S. Mill, who recognised the worth of Maine's contribution even though his approach was historical and generally critical of the Utilitarians' abstract method.⁶² Like his cousin, Venn was impressed

⁵⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.113. Venn is referring to Edward Strachey, *author of Hebrew politics in the time of Sargon and Sennacherib* (1853), who was a friend of and influenced by F.D. Maurice.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.101.

⁵⁸ D.S. Palfrey, 'The Moral Sciences Tripos at Cambridge 1848-1860' (University of Cambridge PhD thesis, 2002), pp.60-7.

⁵⁹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.99.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.112.

⁶¹ Smith, *op. cit.*, pp.46-52; Collini, *Public moralists*, p.262.

⁶² Collini et al., *That noble science of politics*, pp.145-6, 211.

by the historical sense of Maine. He was particularly struck by the novelty of an approach that illustrated how accepted concepts of family, property and nation were historical constructs of western civilisation. This historical understanding might be transferred, as it was by Seeley, to a recognition that religious thought and institutions might also be historically determined and, as such, might be replaced by new thinking and institutions when they were no longer fit for purpose.⁶³ Venn was also impressed by Austin's analytical classification which separated out the elements of ethics or morality and law; themes that he returned to in later life when writing his work on *Empirical logic*.⁶⁴

As is evident, the intensive reading that Venn undertook during this period laid the foundations for much of the academic work he was later to undertake. For example, reading Buckle's *History of civilisation in England* on the potential for a science of history provided a starting point for Venn's future work on of inductive logic and statistics which informed his book on the *Logic of chance*.⁶⁵ Similarly, an introduction to the work of the logician, George Boole, eventually resulted in Venn's work on *Symbolic logic*. Venn's list of his wider reading during this period not only highlights the roots of his future work but gives some sense of the intellectual landscape of which he was a part. Clearly represented in Venn's reading were both of the strands of Victorian thought and sensibility represented by Collini as the dichotomy between the rational and the scientific linked with Utilitarianism and Mill; and the romantic cultural critique linked more with Coleridge and Maurice. The two were not mutually exclusive: Leslie Stephen was an example of how intellectual commitment to the methods of science and to the reasoning associated with Utilitarianism could be combined with the cult of manliness grounded in a Coleridgean and Arnoldian tradition.⁶⁶ By temperament and by his training in the Cambridge mathematical tradition, Venn's inclination was ultimately towards

⁶³ R. Soffer, 'History and religion: J. R. Seeley and the burden of the past' in Davis & Helmstadter (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.140.

⁶⁴ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.113.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.130.

⁶⁶ S. Collini, 'Manly fellows': Fawcett, Stephen and the Liberal temper' in L. Goldman (ed.), *The blind Victorian: Henry Fawcett and British Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1989), p.52.

the systematic and scientific approach, but he could still be moved by observation of nature by Ruskin or touched by the memory of lines from Tennyson.⁶⁷

The impact of this wider reading was further reinforced by the discussion of new ideas with friends. Venn owed his introduction to Austin's works to Albert Venn Dicey, for whom it constituted part of his field of academic interest in constitutional law and history. It was Charles Monro, Venn's Caian contemporary, who introduced Venn to the works of Mill, Buckle and Maine, and to whom Venn also acknowledged a broader debt in terms of his academic development, writing later,

No mere convention, and no loose argument, were ever allowed to pass, whether in theology, politics, literature or science.⁶⁸

It was during the curacy at Mortlake that Venn also became better acquainted with John Seeley, at that point a master at the City of London School and whose family lived in the parish. In Seeley, Venn found another son of an Evangelical home, the influence of which was beginning to wane. Seeley was versed in classical and literary studies rather than the Cambridge mathematical tradition, and was increasingly influenced by the works of Carlyle, Coleridge, German historical criticism and the Broad Church.⁶⁹ Venn was struck by Seeley's 'wide knowledge and brilliance of intellect' during their walks together. Debate and discussion was often combined with a shared passion for walking and climbing. The undergraduate habit of combining walking with discussion, was sustained as a curate, when Venn went walking locally with University friends to discuss books and ideas. He also spent holidays in Wales and the Lake District in the 1860s walking with friends, like Seeley, and with fellow College reformers and future Masters of Caius, Norman Ferrers and E.S. Roberts.⁷⁰ Venn retained

⁶⁷ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, pp.88-9, 99.

⁶⁸ J. Venn, 'C.H. Monro', *The Caian*, Volume XVII (1907-8), p.163; W.W. Buckland, 'Monro, Charles Henry (1835-1908)', revised by E. Metcalfe, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/35069>, accessed 17 August 2005].

⁶⁹ R.T. Shannon, 'Seeley, Sir John Robert (1834-1895)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25025>, accessed 17 August 2005]; Soffer, 'History and religion', p.135.

⁷⁰ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.131; Caius Archive, Venn papers C02/36, J. Venn to J.A.

until late in life an association between certain ideas, people and locations. He recalled walking with a Cambridge contemporary when curate of Mortlake:

I could localize the spots almost to a few yards: how, near Merton, we got on to the doctrine of the Atonement, and whether it was just that one should suffer in place of another, which I supported and he rejected; how, as we wound round the descent from the down, by Micklesham church, we got onto Tennyson's Love and Duty...⁷¹

The nature of the works being read, supported by earnest discussion of them with contemporaries, resembles the framework posited by Newsome on godliness and good learning.⁷² Venn and his friends were of a slightly later generation than that discussed by Newsome but the parallels are notable. In both cases, it was a framework in which education and religion were seen as essentially allied, and shared texts, such as Butler's *Analogy*, Wordsworth's poems, Scott's novels and Coleridge's *Aids to reflection*, were the basis for intellectual and earnest debate on religious matters. For Venn, these friends were men, unlike his father or the clergymen under whom he was serving, with whom he felt comfortable engaging in free discussion and whose opinions he valued and respected. Whereas Venn described himself as unable to test out and articulate his inherited Evangelical beliefs, he was under no such restraint in respect of the new ideas to which he was brought into contact by his friends.

Initially, the fabric of the Evangelical beliefs Venn had adopted under his father's influence remained apparently untouched, with no specific doctrine rejected. Gradually, over time, Venn appears to have worked through the logic of his own intellectual position – asking himself on what basis a belief could be held and what he actually believed. The influence of Newman's *Apologia* is clear at this point in the narrative of the Annals. Venn made explicit

Venn, 28/6/1922

⁷¹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.109.

⁷² D. Newsome, *Godliness and good learning: four studies on a Victorian ideal* (London, 1961), pp.12-25.

reference to the way in which Newman seemed able to specify doctrine after doctrine and assign a date at which each was accepted or rejected. He certainly seems to have adopted this as the model for his own work, trying to define his 'actual state of belief' over time.⁷³ Venn reflected that he was not one of those like Newman who was able to note the precise points in time at which particular ideas or doctrines were doubted or rejected. Thus the subsequent chronology of the development of his beliefs is imprecise in his narrative, although he sketched out the general course of their development.

Venn separated out what he terms 'accretions', such as Sabbatarianism, which were among the first concepts he rejected. These were followed by 'outworks', such as Verbal Inspiration and the truth of the Mosaic narrative. Both in rejecting Verbal Inspiration and in downgrading it as an 'outwork' rather than as a core issue, Venn can be seen to be making a clear distinction between his own theological position and priorities and those of leading Evangelicals; aligning himself with positions being taken publicly by liberal churchmen. By 1862, Venn cited his studies of Mill, Austin and Bentham as having an impact upon core doctrines, such as the total depravity of man 'evacuating these doctrines of all significance'.⁷⁴ The idea of Original Sin was at the core of the Evangelical schema; the innate sinfulness of humanity being a necessary starting point to a recognition of God's forgiveness and deliverance through the atoning sacrifice of Christ and the sanctification of a regenerate soul. Venn continued to call himself Evangelical, while gradually departing from the theological positions with which Evangelicalism was identified.

Public and private identity

Was Venn experiencing a crisis of faith? The traditional historical formulation of a crisis of faith has drawn upon 'unconversion narratives', like Venn's Annals, to pinpoint the emotional

⁷³ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.92.

⁷⁴ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.120.

and intellectual impact of particular works of biblical criticism and discoveries in science.⁷⁵

Venn was aware that his Evangelical beliefs were

...being actively attacked on every side by nearly all the books I was reading, and implicitly contradicted by much of my conversation with my friends.⁷⁶

The purpose of the *Annals* was to set out how Venn had reached his mature religious position. The narrative was shaped by the requirements of an 'de-conversion narrative' explaining the defects of Evangelicalism and the influence of new ideas. Venn was able to trace the process back as has been indicated to the texts and the people by which and whom this process had originated. However, an immediate or sudden crisis of faith cannot be said to have been precipitated by Venn's exposure to key works of 'dissolvent literature'.

I had none of those mental or moral crises, or periods of sudden development which many young men experience.⁷⁷

Indeed he was concerned to point out that such works did not have the immediate impact that might have been expected. For example, having read *Essays and reviews* and *The origin of species*,

I cannot say that they produced the full effect that they should have produced. They certainly gave no shock to my religious convictions.⁷⁸

Venn may have been grappling with the ethical issues faced by a number of other intellectuals. Murphy and Altholz have argued that the decline of orthodoxy was less about the specific implications of scientific discoveries or biblical criticism but about the intellectual revolt against the ethical implications of previously accepted elements of Christian dogma, such as election, original sin and vicarious atonement.⁷⁹ A similar concern had led F.D.

⁷⁵ F. M. Turner 'The Victorian crisis of faith and the faith that was lost' in Helmstadter. & Lightman (eds.), *op. cit.*, (Stanford, 1990), pp.9-10.

⁷⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, *Annals*, p.104.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p.67.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p.102. For the further impact of these works, see p.90.

⁷⁹ J.L. Altholz, 'The warfare of conscience with theology', in G. Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain, Volume IV Interpretations* (OUP, 1988), pp.151-7; H.R. Murphy, 'The ethical revolt against Christian orthodoxy in early Victorian England' in Helmstadter and Lightman (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp.800-1.

Maurice to challenge the idea of everlasting torment and to refocus Christian teaching away from the innate sinfulness of man towards repentance as a gradual recognition of the presence of Christ. As has been noted, Venn altered his position on key tenets such as Original Sin, but there is an absence of positive evidence in the *Annals* that this was a specifically ethical issue.

A crisis of faith has also been defined as a reaction to the demands of a Christian faith which had become unbearably intense on the personal and vocational levels; religious revival and denominational rivalry having expanded and intensified the arena of religious life to the point of personal crisis. In short, revival had defined a faith to be lost.⁸⁰ Intensified religiosity that was neither institutionally passive nor spiritually nominal could transform religion into a significant and problematic burden.⁸¹ For Venn there was certainly a heavy burden of familial expectation with regard to religion and there is a strong sense throughout his narrative of measuring himself against paternal expectations and finding himself wanting. Furthermore, the theological positions that Venn listed as increasingly problematic included Verbal Inspiration, a subject which had assumed increasing totemic value in mid-century Evangelicalism.

The doctrines that Venn was rejecting as religious 'accretions' and 'outworks' were at the very heart of contemporary debate about religion. The reaction to *Essays and reviews* contributed to a hardening of views. Party rivalry was polarising the religious landscape such that, in Conybeare's words, a catholic bond became a specific creed, where secondary doctrines assumed importance.⁸² The Recordite response to the challenges of biblical criticism and honest doubt was to propose the restoration of scriptures to priority and the reassertion of a

⁸⁰ F. M. Turner 'The Victorian crisis of faith and the faith that was lost' in Helmstadter & Lightman (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp.11-16.

⁸¹ Altholz, 'The warfare of conscience with theology' in Parsons, *op. cit.*, p.151.

⁸² Conybeare, *op. cit.*, p.262; I. Ellis, *Seven against Christ: a study of Essays and Reviews* (Leiden, 1980), pp.152-5.

substitutionary view of Atonement and the doctrine of everlasting punishment of sinners.⁸³ Bradley has pointed to the 'new obscurantism and fanaticism' in contemporary Evangelicalism, where a belief in the literal authority and an imminent second coming had become standard doctrines, which may have caused more educated and sensitive consciences raised in moderate Evangelical families to react against this narrowness.⁸⁴ Allegiance was demanded to distinct doctrinal positions, such as Verbal Inspiration, where mere acquiescence to a set of broadly defined principles might previously have been sufficient.⁸⁵ The result of these all-or-nothing arguments may, as Wolffe has argued, contributed to the alienation of more thoughtful men from Evangelicalism.⁸⁶ In this way, Venn might be seen to have encountered religious expectations and theological positions that became problematic in part because of the new prominence that was accorded to them in the course of contemporary debate.

However, the clear reference in the *Annals* to Mill's argument on the need for beliefs to be tested in order to avoid their enfeeblement also indicates the nature of Venn's relationship to his inherited beliefs. Venn's acceptance of the Evangelical creed had, by his own admission, been 'hazy' - not defined by adherence to particular theological tenets but rather the result of being the only creed set in front of him and also being the creed held by all those for whom he had affection and respect. What is implicit here is a change in the basis on which Venn approached religion and belief. From Venn's own narrative it is certainly possible to describe him as an Evangelical by attachment and by reputation but what is not clear is a sense that he was truly attached to Evangelicalism as a creed. What was lacking from Venn's writings, in the *Annals* and in his letters, was the sense of God's immanence, assurance and personal vocation that were the hallmarks of his father's and grandfather's writings. This might, of

⁸³ Ellis, *op. cit.*, p.3.

⁸⁴ I. Bradley, *The call to seriousness: the Evangelical impact upon the Victorians* (London, 1976), pp.194-8.

⁸⁵ P. Toon, *Evangelical theology 1833-1856: a response to Tractarianism* [Marshall's theological library] (London, 1979), p.205; Bradley, *op. cit.*, p.195.

⁸⁶ J. Wolffe, *The Protestant crusade in Great Britain 1829-1860* [Oxford Historical Monographs] (Oxford, 1991), p.304.

course, be expected in a narrative about the departure from such a perspective.

Nevertheless, although Venn's emotional attachment to Evangelicalism was by no means superficial, it was certainly not the result of serious consideration of doctrinal positions. When such serious consideration was given, Venn

...gradually came to see that much of what I said in public was only held by tradition or from respect for those I revered; not from rational conviction.⁸⁷

In contrast with this largely personal and emotional engagement with Evangelicalism, Venn began, in the course of his wider reading and discussions, to engage with religious ideas intellectually and critically as he would any other work whether philosophical or mathematical.

The transition Venn was making intellectually in private was not reflected in his public stance as a clergyman. Venn later wrote of the growing distinction between the views he expressed in public and the ideas he was discussing in private. He described his position in 1858, studying Mill for hours each day while preaching the Evangelical creed every Sunday as a 'queer state of things' but thought it had been undertaken 'without the slightest insincerity or suspicion'.⁸⁸ Private exploration of his own views through reading and discussion with friends was still held in check publicly by concern for his family and fear of Manley.

