Methodist Politics in Ireland, 1861-1914

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Nicola Kathryn Morris

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Introduction

"The friends of all and the enemies of none"[1]

This phrase reputedly coined by Methodism's founder John Wesley[2] encapsulates the relationship that Irish Methodism perceived that it should have with the rest of society, avoiding controversy and preaching the good news. Adopted as the motto of Irish Methodism in the twentieth century, this axiom was frequently repeated in the nineteenth century in attempts to calm tensions within the denomination. From its inception, Wesley had conceived of Methodism as a devotional society, unaligned with any wider political agenda. He therefore advised his followers that 'no politics' should be brought into the Church, as it engendered ill-feeling within congregations and might attract the unwelcome attention of the authorities. The Wesleyan leadership, however, considered it appropriate to give moral direction to its members, and this increasingly included comment on political affairs. Moreover, successive governments attempted to legislate regarding primary education in the United Kingdom, which was perceived as impinging on Wesleyan interests, thus offering an appropriate area for political involvement. Consequently, throughout the nineteenth century, Methodists attempted to resolve the tension between what should be considered a moral issue, and was thus appropriate for comment, and what was a purely political issue, with which the Church should not become involved. This thesis will examine how Irish Methodism re-assessed its role in political life during the period 1861-1914.

Methodism had arrived in Ireland in the 1730s, and galvanised by the twenty-one visits of its founder, John Wesley's to the island between 1747-89, established by a

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[1] *Wesleyan Conference Minutes of Ireland* [hereafter *ICM*], 1886; the adage itself is commonly attributed to John Wesley and was later adopted by the Methodist Church in Ireland as its official motto.

[2] John Wesley (1703-91), ordained as an Anglican priest in 1728. While studying at Oxford became involved with a religious group known as the 'Holy Club' of which he was soon leader, which encouraged students to distance themselves from 'worldly pursuits'. Impressed by the simple faith of the Moravians, he started attending a religious society, at one meeting of which in 1738 he experienced his heart feeling 'strangely warmed' by the realisation of the personal love of Christ on the cross. His peripatetic ministry took off in 1742, and he made his visit to Ireland in 1747. His intention was never to start a new denomination, but revitalise the moribund Established Church. In the course of his ministry Wesley visited Ireland on a total of twenty-one occasions over a 42-year period. Wesley presided at the first meeting of the Irish Conference in 1752.

continuous presence in the country that remains to the present day.[3] Compared to Catholicism, Anglicanism and Presbyterianism, Methodism arrived relatively late in Ireland, and had only limited appeal to a population that in the eighteenth century equated Church affiliation with ethnic identity. Consequently, Irish Methodism never experienced the explosion in popularity that was characteristic of its counterpart in England.[4] Moreover, the focus on the development and political consequences of Nationalism and Unionism in modern Ireland has encouraged historians and politicians alike to perceive a binary division in the Irish population: Protestant versus Catholic; Unionist versus Nationalist. The use of these terms has presented the 'opposing' communities as monolithic and homogeneous, but has elided and obscured internal differences and subtleties within the groups. While a number of studies of the eighteenth century have engaged with the distinctive characteristics of Presbyterianism and Anglicanism in that period, and the arrival of Methodism in the country has been well documented, little similar work exists for the nineteenth century.[5] Peatling rightly identifies a major gap in the historiography of nineteenth-century Protestantism: specifically, a lack of consideration of denominational differences among Ulster Protestants and the consequences of this.[6] The smaller religious groups, including Methodism, have in particular suffered from this broad approach with their unique attitude to social and political situations overlooked. Furthermore, Walker suggests that the Unionist coalition of Ulster Protestants was a relatively late development with divisions between denominations remaining into the 1880s.[7] This study will, therefore, attempt to explore the reaction of Irish Methodism to political events between the election of Gladstone as premier in 1868 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