The extent of his public reserve was brought home to him during the public debate about *Essays and reviews* in 1861. Venn read *Essays and reviews* along with *The origin of species* in 1860, but it was only in the following year, following Frederic Harrison's review of *Essays and reviews* in the *Westminster Review* that public reaction to the volume escalated. Venn found himself in agreement with many of the liberal views expressed in *Essays and reviews*. The Essayists rejected the theology of passive acceptance of traditional doctrines derived

⁸⁷ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.117.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p.98.

from the Bible.⁸⁹ The purpose of the volume as expressed in the preface might have seemed to Venn to echo the process of personal scrutiny on which he himself was embarked:

An attempt to illustrate the advantage derivable to the cause of religious and moral truth, from a free handling in a becoming spirit, of subjects liable to suffer by the repetition of conventional language, and from traditional methods of treatment.⁹⁰

The Essayists were examining the very subjects with which Venn was struggling, such as the infallibility of the Bible, Atonement and Eternal Punishment. In drawing upon the works of Maine and Buckle to support the historically based view of progressive revelation, the Essayists were also drawing upon works by which Venn himself was being stimulated.⁹¹

When Pusey drew up the Oxford Declaration in response to *Essays and reviews*, which declared that the Church of England maintained without reserve or qualification the divine inspiration and authority of the scripture, Venn was not among the 8000 clergymen who signed. In not signing the clerical declaration Venn felt that he was departing from what was considered orthodox by his vicar and was conscious of an inconsistency of his own position by privately expressing approval of the spirit of *Essays and reviews* while curate to a vicar for whom 'mere abstention from denunciation of the hated views would have been enough, in highly orthodox circles, to attract attention'.⁹² He considered himself fortunate that his contact with Manley was not sufficient to draw attention to the omission and that no pressure was brought to bear upon him to sign either by Manley or the local clerical society.⁹³ Venn's position may not have appeared so unorthodox as he feared as his father also found himself isolated by his own unwillingness to sign the protest. Henry Venn had previously expressed concern to his son at 'the movement among the clergy of the Oxford diocese' and the

⁸⁹ J.L. Altholz, *Anatomy of a controversy: the debate over Essays and Reviews 1860-1864* [Nineteenth Century Series] (Scolar Press, 1994), pp.4-5.

⁹⁰ Ellis, *op. cit.*, p.50.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.92.

⁹² CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.111.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.112.

'Protestant feeling' that was being roused in response.⁹⁴ In an illustration of the hardening of party position, Henry Venn was unwilling to line up alongside men such as Pusey and so give the impression that party differences were of no consequence and that the Tractarian view of biblical inspiration was in some way equivalent to that of the Evangelicals.⁹⁵

In the face of an all or nothing choice, such as the signing of the Oxford Declaration, Venn was one of those who found himself unable to take a dogmatic stand. The controversy over *Essays and reviews* may have given additional impetus to his silence over his own private doubt; particularly when he saw periodicals like the *Christian Observer* calling for the parents of Rugby pupils to get rid of their 'infidel' headmaster, Temple.⁹⁶ The outcome of the *Essays and reviews* controversy may also have closed down an avenue in which he might have taken refuge as a clergyman. Conybeare postulated that Anglican liberal churchmanship might offer an alternative to reaction on one hand and to a collapse into unbelief on the other. However, by 1870, the idea of the Broad Church party as an alternative to the High Church and Evangelical parties was vanishing leaving liberal churchmen without a positive direction.⁹⁷

Venn was aware that friends such as Seeley may have been puzzled by the inherent contradiction between the ideas and positions he had adopted privately and those he was preaching in his public ministry. In front of a congregation Venn felt he was able to:

...utter conventional platitudes to a congregation most of whom, if they attend at all, take everything for granted, and another thing to be pulled up for any loose word or argument.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 2/4/1859.

⁹⁵ H. Venn to J. Venn of Hereford, 9/3/1861 quoted in W. Knight, *Memoir of Henry Venn BD Prebendary of St. Paul's and Honorary Secretary of the Church Missionary Society* (London, 1882), pp.331-2.

⁹⁶ Ellis, *op. cit.*, p.178.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, pp.2, 244; Altholz, *Anatomy of a controversy*, p.135.

⁹⁸ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.117

Venn held that there was no direct contradiction between his privately held theological views and his public platform and at no point was a matter of conscience involved that would have required his departure. Yet in his *Annals*, he returned repeatedly to the issue of his own sincerity. He later wrote

...there was no insincerity, in the sense of my saying in public what I did not believe, but I must admit that there was reserve, in the sense of not saying a great deal which I did believe.⁹⁹

Venn was perhaps sensitive to the charges of intellectual dishonesty that had been levelled against Newman and the Tractarians in the 1830s and was attuned to the contemporary debate on the ethics of belief and subscription. Much of the debate about the authors of *Essays and reviews* surrounded their alleged honesty or dishonesty. Both orthodox churchmen and the positivists challenged the Essayists to be honest in acknowledging the incompatibility between their position and the formularies of the Church and by extension, the honest retention of their clerical status. Contemporaries were asking what was the honest course of action for a clergyman who believed himself to be a Christian but who had doubts, for whatever reasons, about Christianity's expression in terms of traditional doctrine and theology. Broad churchmen, like Stanley, protested that honest participation in the Church and ministry depended upon one's relationship to the worship and doctrine of the Church as a whole rather than to precise and uniform acceptance of its doctrines and as such, the 39 Articles provided sufficient flexibility to avoid conflict. Venn's cousin, Fitzjames Stephen, conducted a successful defence of one of the Essayists, Rowland Williams, on the grounds that the question was not one of the correctness of the opinions but rather whether Williams was forbidden from expressing them as a clergyman. Stephen's defence of Williams, that he was exercising the liberty sanctioned by the 39 Articles, reflected Stephen's own transition to

⁹⁹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, *Annals*, p.104.

a liberal opinion at the time that the Bible contained but did not constitute revelation.¹⁰⁰ The final outcome of the trial of the two Essayists, Williams and Wilson, for heresy was to prove that they were not obliged by law to leave the ministry.

Connection with the Stephens

At the time of writing the Annals in the 1880s, Venn would have been aware that his own cousin would have found his reserve before his congregation unacceptable even dishonest. He would also have been aware of the broader parallels between his own religious development and that of Leslie Stephen.

Leslie Stephen had been elected a fellow of Trinity Hall in 1854 and took orders on the title of his fellowship. He described his own ordination in 1855 and 1859 as a step taken rather 'thoughtlessly' motivated by a desire to live up to his father's expectation that one of his sons should take orders, and to relieve his father of the burden of supporting him through taking the academic opportunities offered to clerical fellows.¹⁰¹ His sister, Caroline Emelia Stephen, begged him to give up the plan

...not from any suspicion of his having any doubts, but from my own strong sense of the absence in him of any decided vocation for which we had been accustomed to think of as the most sacred of callings.¹⁰²

It has accordingly been argued that this growing emphasis given to serious vocation and the professionalisation of the clergy from the 1860s promoted a crisis of vocation among men like Leslie Stephen who had taken orders lightly and then found themselves unable to uphold this new standard in good conscience.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ J. Colaiaco, *James Fitzjames Stephen and the crisis of Victorian thought* (New York, 1983), pp.172-5.

¹⁰¹ Annan, *Leslie Stephen: his thought and character*, p.45.

¹⁰² C. E. Stephen to F. W. Maitland 8 Jan 1905 in J. W. Bicknell (ed.), *Selected letters of Leslie Stephen, Volume 1 1864-1882* (London, 1996), p.12.

¹⁰³ J. Von Arx, 'The Victorian crisis of faith as crisis of vocation' in Helmstadter & Lightman (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp.264-74.

Like Venn, Stephen too undertook an intensive period of wider philosophical reading in 1859-60. He later asserted that he 'became convinced among other things that Noah's flood was a fiction (or rather convinced that I had never believed in it)'.¹⁰⁴ Varied slants have been placed upon Stephen's transition. Chadwick has pointed out that few educated men in the 1860s believed in a universal flood and that it seems unlikely that Stephen had that unquestioning faith when he took orders. The issue was more that while he did not believe the stories in the Bible were literally true, he was required by the Church to read them as if they were true and this was something he could no longer do; less a question of intellectual dissent than of moral repudiation.¹⁰⁵ Von Arx has described as a pincer movement, in which the empiricism of Mill's *System of logic* persuaded Stephen that Christian belief was problematic, while Comte's developmental account of history provided an explanation of the way in which such beliefs could have arisen.¹⁰⁶ Annan, on the other hand, has argued that Stephen's belief was not shaken in the first instance by Mill, but rather by the sense that historical evidence, as highlighted in the debates over Darwin and *Essays and reviews*, was against Christianity.¹⁰⁷

Most pertinently in terms of parallels with Venn, Stephen was later to describe the cessation of his acceptance of the religious teachings of his youth as less of a process of giving up beliefs but discovering that he had never really believed

I was not discovering that my creed was false, but that I had never really believed it.¹⁰⁸

Stephen described his relationship to the Evangelical creed as belonging 'the superficial stratum of my thought instead of to the fundamental convictions'.¹⁰⁹ Could a crisis of faith be defined, as Stephen's account suggests, as the realisation of the absence of that faith?

Stephen's denial of his previous beliefs has been challenged by his biographers, Maitland

¹⁰⁴ A. Bell (ed.), *Sir Leslie Stephen's mausoleum book* (Oxford, 1977), p.6.

¹⁰⁵ Chadwick, *op. cit.*, p.113.

¹⁰⁶ J. von Arx, 'The Victorian crisis of faith as a crisis of vocation' in Helmstadter & Lightman (eds.), *op. cit.*, p.271.

¹⁰⁷ Annan, *Leslie Stephen: his thought and character*, pp.162-6.

¹⁰⁸ L. Stephen, *Some early impressions* (1924), p.214.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.214.

and Annan, who argued that if it was necessary to 'discover' or 'become convinced' that a belief was false then some sort of belief had existed in the first place, however baseless it may have been.¹¹⁰ There is a clear parallel between Venn and Stephen in terms of their re-alignment of their relationship with their inherited religion.¹¹¹ As Annan has suggested with regard to Leslie Stephen, the continuous process of scrutinising and criticising the logic of the arguments of the books he was reading probably played a part in causing Venn to apply his intellect in a similar way to his religious beliefs.¹¹² What Venn's and Stephen's narratives indicate is a significant shift in the standards and rigour by which they chose to examine their faith and creed – where authority was given not to a personal engagement with God but rather to carefully argued reason where each position had to be defended.

When his own religious doubts arose, Stephen initially continued to perform his clerical duties, taking refuge in a broad view of the 39 Articles. However, by the summer of 1862, he rejected this position and argued that a clergyman had a moral duty to speak out honestly and plainly, and that it was dangerous for a pastor to interpret in one way in order to suit his conscience when his congregation might assume a different interpretation. On this basis Leslie Stephen ceased to take part in chapel services in 1862, was obliged to resign his tutorship and fellowship at Trinity Hall, before leaving Cambridge in 1864.¹¹³ By 1865, Stephen had abandoned all dogmatic Christianity and eventually resigned orders in 1875.¹¹⁴ Stephen has therefore been identified as an 'honest doubter' who rejected religion 'because he is too earnest to accept it'; objecting to Christianity as the result of doubts over the authenticity of the scripture or deriving from discoveries in science or concerns over the morality of its doctrines. This strong sense of right and wrong was coupled with a sense of duty to truth and honesty, making it impossible for the honest doubter to assent to some of

¹¹⁰ Annan, *Leslie Stephen: his thought and character*, p.115.

¹¹¹ L. Stephen, *Some early impressions* (1924) pp.68, 89, 98 quoted in A. Bell (ed.), *Sir Leslie Stephen's mausoleum book*, p.xvi-xvii.

¹¹² L. Stephen, *Selected writings in British intellectual history*, edited by N. Annan [Classics of British Historical Literature] (University of Chicago, 1979), p.xvi

¹¹³ Bell (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.6; Bicknell (ed.), *op. cit.*, Volume 1, p.14.

¹¹⁴ Annan, *Leslie Stephen: his thought and character*, pp.46-7; Bicknell (ed.), *op. cit.*, Volume 1, p.94.

the central doctrines of Christian theology.¹¹⁵ Again, there are parallels here with Venn's gentler and more timid concern to justify the integrity and honesty of his own position in the Annals.

There were also differences alongside the parallels. There was a distinct sense of personal distance between Venn and Leslie Stephen. In response to a concerned enquiry from his father in 1862 about a family rumour that Leslie Stephen was becoming a supporter of Maurice, Venn declared ignorance.¹¹⁶

About Leslie I know nothing. I never see him & we have scarcely any friends in common. I don't know why he gives up the tutorship; then the tutors lecture & very possibly he was tired of teaching.¹¹⁷

Venn may have be overstating in order to reassure his father, as upon Venn's return to Cambridge in 1862 both he and Leslie Stephen were involved in the organisation of the Moral Sciences Tripos and had a shared acquaintance with men like Ferrers, W.K. Clifford and Henry Fawcett. However, in later correspondence with another Clapham descendent, Laura Forster, Venn indicated that he and Leslie Stephen were temperamentally unsuited to each other as young men,

I wish I could have seen more of him in early days, but in those days we did not fit in well together. I suppose [he saw] in me the sanctimonious prig, & I in him the athletic rough. I don't know which was furthest wrong.¹¹⁸

What is notable about the intellectual development of Venn and his cousins is that each was reacting to similar texts, ideas and problems. However, with the exception of Venn's connection with Dicey, his reading and development does not appear to have been prompted by contact with other family members of his generation. The intellectual processes of

¹¹⁵ M. Bartholomew, 'The moral critique of Christian orthodoxy' in G. Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain, Volume II Controversies* (Manchester, 1988), p.167.

¹¹⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 5/11/1862.

¹¹⁷ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C40, J. Venn to H. Venn, 7/11/1862.

¹¹⁸ Society of Genealogists Library, Venn collection, J. Venn to L.M. Forster, 14/12/1902.

Fitzjames and Leslie Stephen and John Venn may have been parallel but they were separate and private. In stark contrast to their Clapham forebears, who had drawn together on the basis of their shared beliefs, the dissolution of this belief structure was a process experienced in isolation. Given the distinctive religious viewpoint his family's network embodied privately and in the public estimation, and the strong concern that would arise at any suggestion of doubt, it is no surprise that Venn chose to explore his own religious identity in private and largely away from his family circle.

The twin influences of the Claphamite connexion and the influence of Venn's new reading and private discussion did show itself when Venn made his first foray into print in 1862. Drawing particularly upon his reading of Buckle, Mill, Austin and Maine, Venn entered the contemporary debate on the abstract possibility of a science of sociology and the prediction of human actions in a paper entitled 'Science of history'.¹¹⁹ Carefully sidestepping the question of determinism, Venn's contribution was to raise a practical objection, that the mere fact of the prediction would in itself have an impact upon human action and would need to be taken into account as a factor in the prediction.¹²⁰ Making use of the familial network, he submitted the paper to Fitzjames Stephen, who had already published on this subject. Fitzjames Stephen shared Buckle's enthusiasm for the potential of applied social sciences but in a series of articles for the *Cornhill Magazine* and the *Edinburgh Review* had distinguished between prediction and prescription with regard to human actions, upholding the role of personal endeavour against impersonal forces.¹²¹ Fitzjames praised the rigour of Venn's paper and offered comments for its improvement before using his influence to get it published in *Fraser's Magazine*.¹²²

¹¹⁹ J. Venn, 'Science of history', *Fraser's Magazine* (May 1862), p.651.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p.652.

¹²¹ Smith, *op. cit.*, p.46.

¹²² Caius Archive, Venn papers C12/01, F.J. Stephen to J. Venn, 19/1/[1862].

Conclusions

Venn left Mortlake in 1862 having been disillusioned by the clerical example set for him by Manley and with growing awareness of his own personal alienation from the creed he was professing publicly. Venn's comments and actions illustrate how religious identity could operate simultaneously on a variety of levels. In a period in which he formally affirmed his Anglicanism by accepting a fellowship and being ordained and, with the support of his family, took up a public position preaching the Evangelical creed, Venn was privately examining the nature of his theological and spiritual position. What was lacking from Venn's writings, in the Annals and in his letters, was the sense of religious and clerical vocation that were so evident elsewhere in the family archive. The emphasis Venn placed upon obedience to a family tradition rather than personal vocation reinforces the impression given by Leslie Stephen of his own desire to please his father by taking orders. Venn's emotional attachment to Evangelicalism was by no means superficial but was certainly not the result of serious consideration of doctrinal positions. In common with Leslie Stephen, Venn's narrative indicates a significant shift in the standards and rigour by which he chose to examine his faith and creed. He was slowly working through the implications of this change in relation to particular ideas and doctrine. In exploring new ideas, such as those expressed in *Essays and reviews*, in rejecting certain doctrines, such as Verbal Inspiration, Venn was, by the standards of the day, moving away not only from a distinctively Evangelical position but also, to a position that men from a range of positions, both orthodox and doubting, would have found incompatible with continuation in orders. Furthermore, in parish life, as in College, Venn was once again encountering a number of Evangelicals for whom he had no admiration, leaving his own Evangelicalism bound up with family traditions and the reverence he felt for Evangelical 'saints' such as his father.

Venn's experience also highlights aspects of contemporary developments on a broader stage. Venn's dissatisfaction with his preparation for orders not only speaks to his personal

disillusionment but reflects a broader debate about the function of clerical education.¹²³ What Venn's example also illustrates is the important influence of family tradition, not simply changing professional expectations, in determining personal expectations of clerical standards and professionalism. It also gives credence to Conybeare's formulation of the Claphamite Evangelical strand becoming an inherited religious tradition.

Venn's personal experience also supports the impression of the polarising impact of heated controversy, where clergymen were called upon to take a public position on particular religious issues. On the one hand, new authors and friends were opening up questions which educated and enquiring minds like Venn were following through to conclusions regarding personal faith. On the other hand, public controversy as exemplified by the debate over *Essays and reviews*, was polarising religious opinion, resulting in the expectation of adherence to particular public positions. The private imperative to base faith on reason was counterbalanced by external pressures to subscribe to hardened positions. Venn's account illustrates the personal conflict this juxtaposition could cause. What is also highlighted is the overriding personal concern at a time of heated religious debate about what constituted clerical conformity, to keep such dissent concealed within the private domain and to remain unremarked by parishioners and clerical brethren.

As a curate, Venn encountered a wide range of new ideas and began to engage with religious ideas intellectually and critically as he would any other work whether philosophical or mathematical. The result was not an immediate crisis or sudden development in his thinking but the start of a far more gradual process. This delayed reaction is unsurprising. Venn was being bombarded with a wide range of new ideas and perspectives. He was also encountering a peer group with ideas and intellectual approaches which challenged those of his own upbringing. In this light, it comes as no surprise that Venn should take time to sift

¹²³ Heeney, *op. cit.*; Bullock, *op. cit.*; Haig, *op. cit.*

through and establish his own estimate of the value of these new inputs. During his curacies, this process of self-definition was in its initial stages and still lacked coherence but the foundations of the future development of Venn's academic and religious thought had been laid. To take an example from Venn's academic development, it was in 1858 that Venn was introduced by his former coach, Todhunter, to the work of Boole. It was only after an interval of two decades that Venn would interpret Boole's logical work into diagrammatic form.¹²⁴ It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that certain ideas and texts may have had an impact on Venn's relationship to religious ideas in much the same, gradual way.

Rather than seeking to describe Venn's religious development in terms of a crisis of faith or vocation, it is here that a multi-stranded approach to religious identity informs understanding of the seemingly contradictory elements of Venn's experience. Change did not operate at the same pace in all areas and Venn was subject to conflicting pressures. In the same way that Burns has pointed out the distinction between Evangelical churchmanship and Evangelical party, for Venn there was a difference between his public affiliation to Evangelical society and his relationship to Evangelical theology.¹²⁵ Venn's intellectual readiness to explore new ideas was not matched by a similar readiness to break the bond of respect for his father or to expose his views to scrutiny on the public platform. The instinctive emotional pull of his family's Evangelical and clerical tradition, buttressed by the reverence with which he regarded his father, was still strong. Of his religious position at the end of his curacies, Venn wrote,

I continued to call myself an Evangelical, and to suppose that I really was one, and it took a long time to part company with old traditions.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.97.

¹²⁵ Introduction by A. Burns to Conybeare, *op. cit.*, p.252.

¹²⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.120.

5. 'oscillations in belief' – Cambridge life 1860s and 1870s

Venn returned to residence in Cambridge in 1862. Hitherto, he was very much a product of unreformed Cambridge, but returned to a University in the middle of a process of reform, and took up an academic role at a time when new conceptions of professional academic identity and approaches to knowledge were being formulated. In the course of this chapter about Venn's Cambridge life in the 1860s and 1870s, Venn's contribution to University and College reform will be examined, as will the emerging aspects of his academic identity, as a teacher and writer and participant in intellectual social networks. Venn's experience will be located in the context of wider contemporary debates about the function of a University and content of its education, and ideas on the role of a professional academic. This acquired academic identity will be juxtaposed with the continuing evidence of Venn's inherited identity as an Evangelical clergyman; new public elements of which became apparent through Venn's contributions to Evangelical publications and periodicals and in the University pulpit.

University reform and academic Identity

University historians have examined the impetus for and opposition to reform in Cambridge. There was a long term, internal impetus which blurs a strict dichotomy of early Victorian unreformed, and late Victorian reformed University. In the early Victorian period, reformers like William Whewell of Trinity, were successful in expanding the range of teaching, lectures and research, clubs, demonstrations and even facilities. This work had its limitations: science did not have a foothold in the examination system and was beyond the scope of the majority of the poll men. The early reformers were also men of their time, they preserved the distinction between colleges and the University in respect of privileges, endowments and the moral role they envisaged colleges playing in respect of their students.¹ Externally, the Graham Commission was established in the face of the University's inability to enact wide-

¹ H.W. Becher, 'William Whewell's odyssey: from mathematics to moral philosophy' in M. Fisch & S. Schaffer (eds.) *William Whewell: a composite portrait* (Oxford, 1991), pp.1-27.

ranging reform of its own. However, as Brooke has pointed out, the boundaries of internal and external were blurred. The Royal Commissions included Cambridge men, who had considerable knowledge of and sympathy for the University.² The Commissioners recommended the establishment of new triposes, professorships and lectureships and the establishment of boards of studies to create linkage between lectures and examinations. When the University failed to enact these changes, the Commissioners took charge of the implementation. At college level, the historical and personal elements of the ancient endowments were removed in revised statutes of 1860 opening up scholarships and fellowships to competition. As has already been noted, the Commission also recommended the outright abolition of religious tests, but the obligation that fellows should declare themselves to be members of the Church of England was not repealed until the University Tests Act of 1871.³ The requirements for fellows to take Holy Orders and to be celibate were also left in place unless the individual college decided otherwise.⁴

The distinction between those who supported and those who opposed reform could be equally blurred. Not everyone in the University was convinced of the need for reform but, as Leedham-Green has argued, some of the opposition to the reforms of the Royal Commission was defined by resentment of external interference rather than a rejection of the need for reform itself. Furthermore, there was a question of what needed to be reformed. A willingness to support teaching or the establishment of new subjects at University level did not always extend to support for interference with the ancient endowments of the colleges.⁵

University reform interacted with changes in the way that academic identity was viewed and emerging expectations of an academic career. One of the aims of the Commissioners was to encourage talented University teachers to stay within the University. The provision for

² C.N.L. Brooke, *A history of Gonville and Caius College* (Bury St Edmunds, 1985), pp.227-8.

³ P. Searby, *A history of the University of Cambridge*, Volume III 1750-1870 (Cambridge, 1997), p.500.

⁴ E.S. Leedham-Green, *A concise history of the University of Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1996), pp.156-8.

⁵ *Ibid*, pp.152-4.

teaching and new subjects and the removal of barriers such as religious tests, insistence upon orders and celibacy requirements, created an environment in which opportunities for academic careers existed for a wider variety of men who did not necessarily have a clerical vocation.⁶

The creation of institutional opportunities for academic careers was only one part of the redefinition of late nineteenth century academic identity. In the early 1860s Venn resembled the type identified by Engel in early nineteenth century Oxford - the don who was by profession a clergyman, elected soon after receiving his generalist bachelor's degree, taking Holy Orders and then awaiting the availability of a College advowson. Academic duties were not in themselves being regarded as a life career. However, as Engel has noted, by the late nineteenth century, such careers had become the exception rather than the rule as most fellows were engaged in teaching, not merely as an interlude before a career, but as a secular career in itself, involving teaching and specialised study, with professional status befitting a gentleman.⁷ Leslie Stephen's career has been cited as personifying this transition from clergyman to don. He was a man who took orders based upon an older understanding of what it meant to be a clerical don but who in the early 1860s came to have an elevated view of the academic profession, taking an active role in teaching and examining and University reform. However, Leslie Stephen's religious doubts within a University still bounded by religious tests, and his growing conviction that the involvement of the Church in the University was a barrier to its reform, meant that he withdrew from University life.⁸ As will be seen in the course of the next two chapters, it is the longer academic career of Stephen's cousin that

⁶ C.N.L. Brooke, *A history of the University of Cambridge*, Volume 4 1870-1990 (Cambridge, 1993), p.89; E.S. Leedham-Green, *op. cit.*, p.168; J.W. Burrow, 'Victorian historians and the Royal Historical Society', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, Volume 39 (1989), p.137; R. Soffer, 'The development of disciplines in the modern English university', *Historical Journal*, Volume 31 (1988), p.936.

⁷ A.J. Engel, *From clergyman to don: the rise of the academic profession in nineteenth century Oxford* (Oxford, 1993), pp.3-8.

⁸ *Ibid*, pp.266-74.

gives the opportunity for a more extended case study on the constituent elements of academic identity within a University environment.

Further strands of professional academic identity have also been defined. Distinctions have been drawn between the development of research and teaching functions. Engel in his study of academic professionalisation in Oxford distinguished between the educational function of tutors and the professoriate's role in research and scholarship.⁹ This division of labour has been linked with differentiation in conceptualising the functions of a University: with distinctions being drawn between a 'research ideal' focusing upon research-based methodology and advancement of knowledge, and the pedagogical values of a 'liberal education' emphasising training of the student mind for examination and onward into service in public life.¹⁰ Academic life has also been perceived by Rothblatt and Engel to have a vocational element, with university teachers assuming a pastoral role providing moral guidance and leadership, albeit separated from previous associations with particular confessional standards.¹¹ Professional status for academics could therefore be defined and understood in terms of the values of a gentlemanly culture, bounded by ideals of service and duty.¹²

Professional academic identity has also been defined in terms of approaches to knowledge and supporting academic methodologies, which have been observed to become increasingly specialised. At one level, this has been represented as the growth of disciplinary specialisation, with the development of an increasing number of single discipline degree subjects, increasingly specialised academic methods particular to individual disciplines, and

⁹ *Ibid*, p.54.

¹⁰ R. Jann, 'From amateur to professional: the case of the Oxbridge historians', *Journal of British Studies*, Volume XXII (1983), pp.122-147; Soffer, 'The development of disciplines', p.936; Burrow, *op. cit.*, p.138.

¹¹ S. Rothblatt, *The revolution of the dons: Cambridge and society in Victorian England* (London, 1968), p.227; Engel, *op. cit.*, p.81.

¹² Rothblatt, *op. cit.*, p.244.

disciplinary identity cultivated in specialist journals and professional associations.¹³ However, such academic specialisation has to be seen alongside a redefinition of the concept of a liberal education and a continuing adherence to the idea of university education playing a part in the preparation of a social elite. Critics of the ancient universities in the first half of the nineteenth century had questioned the utility of mathematics and classics as an adequate preparation for public service in an industrial world. By the 1860s, it has been argued that a more comprehensive concept of liberal education had been formulated to include new subjects such as science and social science, but still related to similar values of forming gentlemanly character and preparation for public service.¹⁴

Changes have also been observed in the questions that were being asked of knowledge, whether in terms of the impact of the application of scientific method, or in the secularisation of approaches to knowledge. Previously, academic work had been conceived as part of an intellectual whole in which science, scholarship and religious thought were part of a single intellectual totality.¹⁵ The moral or dogmatic presuppositions applied to knowledge in an Anglican university by clerical academics were challenged by men like the geologist, Charles Lyell, who attempted to exclude biblical preconceptions from geological reasoning, and to judge evidence from scientific rather than biblical criteria. In relation to this, Turner has argued that conflicts allegedly about science and religion may equally have been between rival scientific and religious factions; about determining the professional position of the scientific community in relation to Anglican cultural leadership.¹⁶ Questions were raised of

¹³ Soffer, 'The development of disciplines', p.933 on P. Slee, *Learning and a liberal education: the study of modern history in the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Manchester, 1800-1914* (Manchester, 1986); S. Collini, *Public moralists: political thought and intellectual life in Britain 1850-1930* (Oxford, 1993), pp.213, 237.

¹⁴ R.D. Anderson, *Universities and elites in Britain since 1800* [Studies in economic and social history] (London, 1992), pp.16-17.

¹⁵ W.F. Cannon, 'Scientists and Broad churchmen: an early Victorian intellectual network', *Journal of British Studies*, Volume IV (1964), pp.87- 8.

¹⁶ F.M. Turner, 'The Victorian conflict between science and religion: a professional dimension' in *Contesting cultural authority: essays in Victorian intellectual life* (Cambridge, 1993), pp.171-200.

competing professional loyalties, asking how academics conceived of themselves, primarily as academics or as clerics.

This specialisation brought with it a process of definition of the boundaries between professional and amateur academic activity. Attention has been drawn to the increasing professionalisation of intellectual activities, where scholarship was increasingly an academic activity within an academic environment.¹⁷ In relation to the development of history as a discipline, this change has been characterised by a changing relationship to audiences: the distinction between men of letters writing for a general audience and professional historians who wrote for and interacted with a smaller audience of expert peers.¹⁸

Such distinctions do not indicate a straightforward linear transition. As well as identifying new aspects of academic identity, historians have also pointed to the continuities between older and new ideas of academic professionalism, notably in the persisting values of liberal education, as well as the strength of academic networks, where older academics mentored and were revered by younger academics.¹⁹ Professional identity was still being formed in the second half of the nineteenth century, and Burrow has argued that professionalism was still 'debatable territory', where professionals sought to distinguish themselves by distancing themselves from the amateur tradition, and where transitional generations existed, of men whose academic competence met professional standards but who were largely outside institutional structures being defined as academic.²⁰

An examination of Venn's academic career over a fifty year period provides a personal perspective through which to view the passage of University reform and the opportunities for an academic career that were generated by reform. Dissection of Venn's academic activity

¹⁷ Collini, *Public moralists*, pp.22-3.

¹⁸ Jann, *op. cit.*, pp.122-3.

¹⁹ Burrow, *op. cit.*, p.138; Cannon, *op. cit.*, p.65.

²⁰ Burrow, *op. cit.*, pp.129-130, 133.

will facilitate an understanding of the variety of research, teaching and pastoral functions encompassed within academic identity; the nature of a distinct academic approach to knowledge; and the boundaries between professional and amateur identity. Examining the developing aspects of Venn's academic identity and his career within an institution in the midst of reform provides an opportunity to take a step back from the definitions of academic professionalism that concentrate upon particular aspects of occupational professionalism or institutional status. A biographical case study provides a means to explore in academic terms Collini's understanding of individual intellectual identity as being constituted of a more complex mix of overlapping identities and membership – as lecturer, social scientist, writer, clergyman, gentleman, husband and member of clubs and societies.²¹

Moral scientist, lecturer and academic writer

On his return to Caius in 1862, Venn found the resident fellows to be mostly those he termed reformers, but found their concept of reform to be based upon dissatisfaction with details of University management and derived from the broader contemporary current of reform rather than relating to any deeper thought on the principles of university education.²² Venn threw in his lot with the reformers: firstly through an internally-generated, pragmatic reform of an ancient office to provide support for teaching in new subjects. Venn returned to Cambridge to take up the role of catechist, a college lectureship for religious subjects and moral philosophy traceable back to the sixteenth century. Following proposals to the College meeting from Venn in the previous December, the role of catechist had been reformed by the Master and senior fellows to make it a permanent one rather than one that rotated among the fellows. The previous requirement to give lectures on Paley was replaced by Logic and Political Economy.²³ The College had in mind teaching candidates for the Indian Civil Service examinations, but Venn also had in mind teaching for the newly reformed Moral Sciences

²¹ Collini, *Public moralists*, p.27.

²² CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.76.

²³ Caius Archive, GOV/03/01/11, Gesta, 3/4/1862.

Tripes and spent the final months of his curacy working more systematically on the texts on which he would have to lecture.²⁴

The Moral Sciences Tripos had been established in 1848 alongside the Natural Sciences Tripos, a deliberately conservative compromise, which aimed to remove some of the sting out of contemporary criticism of the narrowness of the Cambridge curriculum and to deflect the energies of the University Commission, by providing for new areas of study and improving attendance at professorial lectures.²⁵ The Moral Sciences Tripos was initially shaped not by reference to new fields of study but around five existing professorial chairs in moral philosophy, history, political economy, English law and civil law. It was only a one year course of study only open to those who had already succeeded in another tripos, and no degree was awarded at the end. Given its lesser status in comparison with mathematics and classics, the Moral Sciences Tripos was unattractive to students. It was criticised for its lack of curricular unity and the superficiality of its course of study, with concerns being voiced as to the standards of candidates.²⁶ In 1860 a new low was reached when no students entered for the Moral Sciences Tripos, giving rise to the reform of both the Moral Sciences and Natural Sciences Triposes to create independent degree courses with their own Boards of Studies. Additionally an attempt was made to rationalise the Moral Sciences curriculum, with logic and mental philosophy being substituted for English law and civil law. The Board of Studies took over setting the syllabus and superintending examinations in order to reduce the reliance on the professoriate.²⁷

²⁴ *Ibid*, 11/12/1861; CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.118; J. Venn, 'History of our lecturers and tutors', *The Caiian*, Volume VI (1896-7), p.193.

²⁵ D.S. Palfrey, 'The Moral Sciences Tripos at Cambridge 1848-1860' (University of Cambridge PhD thesis, 2002), pp.20, 107.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p.14.

²⁷ J. Grote, *To members of Senate: Remarks on proposals made by the syndicate appointed last term in reference to the Moral Sciences Tripos* (Cambridge, 1860) (Trinity College Library, LL.696.c.127(18)) p.1; J.B. Mayor, *Remarks on the proposal to grant the degree of BA to persons who have obtained honours in the Moral Sciences Tripos* [Cambridge, 1860] (Trinity College Library, LL.696.c.117(28)), pp.1-4; Palfrey, *op. cit.*, pp.1-2; D.A. Winstanley, *Later Victorian Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1947), pp.185-8; Slee, *op. cit.*, p.34.

The University of the 1860s was still very much a religious as well as an intellectual community, and it was religious and moral concern that had in part informed the development of the curriculum of the Moral Sciences Tripos. In London there was a concept of the moral sciences, characterised by J.S. Mill, that was secular in tone, looking to reduce moral phenomena to the psychological and making all evidence subject to scientific treatment. However, the Cambridge tradition, drawing upon Coleridge's theological conception of the moral sciences as the investigation of men as moral beings, was somewhat different, with William Whewell, together with J.B. Mayor, T.R. Birks and F.D. Maurice, seeking to promote a renewal of Anglican moral philosophy in reaction against utilitarianism.²⁸ The introduction into the Moral Sciences Tripos of new subjects of logic and political economy was made at the instigation of the Knightbridge Professor of Moral Philosophy, John Grote, who was mindful of the criticisms of the Tripos that had previously been levelled by Bain and Mill. The introduction of these new subjects gave the young followers of Mill, such as Leslie Stephen, Henry Sidgwick and Venn, an opening that they seized.²⁹ Over the next two decades, Venn played his part in the development of a new discipline; and in defining that discipline in a way that departed from the Anglican intuitionism embodied by Whewell. Through his work as a College lecturer and a University examiner for the Tripos, Venn contributed to the process of signposting the knowledge worth knowing and testing in moulding the shape of a field of knowledge, defining its corpus, determining its antecedents and pointing its future direction. While as a member of the Board of Moral Sciences Studies, Venn helped to determine the texts and authors through which the content of the Tripos was defined and, in turn wrote two books that themselves became recommended texts.³⁰

Venn received crucial support for the reform of the role of catechist from Norman Ferrers. Ferrers was one of the leading mathematical lecturers of his generation, later becoming

²⁸ Palfrey, *op. cit.*, pp.120-5,146.

²⁹ *Ibid*, pp.17, 252, 285, 377.

³⁰ *Cambridge University Reporter*, 8/2/1871 p. 177; 19/10/1870, p.6; 8/2/1871, p.177; CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C40, J. Venn to H. Venn, 8/5/1863.

Master of Caius and Vice-Chancellor of the University. The two men were drawn together by shared interests in walking and climbing as well as University reform. Ferrers was a proponent of the admission of Nonconformists to the University, but his career illustrates the complexities of a reforming position. In 1882, he was to preach against the work of the second Royal Commission for interfering with the autonomy of colleges by imposing a tax through which to fund development of University teaching.³¹

Ferrers supported Venn's proposal despite being a subscriber to the liberal ideal, being convinced that mathematics was the one subject that was essential to a good education.³² Venn on the other hand was to argue that he did not believe that the value of study of a particular subject lay in the mental discipline alone, but that the knowledge itself should be retained and utilised. He did not think that the exclusive study of mathematics for three years, unleavened by study of logic, science or probability, was a good thing.³³ A parallel difference of opinion occurred between Leslie Stephen and Henry Fawcett. Stephen acted as an Examiner on the newly constituted Moral Sciences Tripos in 1861, being convinced that a broader-based intellectual education was needed and could be achieved through a wide curriculum. Whereas Fawcett adhered to the view that the mental discipline acquired through the Mathematical or Classical Tripos was the *raison d'être* of a University education and that reform should therefore be concentrated upon producing open and free competition in those disciplines.³⁴ Such differences speak to a wider contemporary debate on the function and content of liberal University education and its suitability in preparing the social elite for a social and industrial world.³⁵

³¹ Brooke, *A history of Gonville and Caius College*, p.226.

³² J. Venn, 'Ferrers, Norman McLeod (1829-1903)', revised A. McConnell, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33116>, accessed 17 August 2005].

³³ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.74.

³⁴ J. von Arx, 'The Victorian crisis of faith as a crisis of vocation' in R.J. Helmstadter & B. Lightman (eds.), *Victorian faith in crisis: essays on continuity and change in nineteenth century religious belief* (Stanford, 1990), pp.272-3.

³⁵ Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp.16-17.

Venn recognised that he was associating himself with a new degree course that still lacked recognition as a proper subject for the training of the intellect or as a test of the abilities of the most able.³⁶ In pressing the claims of the Moral Sciences Tripos, its supporters picked up on the case made by critics that the University was not doing the job of preparing the minds of men who would mould the minds of the country by teaching only mathematics and two ancient languages.³⁷ They presented the Moral Sciences Tripos as part of the reaction against 'the narrowness of the traditional Cambridge curriculum'.³⁸ In the 1862 Students' Guide to the University, Moral Sciences was presented as an excellent preparation for the business of life, whether that be at the bar, in the pulpit or in the Indian Civil Service.³⁹ Advocates of the Moral Sciences Tripos were also quick to link its values to those of Arnold on the role of history and moral philosophy in a rounded liberal education.⁴⁰ The Moral Sciences and Natural Sciences Triposes can thus be seen a first step towards the re-stating of the liberal ideal of education, detaching it from its previous association with classics and mathematics, and linking it eventually with specialised, single subject degrees.⁴¹

Venn also initially supported the parallel reform of examinations, being involved in the re-organisation of College examinations, including Moral Sciences, in 1869.⁴² During the first half of the nineteenth century oral examinations had given way to written examinations and much of the early reform of the universities concentrated upon the development of a rigorous examination system. By the 1870s, examinations had come to dominate undergraduate education in Oxford and Cambridge and had assumed a new importance in relation to professional status.⁴³ Venn was later to associate the idea of free competition negatively with

³⁶ A. Sidgwick & E.M. Sidgwick, *Henry Sidgwick: a memoir* (London, 1906), p.134.

³⁷ Grote, *op. cit.*, p.3.

³⁸ H. Sidgwick, 'Philosophy at Cambridge', *Mind: a quarterly review of psychology and philosophy*, Volume I (1876), p.241.

³⁹ S. Collini, D. Winch & J. Burrow, *That noble science of politics; a study in nineteenth century intellectual history* (Cambridge, 1983), p.346.

⁴⁰ Mayor, *op. cit.*, p.5.

⁴¹ Slee, *op. cit.*, p.30 ; Palfrey, *op. cit.*, p.380.

⁴² Caius Archive, GOV/03/01/11, Gesta, 10/3/1869.

⁴³ Anderson, *op. cit.*, p.16.

the proliferation of examinations and also to deprecate the straitjacket that a strong examination system placed upon academic enquiry. Looking back with the perspective of College historian who mourned the way in which ancient endowments and practices had been swept aside, Venn was later dismissive of his own generation of 'ardent young University reformers'⁴⁴ who had taken the view that

Free competition was supposed to be the one panacea for every evil, and therefore, as examinations were the main means for carrying out this competition, the multiplication and improvement of examinations assumed enormous relative importance.⁴⁵

Venn was not the sole critic of the excesses of this trend. In Oxford, Mark Pattison contended that originality of thought was not fostered by an examination system that concentrated upon knowledge that was testable.⁴⁶

Whatever his later reservations about some of the results of reform, Venn not only championed a relatively new discipline but also showed commitment to the idea that the University and colleges had active roles to play in teaching students. Until Venn's arrival, the only non-professorial teacher of Moral Sciences was J.B. Mayor of St. John's and his focus was primarily upon the poll men.⁴⁷ Venn lectured three times a week every term and also took a small number of private pupils.⁴⁸ Progress was not straightforward. There were times in the mid 1860s when Venn despaired of attracting able men away from the Mathematical Tripos which was the acknowledged route to the reward of a College fellowship.⁴⁹ However, in 1867, following a further proposal from Venn, his lecturing work was recognised by Caius in the formal conversion of the post of catechist into a Moral Sciences lectureship and Venn was

⁴⁴ Society of Genealogists Library, Venn collection, J. Venn to L.M. Forster, 27/1/1903.

⁴⁵ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.77.

⁴⁶ M.C. Curthoys, 'The examination system' in M.G. Brock & M.C. Curthoys (eds.), *The history of the University of Oxford, Volume VI Nineteenth Century Oxford Part I* (Oxford, 1997), pp.339, 346, 367.

⁴⁷ Palfrey, *op. cit.*, p.371; Slee, *op. cit.*, p.25.

⁴⁸ H.T. Francis, 'In memoriam: John Venn' *The Caius*, Volume XXXI (Cambridge, 1922-3), p.118.

⁴⁹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C40, J. Venn to H. Venn, 17/10/1863; C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 6/7/1864.

permitted to accept men from Trinity Hall at his lectures. In 1868, the same year that Venn became a senior fellow, a system of inter-collegiate lecturing for Moral Sciences was formally endorsed by Caius. Under this system, students of one college could attend lectures in another on payment of a fee, and Venn became, in his own estimation, the first inter-collegiate lecturer.⁵⁰

The creation of the Moral Sciences lectureship was part of a broader trend of the College taking responsibility for teaching, with College lecturers taking over the function formerly supplied by coaches. Following the statutory reform which had detached endowments from their charitable and local purposes and limited the tenure of fellowships unless combined with a college office such as a lectureship, an increasing proportion of colleges' resources were devoted to teaching, and fellowships were increasingly associated with a more elevated teaching function that could be a profession for life.⁵¹ By the 1870s, Caius offered College teaching in chemistry and law as well as a renewed commitment to teaching in classics and mathematics.⁵² Venn played his part in shaping this process, becoming in 1866, a member of a Caius committee considering changes to the scheme of College lectures to adapt to the new University scheme for the BA degree.⁵³

Given the breadth of the Moral Sciences Tripos and the shortage of men appointed to teach, for a short period in the 1860s, Venn had to lecture in ethics, political economy and logic. He was eventually able to relinquish the first to Henry Sidgwick and the second to Alfred Marshall. By 1871, the University list of lectures for Moral Sciences included F.D. Maurice, Sidgwick and Marshall on Moral Philosophy, Fawcett on Political Economy, and Venn on Logic.⁵⁴ By 1876, Sidgwick was able to proclaim that across the different colleges there were

⁵⁰ Caius Archive, GOV/03/01/11 Gesta, 9/4/1867, 16/6/1868, 21/2/1868; J. Venn, 'History of our lecturers and tutors', p.193.

⁵¹ Brooke, *A history of Gonville and Caius College*, p.236; Engel, *op. cit.*, pp.60, 113.

⁵² Brooke, *A history of Gonville and Caius College*, pp.273-4.

⁵³ Caius Archive, GOV/03/01/11 Gesta, 12/12/1866.

⁵⁴ *Cambridge University Reporter*, 14/6/1871, pp.390-1.

five lecturers, including Venn, chiefly employed in teaching for the Moral Sciences Tripos, with the subjects of the Tripos being distributed between the lecturers by 'mutual arrangement'.⁵⁵ With men of this intellectual quality engaged in its teaching, the standing of the Moral Sciences Tripos gradually improved, and although it never became a large school, it did attract and develop a better calibre of men. Such success as the Tripos had was built upon the work of a small group of like-minded men who were committed to their subject and found their vocation in scholarship and teaching.⁵⁶

There is a strong sense of a transitional generation that emerges from Venn's fond description of the early days of this second incarnation of the Moral Sciences Tripos, both in a disciplinary sense and in terms of professional identity. For example, until the establishment of the Theological Tripos, the Moral Sciences Tripos provided a home for a number of men keen to take orders and interested in ethical questions. Furthermore, in his *Annals*, Venn spoke of himself and his fellow lecturers being 'somewhat of amateurs and diligent learners'; being themselves graduates of the old Classical or Mathematical Triposes.⁵⁷ The lecturers were exploring a new discipline as well as establishing a new curriculum, and as a result, were learning alongside their students, which brought with it a certain sympathy of cause.⁵⁸ Numbers were small, both of students and staff, which facilitated a further intimacy of contact in the early years, not least as the lecturers had the experience of both teaching and examining every student taking the Tripos.⁵⁹

Alongside his teaching, Venn found time to write, publishing his first book, *The logic of chance*, in 1866. Stimulated by Buckle's work on the statistical regularity of human actions and works by Augustus de Morgan and Boole on probability, Venn described his work as the

⁵⁵ Sidgwick, *op. cit.*, p.243.

⁵⁶ Collini et al., *op. cit.*, p.345; Winstanley, *op. cit.*, p.189.

⁵⁷ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, *Annals*, p.124.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.124.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp.126-7.

'working out of the material view of Logic as applied to Probability' and acknowledged his debt to J.S. Mill as

Almost the only writer who seems to me to have expressed a just view of the nature and foundation of the rules of probability is Mr Mill, in his *System of Logic*.⁶⁰

Following Mill, Venn adopted a materialist rather than a formal or conceptualist view of logic; choosing to define probability as empirically based judgements of the recurrence of events over time, independent of the subjective feelings and beliefs of the observer.⁶¹ In Venn's view, knowledge of the statistical probability of an occurrence observed as part of a series was not a reliable indicator when applied to a single instance as a basis for action.⁶² Venn placed himself in opposition to the position taken by Augustus de Morgan, who argued that belief was held and action undertaken in direct proportion to probability.⁶³ The history of logic and statistics is beyond the scope of this thesis except in so far as it illuminates understanding of the academic networks and traditions in which Venn can be located. Venn's major contribution was to summarise and survey the existing works in the field and then to explore systematically the applications of probability and its limits with regard to moral sciences. In so doing he produced not only a work that that attracted praise from J.S. Mill, who was moved to make changes to subsequent editions of his *System of logic* in acknowledgement; but also a book that was influential upon the next generation of academics in his field, men like F.Y. Edgeworth and Karl Pearson.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ J. Venn, *The logic of chance: an essay on the foundations and province of the theory of probability, with especial reference to its logical bearings and its application to moral and social science, and to statistics*, 3rd edition (London, 1888), preface to first edition, p.x.

⁶¹ A. Baccini, 'High pressure and black clouds: Keynes and the frequentist theory of probability', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, Volume 28 (2004) [<http://cje.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/28/5/653>, accessed 18 November 2005] Section 3 Frequentist probability in *The Principles of Probability* (1908).

⁶² J. Venn, *The logic of chance*, p.146.

⁶³ C.D. Broad, 'The local historical background of contemporary Cambridge philosophy' in C.A. Mace, *British philosophy in the mid-century*, 2nd edition (London, 1966), p.19; J. Venn, *The logic of chance*, 3rd edition, p.122.

⁶⁴ Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C52/1 J.S. Mill to J. Venn, 4/2/1868.

The production and continuing influence of the *Logic of chance* was closely entwined with the Moral Sciences Tripos. Venn indicated that he was drawing upon ideas that had been developed in the lecture room and his book was eventually added to the list of recommended reading on logic for the Moral Sciences Tripos.⁶⁵ In the preface, Venn acknowledged his debt to two of his Moral Sciences colleagues, his former tutor, Todhunter, and Henry Sidgwick, who had proofed the text for press.⁶⁶ The book in turn influenced other Cambridge colleagues. It was the text that J.N. Keynes drew on in defining his opposing *Theory of probability* (1907) which argued for the practical relevance of using probability as a basis for action.⁶⁷ Keynes' son, John Maynard Keynes, sent a copy of his own *Treatise on probability* to Venn in 1921 'in a spirit of piety to the father of this subject in Cambridge', acknowledging the influence of Venn's work upon his own thinking.⁶⁸

On the basis of his experience as a lecturer and the reputation established through the *Logic of chance*, Venn began to seek academic preferment. In 1871 he was appointed as External Examiner in Moral Sciences to the University of London; his suitability for the job being recognised by both J.S. Mill and Alexander Bain.⁶⁹ Following Grote's death, in 1866 Venn put himself forward for the Knightbridge professorship, having first tried to persuade his Moral Sciences colleague, J.B. Mayor to stand.⁷⁰ Sidgwick saw Venn as the candidate 'thoroughly of the new school', i.e. someone who regarded it as his duty to as a professor to teach and to write.⁷¹ This indeed was the basis of Venn's application for the role:

⁶⁵ J. Venn, *The logic of chance*, p.xiv; H. Sidgwick, *op. cit.*, p.246.

⁶⁶ J. Venn, *The logic of chance*, p.xi.

⁶⁷ J.R. Gibbins, 'Venn, John', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36639>, accessed 17 August 2005]; A. Bacchi, *op. cit.*, Section.1 Introduction.

⁶⁸ Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C49 J.M. Keynes to J. Venn, 31/8/1921.

⁶⁹ Caius Archive, John Venn papers, C15/01-03, A. Bain to J. Venn, 18/3/1871-2/5/[1871].

⁷⁰ Trinity College Cambridge, Mayor Family Papers, B16/152 [H Lee Warren] to J.B. Mayor, 12/10/[1866].

⁷¹ Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Add.mss.99⁷³ H. Sidgwick to mother, 1866.

Having abandoned all other University work in favour of the Moral Sciences, I have no other wish than to remain here permanently engaged in teaching them.⁷²

He cited as evidence in support of his case his experience of lecturing and examining and his recently published *Logic of chance*. Sidgwick withdrew his own candidacy in the same election, thinking it unlikely that a layman of unorthodox religious opinions would be elected to a chair which encompassed moral theology and wishing to give a clear path for the eventual choice, Maurice – a man whose religious opinions were regarded as just as unorthodox by men like Henry Venn, who 'deplored' Maurice's election.⁷³

In 1872, following Maurice's death, Venn once again put himself forward for the Knightbridge chair: this time alongside Sidgwick. Sidgwick recognised that Venn had evinced a clear desire to obtain the chair and that he might have stronger chance on grounds of performance.

However, Sidgwick thought that he himself might be a stronger candidate for the role as

I still think I should do better than he for the post. I think his view of the subject wants nuance and versatility: it is an acute subtle narrow formal utilitarianism as far as I can make out.⁷⁴

If Venn or another clerical Moral Sciences teacher, Pearson, were to be elected, Sidgwick indicated the intention to leave Cambridge, considering his own area of specialism in research and teaching, Practical Philosophy of Ethics, to have been competently filled.⁷⁵ In the event, both men were unsuccessful, losing out to the Evangelical clergyman and theologian, Thomas Rawson Birks. The appointment was criticised at the time as a retrograde step in light of Birks' pronounced Evangelical party allegiance and lack of commitment to teaching.⁷⁶ Something of Venn's personal distaste for the appointment was expressed in 1900 when, on the eve of another election, he recalled how 'the cold, thin face

⁷² Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Add.mss.c.111⁶⁰, Circular from J. Venn, 13/10/1866.

⁷³ Rothblatt, *op. cit.*, p.218; CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 27/10/1866.

⁷⁴ Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Add.mss.c.100²²⁵, H. Sidgwick to F. Myers.

⁷⁵ Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Add.mss.c.100¹²²⁸, H. Sidgwick to F. Myers, 1872.

⁷⁶ A. Sidgwick & E.M. Sidgwick, *Henry Sidgwick: a memoir* (London, 1906), p.265.

of Birks smiled down upon us'.⁷⁷ The criticism of Birks' appointment can be viewed in light of the distinct religious difference that emerged between the Evangelical Birks and men like Venn and Sidgwick who were to reject that tradition. It is also possible to see it as evidence of an emerging academic identity which was defined by a secularised approach to knowledge and where the Knightbridge chair was important for its relation to learning and teaching rather than its religious status. However, the residual strength of the religious tradition in the University was shown in 1879 when the Vice-Chancellor, the Evangelical Perowne, offered Venn the position of deputy to the Knightbridge Professor making it clear that he would not consider someone of unorthodox religious opinion like Sidgwick for such a role. It was an offer that Venn declined out of respect for Sidgwick.⁷⁸

A commitment to University reform extended into the sphere of higher education for women. Sidgwick was successful in 1868 in petitioning for the establishment of an advanced examination, the Higher Local Examination. Following this success, Sidgwick proposed that a series of lectures for women be established. The proposal found favour with his immediate circle and a committee, which included Sidgwick and his wife, Maurice, Fawcett and his wife, Mrs Venn and Ferrers, was established to take the plan forward.⁷⁹ When in 1871 Sidgwick sought to establish a house in Cambridge to receive women from outside Cambridge who wished to attend the lectures – an establishment that was subsequently to become Newnham College - it was Mrs Venn whose name was listed in the *University Reporter* alongside his as the main contact for enquiries.⁸⁰ Initially, teaching was supplied by persuading sympathisers to provide separate lectures. Sidgwick, Mayor and Marshall each offered lectures to women students; with Venn teaching logic from his home on Mondays and Fridays.⁸¹ Gradually, a number of lecturers were persuaded to open up their University lectures to women. Sidgwick

⁷⁷ Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Add.mss.c.95¹⁷⁵ J. Venn to H. Sidgwick, 13 Ju[] 1900.

⁷⁸ Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Add.mss.c.103¹³⁰ J. Venn to E. Sidgwick, 20/3/ 1906.

⁷⁹ Sidgwick & Sidgwick, *op. cit.*, pp.204 -5.

⁸⁰ *Cambridge University Reporter*, 1/3/1871, p.220.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 1/2/1871, p.165.

enlisted Venn's further help to moderate the standard for the women's examinations in logic and political economy against that of the equivalent examination for male students who were not seeking honours, the poll men. As the women's colleges became established, Venn also took pupils from Girton.⁸² Although women were not officially admitted to Tripos examinations until 1881, the same small group of men also worked to provide women with the opportunity to sit the examinations informally. In 1874, Moral Sciences examination papers were delivered from Senate House to Bateman Street for two women students by a relay of runners including Sidgwick, Marshall and Venn – later recalled by Keynes,

Apart from Marshall, they were all very short and had long, flowing beards...I see them as wise, kind dwarfs hurrying with the magical prescriptions which were to awaken the princesses from their intellectual slumbers.⁸³

Despite the commitment of these men, women's education did not gain acceptance among the majority of the senior members of the University, with attempts to admit women formally to full membership of the University failing when put to the vote in 1887 and 1897.⁸⁴

Academic identity as social and intellectual network

The involvement of Mrs Fawcett, Mrs Venn and Mrs Sidgwick in the schemes to promote the higher education of women signals another new element. Caius was one of the first colleges to choose to remove all restrictions on the marriage of its fellows in 1860. It was not a move without controversy. Some viewed celibacy as an anachronism and as the bar for making academia a lifelong career for a don, while others feared the loss to the College's sense of community once fellows had domestic centres outside its walls. Other colleges followed suit over the course of the next two decades and it became possible for a greater number of men

⁸² Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Add.mss.c.100⁹⁶ H. Sidgwick to A. Marshall [July/Aug 1871]; Girton College Archive, Emily Davies papers, GCPP Davies 15/1/7/12, E. Davis (draft) to J. Venn, 26/7/1873.

⁸³ Collected works of John Maynard Keynes x, 237 quoted in R. Skidelsky, *John Maynard Keynes, Volume One: hopes betrayed 1883-1920* (London, 1983), p.17.

⁸⁴ Leedham-Green, *op. cit.*, pp.176-8.

to combine academic and family life.⁸⁵ Venn was among the first fellows of Caius to marry in 1867. In his marriage to Susanna Edmonstone, Venn could be seen as reinforcing the religious bonds of the previous generation through inter-marriage. Susanna was the daughter of Henry Venn's former curate and successor as vicar of St. John's Holloway and contact with the Edmonstone household had since been maintained through Henrietta Venn and Caroline Emelia Stephen. However, the Venns increasingly became part of a network of prominent University families, including the Darwins, the Maitlands, the Horts, the Sidgwicks and the Jebbs, who dined at each others houses.⁸⁶ The freedom to marry introduced a new social element to University life.⁸⁷ As Annan has described, the intellectual links forged on the pages of learned journals, academic networks created in the lecture room, Senate house and College hall, were reinforced by a new social dimension of family connection and marriage.⁸⁸ Tellingly, when Venn's son, John Archibald, eventually married, his chosen partner was not the daughter of a clergyman, but the daughter of another fellow of Caius and career academic, William Ridgeway.

Social networks intersected with intellectual networks and contributed to Venn's continuing academic development. His reading continued along the same lines begun as a curate, but he noted that the main intellectual influences during this period 'were rather to be found in personal intercourse than in the study of print'.⁸⁹ During walking and reading holidays in the 1860s Venn continued his friendship with John Seeley. The two men discussed University reform, sharing a dislike of the prevalence of the examination culture, and a love of Tennyson. However, it was notable that their discussion did not touch upon the religious difficulties which informed Seeley's work on *Ecce homo* in 1865. Seeley published it anonymously in order to avoid giving offence to his family. Venn did not know of Seeley's

⁸⁵ Brooke, *A history of Gonville and Caius College*, p.234.

⁸⁶ Obituary of Susanna Venn, *The Times*, 27/3/1931.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p.224.

⁸⁸ N. Annan, 'The intellectual aristocracy', *The dons: mentors, eccentrics and geniuses* (London, 2000), pp.304-341.

⁸⁹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.122.

authorship until early 1866 when at Seeley's request he helped to throw people off the scent, later noting,

...we had not then spoken much on the special topics principally discussed in the work.⁹⁰

The concentration of *Ecce homo* upon the life and work of the historical Christ drew criticism from many sides: from the orthodox, on the grounds that it appeared to deny certain doctrines by avoiding them, and from intellectuals on the grounds that Seeley did not implement faithfully the scientific and historical approach he was advocating.⁹¹ Despite the controversy attached to *Ecce homo*, Venn continued to support Seeley, favouring his election as Regius Professor of History in 1869 and offering him hospitality in Cambridge in 1870.⁹²

In a further extension of his personal network, Venn was invited by his fellow teachers on the Moral Sciences Tripos, J.B. Mayor and Henry Sidgwick, to join a small discussion group or essay club subsequently known as the Grote Club. The group had no formal membership or form of introduction but brought together men interested in 'keen and perfectly free discussion of fundamental principles'.⁹³ The group had originated in 1861 from discussions between Grote and Mayor about how they might make their Moral Sciences lectures work alongside each other, with Grote suggesting that it would be helpful to have periodic discussions amongst those who were interested in philosophical speculation.⁹⁴ Sidgwick was invited to join after he attracted Grote's attention at his fellowship examination.⁹⁵ The circle of participants was small. In addition to Venn, Sidgwick and Mayor, the only other members

⁹⁰ J. Venn, 'J.R. Seeley', *The Caian*, Volume IV (1893-4), pp.166-7.

⁹¹ R. Soffer, 'History and religion: J. R. Seeley and the burden of the past' in R.W. Davis & R.J. Helmstadter (eds.), *Religion and irreligion in Victorian society* (London, 1992), pp.134-7; R.T. Shannon, 'Seeley, Sir John Robert (1834-1895)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25025>, accessed 17 August 2005].

⁹² Society of Genealogists Library, Venn collection, J. Venn to L.M. Forster, 25/12/1902; CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 9/12/1870.

⁹³ Sidgwick & Sidgwick, *op. cit.*, p.135.

⁹⁴ Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Add.mss.c.104⁶⁷, J.B. Mayor to E.M. Sidgwick, 28/4/1904.

⁹⁵ Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Add.mss.c.104⁶⁹, A.J. Mayor to E.M. Sidgwick.

were Pearson, J R Mozley, Aldis Wright and R B Somerset.⁹⁶ They met once or twice a term at the Trumpington vicarage of John Grote, where dinner would precede the presentation of a paper on a philosophical topic, followed by discussion of its contents. After Grote's death in 1866, the group continued to meet in each other's rooms, until Grote's successor to the Knightbridge chair, Maurice, arrived to take the chair.⁹⁷ The later meetings were given new vigour by the addition of new members, Alfred Marshall, Henry Jackson, W.K. Clifford and J F Moulton.⁹⁸

The Grote Club fulfilled Grote's intent in its creation in bringing together the first lecturers in Moral Science, Sidgwick, Venn, Mayor and Marshall, and providing an opportunity to consider outside the Board of Studies the texts that were listed as required reading as part of the Moral Sciences syllabus. Surviving notes of the topics discussed record debates of the merits of Whewell against Stewart, Bain and Spencer, as well as discussions of works of contemporary interest, such as *Ecce homo*.⁹⁹ The Grote Club has been credited with providing the milieu for the development of the particular analytic style of Cambridge philosophy and for the development of the first professional academic philosophers.¹⁰⁰ It was also an opportunity for the younger generation of University men to sit at the feet of the academic statesmen. Grote drew particular respect and affection from Venn

Nothing escaped his keen and critical judgment, and he asserted himself just sufficiently to draw out the thoughts of those who were shy in expressing themselves, and to keep conversation from straggling into side issues.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Add.mss.c.104⁶⁶, J.R. Mozley to J.B. Mayor, 21/4/1904; CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, pp.127-8.

⁹⁷ A. Sidgwick & E.M. Sidgwick, *op. cit.*, pp.135-7.

⁹⁸ Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Ad.mss.c.104.65(1), Notes from Professor Marshall; Extracts from a commonplace book begun in April 1866 and continued fitfully to the end of 1867.

⁹⁹ Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Ad.mss.c.104.65(1), Notes from Professor Marshall.

¹⁰⁰ Gibbins, *op. cit.*

¹⁰¹ A. Sidgwick & E.M. Sidgwick, *op. cit.*, p.135.

In his *Annals*, Venn acknowledged his personal academic debt to the Grote Club. A good deal of the substance of his *Logic of chance* was worked out in discussion both individually with Grote and more generally with the group.¹⁰²

What was conspicuous among the members was a lack of any homogeneity of view. In writing about the Club for a memoir of Sidgwick, the members recalled their distinctive viewpoints. Mozley recalled:

Professor Grote and Sidgwick were both judicially minded, though starting from very different sides; Venn was logical, I was speculative; Pearson, though he did not introduce religious questions, yet clearly showed the religious ethos, though I cannot be sure how this appeared.¹⁰³

Grote was a clergyman influenced by the liberal Anglican tradition and by Maurice in terms of his anti-systematic and anti-sectarian approach. He was largely critical of J.S. Mill; Grote's examination of utilitarian philosophy being considered one of the best critiques of Mill's work. Nevertheless, Grote saw the potential for working with certain of Mill's followers in light of what he perceived as the greater threat of Mansel's theology.¹⁰⁴ Mayor was the son of a missionary and his mother was a member of the Evangelical Bickersteth family. He also opposed positivist and utilitarian thought, and as a close associate of Grote and later, Hort, he looked to the creation of a critical and liberal Anglican scholarship through which to restore the intellectual credibility of Christianity.¹⁰⁵ Sidgwick shared Grote's interest in ethics, but like Venn had been greatly influenced by Mill although it was during this period that his view of Mill changed and although his thought continued to be shaped by Mill, he 'no longer thought

¹⁰² Trinity College Cambridge, Mayor family papers, B16/135 J. Venn to J.B. Mayor, 4/11/1866.

¹⁰³ Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Add.mss.c.104⁶⁶, J.R. Mozley to J.B. Mayor, 21/4/1904

¹⁰⁴ Palfrey, *op. cit.*, pp.15, 195; J.R. Gibbins, 'Grote, John (1813-1866)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11679>, accessed 17 August 2005].

¹⁰⁵ J.R. Gibbins, 'Mayor, John Bickersteth (1828-1916)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/56241>, accessed 17 August 2005].

him impregnable'.¹⁰⁶ Pearson was another clergyman, a pupil of Mayor's, described as an 'earnest broad churchman'. Mozley and Clifford, in contrast, were admirers of Spencer on evolution and the development of the mind. Clifford gradually departed from the high churchmanship of his upbringing to become a keen public proponent of scientific reasoning in opposition to religious thinking.¹⁰⁷

Whatever their churchmanship, viewpoints and influences, what these men shared was a commitment to free discussion and an earnest search for truth. It was an approach epitomised by Henry Sidgwick, whose own religious development bore close parallels to Venn's own. The two men had a great deal of respect for each other, Venn acknowledging a debt to Sidgwick's influence and Sidgwick characterising Venn as 'particularly discriminating and clearheaded'.¹⁰⁸ Like Venn, Sidgwick had become acquainted with new works of biblical criticism and had pursued enquires into the historical basis of Christianity by serious study of Arabic and Hebrew. On the basis of philosophical reading of Comte, Mill and Spencer, Sidgwick accepted the necessity of examining the historical evidence for Christianity with scientific method and impartiality.¹⁰⁹ Although he was to reject Mill and Comte by 1866 for failing to provide an adequate alternative for faith and religion, he was led by his reading of them to question accepted beliefs, such as miracles and the Virgin birth.¹¹⁰ This built upon the disenchantment that he felt at the reaction by the Church to *Essays and reviews* and resulted in an ethical crisis for Sidgwick.¹¹¹ He resigned his fellowship of Trinity in 1869 on the basis that he could no longer subscribe honestly to the creed that holding a fellowship

¹⁰⁶ Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Add.mss.c.104⁶⁶, J.R. Mozley to J.B. Mayor, 21/4/1904.

¹⁰⁷ A.C. Lewis, 'Clifford, William Kingdon (1845-1879)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5667>, accessed 17 August 2005]; Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Ad.mss.c.104.65(1), Notes from Professor Marshall; Add.mss.c.104⁶⁶, J.R. Mozley to J.B. Mayor, 21/4/1904.

¹⁰⁸ Trinity College Cambridge, Henry Sidgwick papers, Add.mss.c.104⁶⁶, J.R. Mozley to J.B. Mayor, 21/4/1904.

¹⁰⁹ A. Gauld, *The founders of psychical research* (London, 1968), p.47.

¹¹⁰ F.M. Turner, *Between science and religion: the reaction to scientific naturalism in late Victorian England* (Yale, 1974), pp.40-1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p.39.

presupposed. Seeley wrote to Sidgwick commending him for his honesty in resigning his fellowship but commiserating with him on the need to do it.¹¹² Trinity appointed Sidgwick as a tutor without fellowship in Moral Science but it was only after his election to the Knightbridge Chair in 1885 that he was re-elected to a fellowship.¹¹³ Sidgwick's position highlighted a tension regarding the appropriateness of religious tests as a qualification for the role of University teacher. The University Tests Act of 1871, which finally removed the religious qualification for fellowships and most offices, was a key milestone of the emergence of an academic profession distinct from clerical status or doctrinal position but still re-affirmed the requirement for the continuation of daily chapel services according to the Book of Common Prayer.¹¹⁴

Clerical Identity and Evangelical thinker

In the same period that his membership of the Grote Club engaged him in discussion with some of the most advanced and liberal opinion in the University, Venn continued to take occasional clerical duty in churches in the surrounding area in response to requests from leading Cambridge Evangelicals, Clayton, Perowne and Birks, and also served his rotation as Junior and Senior Dean of Caius between 1864 and 1866.¹¹⁵ Venn was also emerging onto the public Evangelical platform. He helped Frederic Wigram, a donor to the Church Missionary Society and a future Honorary Secretary, at St Paul's Cambridge, a church of which Henry Venn was a trustee.¹¹⁶ He travelled up to London to support his father at Church Missionary Society meetings, attended meetings for the Christian Vernacular Society and other occasional events, such as a lecture by Carus on Simeon in 1862.¹¹⁷ Venn was tapping into the proliferation of Evangelical and philanthropic societies through which Evangelical allegiance, in the absence of a single organising structure, was expressed. Missionary work

¹¹² D. Wormell, *Sir John Seeley and the uses of history* (Cambridge, 1980), p.73.

¹¹³ R.B. Todd, 'Henry Sidgwick's appointment as praelector in moral science', *Notes and Queries*, Volume CCXLII New Series 44 (1997), pp.362-3.

¹¹⁴ Engel, *op. cit.*, p.77.

¹¹⁵ Caius Archive, GOV/03/01/11, Gesta 18/10/1864, 17/10/1865.

¹¹⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C40, J. Venn to H. Venn, 30/11/1862, 11/2/1863, 17/10/1863, 1/2/1863.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 24/4/1863, 18/11/1862.

was by far the strongest strand and, given Venn's family connections to the Church Missionary Society, was a natural source of association to him.¹¹⁸ He attended a number of the meetings of local associations at which clergy gave missionary sermons or former missionaries recounted their experiences as the basis of appeals for recruits and funds. Venn reported back on these meetings, reviewing for his father's benefit the performance of the speakers in front of a University audience and the general success of the meeting.¹¹⁹ Gradually, Venn was drawn into the inner circle of adherents, joining the principal supporters of the Church Missionary Society at their termly dinner at the Eagle. He took his place on the platform when he acted as a secretary to another society by receiving and sending in money raised from charity sermons.¹²⁰ Being a Venn also brought with it a network of Evangelical social obligation. Henry's letters to his son during the 1860s were littered with references to people to whom John should make himself known. These were often the sons of his own Evangelical contacts, such as the grandson of John Thornton of Clapham or Julius Elliott on the grounds that,

...there has been such a blessed friendship between the fathers that I shd earnestly desire to pass it down.¹²¹

Venn dutifully called upon these men at his father's request. It is not clear how strong the Clapham connexion remained at a distance of one or two generations removed, although in the early 1870s, Venn and his wife did offer a home in Cambridge to one of the Elliotts experiencing financial difficulty.¹²²

Venn also corresponded with his father about the opportunities for taking up more regular clerical duty, and when disillusioned with the response to his Moral Sciences lectures in 1864,

¹¹⁸ I. Bradley, *The call to seriousness: the Evangelical impact upon the Victorians* (London, 1976), pp.74-80, 136.

¹¹⁹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C40, J. Venn to H. Venn, 8/5/1863, 7/3/1865.

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, 7/3/1865, 11/2/1863.

¹²¹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 22/10/1862.

¹²² CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to S.C. Venn, 2/3/1871.

discussed the possibility of leaving Cambridge and taking clerical duty elsewhere.¹²³ Henry Venn did not cease to hope that his son would return to parish duties, and wrote to his brother, John Venn of Hereford,

Dearest Johnny is, I am happy to say, dissatisfied with Cambridge. Men will not attend his lectures in any number. This is universally the case in the 'moral' lectures. He longs for parochial work again.¹²⁴

In his autobiographical memoir, Venn said that it was with a view to settling as rector of a College living that he took on another curacy for six months in 1866, with Lamb, a fellow of Caius and vicar of St Edward's Cambridge.¹²⁵ It is not clear chronologically how this curacy overlapped with the election for the Knightbridge chair: whether clerical ambition was redirected upon the chair becoming available, or whether it offered an alternative in the face of disappointment. Henry Venn was elated, making a connection between his son's curacy of St Edward's and Simeon's ministry in Cambridge, noting the continuation of the Venn tradition,

...you of the 4th generation are called to exercise your ministry in Cambridge.¹²⁶

The period at St Edward's proved to be Venn's final period of sustained clerical duty. By 1866-67, Venn appeared to be settled in Cambridge, prepared to take advantage of the opportunities for preferment offered through academic channels rather than as a parochial clergyman.

Henry Venn was also trying to nurture his son as an Evangelical thinker, showing increasing respect for his son's opinion in matters of churchmanship. Since John Venn had begun his University career, he and his father had begun to discuss aspects of church business in their letters, whether the legal autonomy of the Church, colonial bishoprics or matters of party

¹²³ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn (of Hereford), 10/2/1864.

¹²⁴ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 10/2/1864.

¹²⁵ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.139.

¹²⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 1/8/1866.

controversy. In 1868, Henry sent John his thoughts on the consequences of disestablishment asking for his views in return, commenting,

I am sick of vague arguments and long for a fair accurate statement such as your pen can produce.¹²⁷

Operating in an increasingly heated party atmosphere of what he regarded as 'unblushing Popery' and rituals that might 'enflame and ruin' the Church, Henry Venn particularly appreciated the less emotional, more intellectual perspective that his son could offer.¹²⁸

Henry also encouraged his son to discuss his thinking with men such as Thomas Birks anticipating 'much mutual benefit from your intercourse together'.¹²⁹ Birks was the son-in-law of Edward Bickersteth, a former secretary of the Church Missionary Society and held Simeon's old parish, Holy Trinity, before succeeding Maurice to the Knightbridge Chair. Birks was seen as the leader of scholarly Evangelicalism and was described by Manley Hopkins in 1864 as 'almost the only learned Evangelical going'. He attempted to defend the Evangelical cause by producing a considered response to biblical criticism and scientific enquiry. In so doing he sometimes adopted positions which were distinct from contemporary Evangelical orthodoxy, indeed his views on Eternal Punishment were noted as bearing similarities to those of Maurice and caused considerable controversy within the Evangelical Alliance.¹³⁰ However, Birks' example might indicate what Henry Venn increasingly had in mind for his son.

The Evangelical party was in need of thinkers. It has been seen as one of the weaknesses of mid-Victorian Evangelicalism that in its insistence on a vital religion of personal holiness and

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 29/4/1868.

¹²⁸ H. Venn to J. Venn of Hereford 14/10/1867 and Nov 1867 in W. Knight, *Memoir of Henry Venn BD Prebendary of St. Paul's and Honorary Secretary of the Church Missionary Society*, (London, 1882), p.344.

¹²⁹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 6/4/1867.

¹³⁰ G. Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians: a study of the nineteenth century theological controversies concerning eternal punishment and the future life* (Oxford, 1974), pp.123-4; D.M. Lewis (ed.), *The Blackwell dictionary of Evangelical biography 1730-1860* Volume I (Blackwell, 1995), pp.100-1.

service rather than a religion of books, there was a failure to underpin theological basis for the Evangelical position through scholarship.¹³¹ Men like Isaac Milner, William Farish and Thomas Birks may have achieved University distinction but there was a deep-rooted anti-intellectual strain to popular Evangelicalism. Theological interest when it arose was concentrated in particular areas coinciding with Evangelical theological pre-occupations, such as original sin, justification by faith and atonement.¹³² There were also limits to enquiry. As Rosman has pointed out, an interest in study was distinct from an open-minded approach to enquiry. Given that Evangelicalism equated the Bible with faith, the challenge of biblical criticism was regarded as particularly threatening.¹³³ Wolffe has also highlighted the negative impact that party conflict had on the direction of theological endeavour, providing a corpus of anti-Catholic writings but little else on which to build in response to liberalism and secularism.¹³⁴ Altholz has gone further in emphasising the theological tension between the 'evasion' and 'reticence' practised by clergy who believed doubt itself was sinful and therefore part of their duty to avoid doubt avoided asking questions; and a rising generation devoted to 'truthfulness' who could not contain their doubts and profess assurance.¹³⁵ The limited intellectual basis of Evangelicalism as a religion of personal experience has in turn been cited as a reason why more cultivated intellects departed from its ranks.¹³⁶ However, both Brown in his thesis on Birks, and Bebbington in his wider survey of Evangelicalism, have pointed to the capacity within Evangelicalism for 'capable scholarship', even if this was less widespread and less noted than in other parties.¹³⁷

¹³¹ A.G.L. Haig, 'The Church, the universities and learning in later Victorian England', *The Historical Journal*, Volume 29 (1986), p.199; D. Bowen, *The idea of the Victorian Church: a study of the Church of England 1833-1889* (Montreal, 1968), pp.146-51.

¹³² D.M. Rosman, *Evangelicals and culture* (London, 1984), pp.205-10.

¹³³ *Ibid*, pp.224-228, 233.

¹³⁴ J. Wolffe, *The Protestant crusade in Great Britain 1829-1860* [Oxford Historical Monographs] (Oxford, 1991), p.304.

¹³⁵ J. L. Altholz, 'The warfare of conscience with theology', in G. Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain, Volume IV Interpretations* (Manchester, 1988), pp.152-6.

¹³⁶ N. Annan, *Leslie Stephen: his thought and character in relation to his time* (London, 1951) p.120.

¹³⁷ R.S. Brown, 'Evangelicalism, cultural references and theological change; considered with special reference to the thought of Thomas Rawson Birks (1810-1883)' (Open University PhD thesis, 1996); D.W. Bebbington, *The dominance of Evangelicalism: the age of Spurgeon and Moody* [A history of Evangelicalism] (Leicester, 2005), p.120.

The Venn and Stephen families have been marked out for their respect for intellectual accomplishment, but there were limits to this.¹³⁸ In the view of Henry Venn of CMS, each Christian was called according to his gifts. Thus, while he saw his less intellectual younger son Harry as best suited to the parochial ministry; in the more reserved and cerebral John he began to see someone who was equipped intellectually to answer the challenges of the day, and who might serve best in the 'nursery of the Christian Ministry', the University.

Oh how...wd I hobble down to Cambridge on my two sticks to hear him preach at St Mary's on the doctrine of miracles and such topics as are beyond common reach.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, for Henry Venn academic study was always subservient to Christian life. In a sermon delivered prior to leaving Queen's, he had maintained that study was important to the development of the faculties and to develop the intellect to be devoted to God, but that it was useless to develop the faculties unless one's heart was given to God. One had a duty to work hard academically, in order to learn the skills that were most effective in edifying the Church. For Henry Venn, study was a means to an end; but the means were nothing, if not applied to a higher purpose.¹⁴⁰ Thus, when John submitted his name as a candidate for a chair in Cambridge in 1866, Henry was able to justify it in terms of God's providence and by pointing to the example of previous 'holy' professors he had known.¹⁴¹ Henry Venn supported his son's candidature by writing to two of the electors who were known to him, the Divinity Professors ,Jeremie and Selwyn, regarding it as providential that his son should have the opportunity to exercise Christian influence by virtue of his academic standing.¹⁴² In 1872, Henry Venn again supported his son's candidacy on the grounds that he was not only deserving but also 'prepared to do full justice to the opportunities of usefulness it will

¹³⁸ K.J.M. Smith, *James Fitzjames Stephen: portrait of a Victorian rationalist* (Cambridge, 1988), p.1.

¹³⁹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to S.C. Venn, 8/2/1868.

¹⁴⁰ H. Venn, *Academical studies subservient to the edification of the church; a sermon preached in the chapel of Queen's College, Cambridge on Sunday the second of March 1828* (Cambridge, 1828).

¹⁴¹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 13/10/1866.

¹⁴² CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81C34 H. Venn to J. Venn, 13/10/1866; *Cambridge Chronicle*, 27/10/1866, p.4.

afford'.¹⁴³ Henry Venn's emphasis upon the scope for personal influence as a tutor, a University preacher or a professor clearly illustrates the religious root of the new collegiate ideal that was emerging in Cambridge in the latter half of the nineteenth century, in which the fellow and tutor was increasingly expected to undertake a pastoral role, engaging with his pupils and setting them a moral example.¹⁴⁴

Henry Venn solicited articles or reviews of books from his son for use in the *Christian Observer*, of which Henry became editor between 1868 and 1872. John Venn became a fairly regular contributor. He was paid for three contributions to the *Christian Observer* between June and December 1871 alone.¹⁴⁵ Contributions to the *Christian Observer* were anonymous, however, from the correspondence between father and son, it has been possible to identify a limited number of John Venn's contributions. For example in 1865, Henry Venn asked for a 'very decisive reply' from his son to an article by Dean Stanley published in *Fraser's Magazine* on 'Nineteenth Century Theology'. Henry Venn's chief concern, characteristically, was that Stanley set aside the historical accuracy of the Bible without denying its authority as a 'valuable library work'.¹⁴⁶ Stanley had argued that the impulse for the theology of the nineteenth century had come from Germany and argued that new approaches to theology, to history and philosophy and to doctrine were penetrating below word and dogma to the essence of Christian doctrine.¹⁴⁷ John Venn responded in kind, arguing that the impact of Evangelicalism had provided the characteristic theology of the age, as evidenced by the most widely read religious writings, the tone of preaching and a living Church known by its works. He went on to question what good works had been produced by the faith of *Essays and reviews*; whether anything positive was being achieved by the questions and doubts of

¹⁴³ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 16/4/1872.

¹⁴⁴ Rothblatt, *op. cit.*, p.277.

¹⁴⁵ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 15/6/1872.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 11/3/1865.

¹⁴⁷ A.P.Stanley, 'Theology of the nineteenth century', *Essays chiefly on questions of Church and state from 1850 to 1870* (London, 1870), p.452-88.

Stanley and his friends and by their want of straightforwardness.¹⁴⁸ At a point when Venn was privately taking a similar questioning and doubting approach to his theology and had arrived at a similar position to Stanley with regard to biblical inspiration, he still found himself able to comply with his father's wish in producing Evangelical polemic in print, albeit without his own signature.

In 1868, Henry Venn suggested to his son that he should publish a new edition of Butler with notes 'adapting his work to modern thought and to the work of missionaries. Such a work would be of inestimable value to the Church at large as well as to the Miss[ionar]y Societies'.¹⁴⁹ Butler was a text first encountered by Venn as a boy. The relevance of Butler's argument of persuasion on the basis of probable evidence may have been given a renewed relevance at this stage both by Venn's academic interest in probabilities and also by his own critical re-examination of his beliefs.¹⁵⁰ The book on Butler did not materialise. However, in 1871, an article by John Venn on 'Bishop Butler reviewed in the light of modern thought' was published in the *Christian Observer*.¹⁵¹ The article took as its starting point recent evidence presented before the Parliamentary Committee on University Tests, that the works of Butler were out of fashion, and argued the grounds for regret of this. Venn sought to illustrate the relevance of Butler's thought to the main characteristics of modern thought. He outlined Butler's argument that, as it was beyond the capacity of human comprehension to see the harmony of the divine plan in creation, it was not therefore possible to take issue with isolated elements of the scheme on the basis of current knowledge. Secondly, he picked out the inductive nature of Butler's *Analogy* arguing for persuasion on the basis of probable evidence. Venn's treatment and view of Butler supports Garnett's argument that Butler remained a pivotal text in the latter half of the nineteenth century when Butler's recognition of the

¹⁴⁸ [J. Venn], 'The Theology of the nineteenth century', *Christian Observer* (May 1865), pp.371-87.

¹⁴⁹ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 18/5/1868.

¹⁵⁰ D.W. Bebbington, *The mind of Gladstone: religion, Homer and politics* (Oxford, 2004), p.249.

¹⁵¹ [J. Venn], 'Bishop Butler reviewed in the light of modern thought', *Christian Observer* (September, 1871); CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 3/8/1871.

fragmentary nature of human perception and his emphasis on the value of reasoning from probability were seen to have fresh and creative significance.¹⁵²

The theme of examining the nature of belief and the evidences for it was continued by Venn in a further article for the *Christian Observer* reviewing Newman's *Grammar of Assent*. Venn approached Newman's work on a philosophical level rather than from a party perspective with a considerable amount of respect for Newman's ability as 'a gentleman and scholar and perfect master of the English language'.¹⁵³ By this Venn did not wish to imply agreement with Newman's principles, but found that the main conclusions were not connected with a particular party but could be used to support religious principles in general.¹⁵⁴ The article as offered by Venn appears not to have been what was expected for the *Christian Observer* reader. Prior to publication, Henry Venn asked John Venn to consider a number of issues that had been raised by the Stephens when reading the review.¹⁵⁵ When the review itself was published, it appeared with a supplement prepared by Henry Venn linked with an editorial note:

Those who wish to know how a master of rhetoric and logic deals with the phenomena of human beliefs as a matter of science, will find in the foregoing review a candid analysis of the book. Some will, however, wish to know how far the *Grammar of Assent* throws light upon many anxious questions which perplex a sincere Christian....We therefore add a short notice of Dr Newman's book, written by another pen, pointing out the serious defects in the book from a religious point of view.¹⁵⁶

Henry Venn was proud of his son's intellectual achievements but remained concerned that 'the readers of the CO are not so intelligent or as yet 'educated up to' your style.'¹⁵⁷ It was a

¹⁵² J. Garnett, 'Bishop Butler and the Zeitgeist: Butler and the development of Christian moral philosophy in Victorian Britain', in C. Cunliffe (ed.), *Joseph Butler's moral and religious thought; tercentenary essays* (Oxford, 1992), pp.63-4.

¹⁵³ [J. Venn], 'Dr Newman's *Grammar of Assent*', *Christian Observer* (October 1870), p.734.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.727.

¹⁵⁵ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 12/8/1870.

¹⁵⁶ [J. Venn], 'Dr Newman's *Grammar of Assent*', p.735.

¹⁵⁷ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 6/11/1871.

similar position to the one in which Fitzjames Stephen found himself in the 1850s. Stephen married the daughter of the Evangelical vicar and former curate of John Venn of Clapham, J W Cunningham, and under his father-in-law's editorship wrote for the *Christian Observer* in the 1850s, relying on editorial intervention to give his articles the required proper tone.¹⁵⁸

Henry Venn was particularly proud of the 'particular and very special opportunity' offered to his son by his election in 1869 to give the Hulsean lectures before the University.¹⁵⁹ The election was a mark of distinction. Venn was preceded in the role by J.J. Stewart Perowne, Bishop of Worcester and succeeded by F.W. Farrar, Dean of Canterbury. Venn did not hesitate to take the opportunity to preach from the University pulpit. He chose as his subject 'Some of the Characteristics of Belief Scientific and Religious'. Venn was clearly influenced in his choice of subject matter by the contemporary party differences about religion and the negative impact that these differences were being seen when compared with the comparative unanimity on scientific subjects. It was his contention that it was possible to diminish the significance of religious differences through an understanding that fluctuations in belief were largely based upon a different apprehension of the evidence influenced, in part, by the role of emotions in religious belief.¹⁶⁰ Venn sought a logical explanation for these differences in belief by bringing emotions into the enquiry and trying to subject them to logical analysis. He adopted a logical rather than a metaphysical approach, leaving aside questions of faith and concentrating upon belief as a 'state of mind in which we are prepared to act upon the truth of any proposition in question'; the belief element of faith not differing essentially from any other act of belief.¹⁶¹

Venn's analysis of the contemporary state of religious belief was that variations in religious opinion were not new; everyone's practical hold of their faith varied according to their

¹⁵⁸ Stephen, *The life of Sir James Fitzjames Stephen*, p.125.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 18/2/1869.

¹⁶⁰ J. Venn, *On some characteristics of belief scientific and religious being the Hulsean lectures for 1869* (London and Cambridge, 1870), p.ix-xii.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, pp.vii-viii.

circumstances. However, in an age when legal restrictions on the expression of such feelings and criticisms had been relaxed, there had been a wide diffusion of vague and indefinite objections to dogmatic Christianity. The differences between scientific and religious opinion contributed to this unsettlement because knowledge of the lack of unanimity was itself contributing to doubt, leading men to secularism and positivism. He contrasted the apparent unanimity of opinion on scientific subjects with the apparent discord on religious matters but took the view that science only encompassed a narrow band of experience whereas religion encompassed everything. Given the wide variety of evidences on which great religious principles were based and the difficulty of fully comprehending a truth intended for all mankind and for all human experience, it was unsurprising that different views of evidence for religious belief arose.¹⁶²

Having explored the nature of the logical foothold for differences in religious belief, Venn asked what was the criterion of truth. How was it possible to decide which opinions were right and wrong if people were entertaining different judgements on religious evidences?¹⁶³ Venn argued for the testing out of one's beliefs by living by the doctrine in question and subjecting one's opinions to the natural 'shaking down' process of daily life. He recognised that this alone would not secure unanimity or determine truth. Given that moral and religious evidences were complex and had reference to both the rational and emotional faculties, a balance needed to be struck by appealing to the judgment of a number of men under different circumstances in order to minimise the impact of the bias each man had individually and recognising the social element in promoting religious conformity.¹⁶⁴ Venn did not purport to offer a conclusive answer to the problem of religious difference. Nor did he take a dogmatic approach to what should be believed. Instead, he emphasised the importance of the honest examination of beliefs and their evidences. The Grote Club's elevation of intellectual enquiry

¹⁶² *Ibid*, pp.1-5, 22-27.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, pp.xiv-xv.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, pp.37-44.

was observable in Venn's emphasis upon the importance of the search for religious truth. There are also resonances here with the Evangelical theme of personal spiritual honesty and with Broad Church values of seeking to test out each religious assumption. Venn may not have been able to offer a definitive answer, but he was convinced that the answer, whatever it might be, was not to be found by taking blind refuge in authority of the Church on doctrinal matters, nor by simply turning the mind away from religious difficulties.¹⁶⁵

The lectures also showed the duality of Venn's position. On the one hand, with careful wording, he had to satisfy his father who expected the lectures to show

...the unreasonableness of unbelief - upon the very principles of the rationalists.¹⁶⁶

On the other hand, the lectures showed the mark of Venn's wide reading over the previous decade. As well as making use of the work of theologians like Butler, Venn also illustrated his familiarity with wider thought, referring to the works and arguments of J.S. Mill and the positivists. Like the authors of *Essays and reviews*, he also drew on the progressive view of history popularised by Austin and Buckle.¹⁶⁷

Once again, Henry Venn's appreciation of the distinction between writing for a general Evangelical audience and the educated and enquiring audience in the University Church was evident in his suggestions for wording to introduce the Hulsean lectures:

Were I addressing an ordinary congregation I might warn you against exercising yourselves in matters too high for you and refer you at once to the written word of God for the authoritative resolution of your doubts. But my present position among you, my knowledge of the currents of thought - my sympathy for enquiring minds whose way to the Holy Scripture needs to be cleared from preliminary obstacles will induce me on

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p.54.

¹⁶⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 9/9/1869.

¹⁶⁷ J. Venn, *On some characteristics of belief*, pp.28-30.

this occasion to meet you on your own ground and to help you solve your difficulties of method of strict reasoning and scientific research &c¹⁶⁸

Henry Venn recognised that for educated men religion needed to be credible on intellectual and moral grounds, but he was also once again concerned to protect his son from criticism and controversy, offering suggestions to 'save you from being misunderstood, and from an outcry being raised, which might hinder the usefulness of your volume and check its circulation'.¹⁶⁹ Henry Venn's caution also illustrates the potential tension that might arise between free enquiry and the duty of religious conformity, particularly within a heated environment of party dispute where public controversy might easily be provoked. His son in contrast took the view that in a University, there was a duty to pursue open, unfettered enquiry.

A University would indeed be wallowing in the mire when it taught, or sanctioned the teaching that truth was not to be pursued anywhere, almost anyhow, and at any risk.¹⁷⁰

This difference of approach between father and son epitomises a tension that was emerging between the academic approach which valued truth above all else; and questioned a religious or clerical viewpoint that bounded free enquiry within a larger dogmatic construct.

The lectures were based in part on arguments that Venn had already rehearsed in his first book on the *Logic of chance*. As a logician, Venn separated out belief as the subjective side of probability distinct from the logical and objective observation of a series of events. For Venn, man acted on belief rather than on the statistical frequency of events, and when considering belief one had to take into account a more complex range of factors, including

¹⁶⁸ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 9/9/1869.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 17/1/1870.

¹⁷⁰ J. Venn, *On some characteristics of belief*, p.81.

emotional or psychological considerations.¹⁷¹ In the *Logic of Chance*, he explored the compound nature of belief, describing it as

...partly intellectual, partly emotional; it professes to rest upon experience, but in reality the experience acts through the distorting media of hopes and fears and other disturbing agencies.¹⁷²

Venn used a similar understanding as the starting point for the Hulsean lectures. Belief was a willingness to act on the truth of a proposition and belief, scientific or religious, and was founded on evidence. Venn argued that a man's religious position was the result of numerous classes of evidence, resting on a composite of upbringing, experience, reading and emotion; the elements woven together into one garment without noticing the seams. A change in one of these elements brought about a change in the composition of the whole. It was in this way that Venn sought to explain what he called 'oscillations in belief'.¹⁷³ The applicability of this to Venn's own changing religious position as he reassessed the evidence of his upbringing and his reading is clear to see. When Venn described the process by which a man might become convinced of a new idea, the description was similar to the one he was later to use of his own struggles in his *Annals*

There will be a time of disturbance and of ferment until the new arrangement has been effected...there may well be a time during which he has grasped the new ideas, and is fully convinced of their truth and importance, but is struggling to fit them into their place and to get out of old grooves of thought and feeling and practice.¹⁷⁴

Despite this private ferment, Venn demonstrated a continued willingness to take services in Evangelical churches, to write for an Evangelical periodical and to associate himself publicly with Evangelical causes. Yet, assessing his theological position by 1864, he subsequently concluded

¹⁷¹ A. Baccini, *op. cit.*, Section 4 Should I go out with my umbrella?; J. Venn, *The logic of chance*, pp.119-37.

¹⁷² J. Venn, *The logic of chance*, p.156.

¹⁷³ J. Venn, *On some characteristics of belief*, pp.65-9.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, pp.78-9.

All that was distinctive of Evangelicalism had now fallen off me. I consider myself to have been, and should very possibly, if asked, have then described myself, as a very moderate Broad churchman.¹⁷⁵

The liberal conception of churchmanship as formulated in *Essays and reviews* has been characterised as a combination of three things: firstly, a moral rejection of traditional teaching on Hell and Atonement; secondly, that the essence of Christianity was to be found in the experience of, rather than intellectual assent to worship; and finally, that Christianity would be falsely placed if it resisted the insights available from science and historical criticism, but that it stood to gain from incorporating such insights into its worldview.¹⁷⁶ Venn's position in this period may reflect the influence of the Mauricean elements of the members of the Grote Club. Palfrey, in his study of the early history of the Moral Sciences Tripos, has pointed to the influential nature of Mauricean or Coleridgean thought both in mid-century Cambridge and also among a number of logicians, like Boole, de Morgan and Dodgson.¹⁷⁷ What is certainly clear is that outside his family, Venn found his role models and intellectual stimulus in the circles of Mill and of Maurice – he does not seem to have found a similar motive force in Evangelicalism.

Broad Church influence was evident in Venn's position on clerical subscription. Venn does not at this stage seem to have shared Sidgwick's ethical doubts about subscription. When Henry Venn was invited to serve upon the Royal Commission appointed in 1864 to examine the terms of clerical subscription, he sent selected papers from the Commission to his elder son, soliciting his opinion. Venn responded giving support to the relaxed form of subscription

I should certainly be pleased to see the assent and consent to all and everything got rid of, or at least smoothed down.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 F27, Annals, p.139.

¹⁷⁶ G. Parsons, 'On Speaking plainly: 'Honest Doubt' and the ethics of belief' in G. Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain*, Volume II Controversies (Manchester, 1988), p.194.

¹⁷⁷ Palfrey, *op. cit.*, p.90.

¹⁷⁸ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C40, J. Venn to H. Venn, Feb 1864.

Without discussing issues of conscience, he argued that there were two practical questions worthy of consideration

(1) what alteration the majority want: somewhat as in taking off a tax you do it at a point which will give most relief consistently with the revenue being retained, and (2) to be corrected and assisted by seeing how other communions get on with modified subscriptions, or without them.¹⁷⁹

On the latter point, he expressed his support for the opinions of Stanley. Stanley had defended the Essayists by objecting to the idea that the clergy should have less liberty of thought and freedom of opinion than the laity. He regarded it as more important for a clergyman sincerely to accept the worship and constitution of the Church as a whole, despite any minor difficulties. Henry Venn illustrated the strength of his own churchmanship in his response to his son's points. He upheld a standard of subscription as a tool of an effective national Church. In a Church in which the congregation held no power of veto over the choice of a minister who had a freehold for life, then it was reasonable to expect

that he should at least be a man who honestly fulfils the character of a Church of England clergyman, up to the mark which the constitution of the Church has fixed... If it further excludes really valuable men - let it be abated - but still keep up to the mark of bona fide Church ministers.¹⁸⁰

For Henry Venn, this required a clergyman to be willing to declare in front of a congregation that he subscribed, in both letter and spirit, to the content of the morning and evening services and the 39 Articles.

The Clerical Subscription Act of 1865 was to provide a relaxed form of subscription. Honest subscription no longer implied precise subscription. Whatever the legal position, Venn would have been aware of the gap between this and the view of his friend, Sidgwick, whose view on subscription as later set out in 'The Ethics of Conformity and Subscription' argued that

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, Feb 1864.

¹⁸⁰ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 24/2/1864.

reserve was unacceptable and that it was the duty of every clergyman to state his position honestly and plainly.¹⁸¹

The question arises whether Henry Venn had any appreciation of his son's doubts. Of Henry's three children, John had moved furthest away from his father's immediate influence. Weekly letters and regular visits were the basis of John's contact with his father and he had established his own household in Cambridge. Henrietta stayed at home keeping her father's house while Harry worked at the Church Missionary Society, serving effectively as his father's private secretary, before committing himself to a lifetime of parish work. Henry Venn was certainly aware of the difference between clerical and academic circles in which he and John moved,

We two live in totally different atmospheres. I am surrounded by men who all speak one language & fire up at the shadow of any compromise of the Truth. You live surrounded by men speaking different languages & leaving the Truth to take care of itself.¹⁸²

Henry Venn's response to his son's association with Seeley illustrates the mixture of fear and confidence he had for his son working within this academic environment.

When you first mentioned Prof S I own I had a little shrinking...My poor but constant prayer will be that his sojourn may be to your and his spiritual profit, and in no degree to your hindrance.¹⁸³

Henry was keen to use his son's knowledge of new works and on the state of academic opinion on them and hoped that 'we may mutually assist each other... by guarding the one against narrowness, the other against a breadth beyond the limits of faith.'¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ G. Parsons, 'On Speaking plainly', pp.194-204.

¹⁸² CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 17/1/1870.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, 29/12/1870.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 17/1/1870.

In the surviving letters between father and son, there is no direct and clear reference to the growth of the religious difficulties which John Venn identifies as happening during this period. Venn's own verdict, that he would have been unable to debate with his father on aspects of religion on which he knew his father had strong views, has already been noted. As Leslie Stephen was later to note, Henry Venn's own Evangelicalism was steadfast and untroubled by contemporary speculation, thus making it difficult for him to appreciate the doubts that others might harbour.¹⁸⁵ Henry's letters to his son alluded to some of the public 'blows to faith' in the 1860s, such as Maurice's resignation of his living, Colenso's work on the Old Testament, the discovery of material 'older than' creation in France, and Stanley's declaration that the historical accuracy of the Bible was a lost cause.¹⁸⁶ However, there was no clear sense of imminent threat close to home. John's response was guardedly orthodox, dismissing Maurice's reasons for resigning his living as 'fanciful', and Colenso's work as 'little arithmetical difficulties'.¹⁸⁷ In commissioning articles from his son for the *Christian Observer* there seems to have been an assumption of orthodox Evangelical churchmanship on Henry Venn's part. And yet here was a father who was aware of the texts with which and the people with whom his son was familiar, and who showed an appreciation of the different values of the academic circles in which his son moved, and was concerned to prevent his son's academic approach being misinterpreted and giving rise to controversy. He also enjoined his son to speak freely with his brother and join him in prayer, notably referring back to a period when their Uncle John's own scruples about remaining in the Church were resolved through united prayers.¹⁸⁸ Such a comment suggests that Henry Venn had some understanding of the potential threats his son faced, if not the nature of his son's actual difficulties.

¹⁸⁵ L. Stephen, *op. cit.*, p.37.

¹⁸⁶ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 5/11/1862, 10/2/1864, 11/3/1865.

¹⁸⁷ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C40, J. Venn to H. Venn, 7/11/1862.

¹⁸⁸ CMS Archive, CMS/ACC81 C34, H. Venn to J. Venn, 2/8/1861.

Conclusions

As can be seen, there were multiple, intertwined strands to Venn's emerging academic identity in the 1860s and 1870s and his experience has wider significance in highlighting aspects of the development of mid-century academic life.

Venn showed himself to be a reformer, championing development of and teaching in an emerging discipline. Venn and his colleagues did not undertake this in isolation, but built upon the internal reforming spirit of the early Victorians, notably in the creation of the Moral Sciences Tripos. They also benefited from the structural reforms of the Royal Commission that led to a greater emphasis upon teaching, relaxation of the rules of celibacy, and eventually led to a removal of religious tests in University life. In light of the experiences of Leslie Stephen and Henry Sidgwick, each of these changes may well have been significant for Venn. Academic opportunity in the reformed University gave him the means of supporting himself when his vocation for the parish ministry failed him, and after the abolition of University Tests, his College did not need to examine too closely the remnants of his Christianity. Venn made his own contribution through proposals for the internal reform of ancient endowments to provide for teaching, pioneering intercollegiate teaching, shaping the development of a new discipline and supporting the higher education of women.

Venn may not have begun this period envisaging that his academic role would be a permanent one, but he saw himself, and was perceived by contemporaries, as one of the new school of academics who was active in teaching, examining and publishing, with the ambition to seek preferment to support a permanent academic career. His formal roles as teacher and examiner were given a further dimension by social and intellectual networks. Venn's academic identity was not just a matter of occupational professionalism but was marked by a particular approach to knowledge. In common with Leslie Stephen and alongside Henry Sidgwick, he supported the introduction of a secular approach to the Moral Sciences as

advocated by Mill. Venn's academic approach, as evidenced by his membership of the Grote Club and the argument of the Hulsean lectures, was to urge an open and questioning academic approach.

There was a tension here between Venn's inherited and acquired identities. During the 1860s, Venn attained a new level of independence, establishing his academic career and an independent household in Cambridge and moving to a position of Broad Churchmanship. However, this was also a decade in which he made his contribution, albeit in a minor way, as a Christian writer and took to the public platform of Evangelical societies. The contradiction between public action and private behaviour that had become apparent during his curacy in Mortlake had been transplanted into a new context. Given the strength of Henry Venn's influence over his son, it was unlikely that these contradictions would be resolved during his lifetime.

Aspects of these tensions also cast a sidelight on wider themes. Whereas John Venn adopted a position of open enquiry, Henry Venn was conscious of the limitations of the intellectual exploration that might be adopted publicly without threat to Church unity and danger of causing controversy among the broader Evangelical body. This highlights some of the restrictions that have been seen to chafe at other consciences. Likewise, there was a contrast between the manner in which father and son conceived of academic status; between the exercise of academic authority as a means to religious influence, and as an end itself for academic influence through writing and teaching. This speaks to the changes that were occurring in the wider understanding of academic identity and approaches to knowledge.

It was a period of transition on a number of levels. Venn engaged with advanced ideas in private while participating in Evangelical society in public and contributing to the pages of an Evangelical periodical. Venn can be seen as part of a transitional generation whose own

career development mirrored the gradual progress of a broader shift in academic expectations. He was the product of the unreformed University, trained in the liberal tradition of the Mathematical Tripos, the son of a clergyman who expected that he himself would take orders and that his fellowship would lead on to a College living. However, he chose to remain in Cambridge, taking advantage of the relaxation of College rules on the marriage of fellows and becoming one of the first inter-collegiate teachers in a new Tripos. The Moral Sciences Tripos was itself the first step towards a more specialised disciplinary approach, with Venn teaching the first generation of acknowledged academic specialists. He sought academic preferment in the field of moral philosophy; a discipline not yet fully secularised, encompassing as it did moral theology and which was still being taught by a number of men who adhered to a liberal Anglican or Broad Church view of Moral Sciences. To paraphrase Engel, Venn was still both clergyman and don.