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[3] D. A. L. Cooney, *The Methodists in Ireland: a short history,* (Dublin, 2001).
[4] D. W. Miller, 'Presbyterianism and "modernization" in Ulster', *Past and Present,* 80 (1978), pp.66-80.
[5] J. C. Beckett, *The Anglo-Irish Tradition,* (Belfast, 1983); S. J. Conolly, *Religion, law and power,* (Oxford, 1992); D. W. Hayton, 'Anglo-Irish attitudes; changing perceptions of national identity and the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland, c.1690-1750', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture,* 117 (1987), pp1145-1157; Kevin Herlihy (ed.), *The politics of Irish dissent, 1650-1800,* (Dublin, 1997); Ian McBride, *Scripture politics: Ulster Presbyterians and Irish radicalism in late eighteenth-century Ireland,* (Oxford, 1998); and Miller, 'Presbyterianism and "modernization" in Ulster', pp.66-80.
[6] G. K. Peatling, 'Whatever happened to Presbyterian radicalism? The Ulster Presbyterian liberal press in the late nineteenth century' in Roger Swift and Christine Kinealy (eds), *Politics and power in Victorian Ireland,* (Dublin, 2006), p.157.
[7] B. M. Walker, *Ulster politics: the formative years, 1868-1886,* (Belfast, 1989).

The election of Gladstone as Liberal premier in 1868 instigated a new period in Irish and British politics. Gladstone was devoutly religious: his faith dominated his life and 'moulded his political style'.[8] Religious issues were always at the forefront of his politics, prompting his resignation from Peel's Conservative government in 1845 over the award of a financial grant to the Catholic seminary at Maynooth, which he argued would undermine the position of the Established Church.[9] Gladstone was a vehement critic of what he perceived as Vatican encroachments into civil life, and although he modified his uncritical support of the Church of Ireland from his position of the 1830s, he remained loyal to the Church Establishment in England.[10] British nonconformists respected Gladstone's religious conviction, and the influence it had on his politics. His 1868 election campaign to bring 'justice to Ireland' through the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland thus attracted the support of many evangelical Protestants across Britain, whose strength as a political grouping had been enhanced by the English electoral Reform Act of 1867. This facilitated the organisation of chapel communities to act as a political pressure group, their influence enhanced by Gladstone's predisposition to listen to religious arguments.[11] Consequently, from 1867 until the Representation of the People Act in 1918 ushered in universal manhood suffrage, British nonconformists were ideally situated to exert influence over government.[12] This phenomenon was referred to by contemporary commentators and subsequent historians as the 'nonconformist conscience'. This period of religious ascendancy in English politics thus coincided with the campaign for Irish Home Rule and was critical in determining how the Protestant churches of the United Kingdom related to one another.

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[8] D. W. Bebbington, 'Gladstone and the Nonconformists: A religious affinity in politics', *Church Society and Politics: papers read at the thirteenth summer meeting and fourteenth winter meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Studies in Church History, 12) (Oxford, 1975) p.372 and D. W. Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone: Religion, Homer and Politics*, (Oxford, 2004).

[9] W. E. Gladstone, *The State in its Relations with the Church*, (London, 1838) and T. L. Crosby, *The Two Mr Gladstones: a study in psychology and history*, (New Haven, 1997).

[10] W. E. Gladstone, *A Chapter of Autobiography*, (London, 1868) and *idem, The Vatican decrees in the their bearing on civil allegiance: a political expostulation*, (London, 1874).

[11] D. W. Bebbington, *The nonconformist conscience: chapel and politics, 1870-1914*, (London, 1982).

[12] *Ibid.*, p.ix.

Historiography

> "church history" or "ecclesiastical history" is regarded as passé. Perhaps it is too confusing, and too disruptive of analytical procedures, to examine institutions which, while central to the "Northern Ireland problem", are all-Ireland in their dimensions.[13]

This statement by Alan Megahey clearly identifies a lack of studies examining the Irish Protestant Churches in the twentieth century. While Megahey posits that the failure of historians to engage with the Protestant Churches as national institutions is rooted in the 'Northern Ireland problem', this applies more broadly to the historiography of Irish religion since the Ulster Plantation of the early seventeenth century. The distinct historical trajectory of Ulster as the industrial heartland of Ireland and the region's unique demography has rather encouraged academics to explore the relation between religion and socio-economic development in the province.[14] Although the religious demography and economic development of Ulster were unique in Ireland and constitute a valid field of enquiry, sole focus on this has led to religious developments being analysed without reference to wider denominational aims and the relationships between the various churches.[15] Although it is useful to be able to chart the region's distinctive development, this approach frequently fails to recognise the political reality of a united Ireland and the Union with Great Britain. This trend for studying the specific conditions in Ulster has also emphasised the creation of a pan-Protestant identity in the province as the Churches reacted to political developments regarding Home Rule. The three largest Protestant denominations associated with Ulster, however, the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches, were, and remain, all-Ireland institutions, and the development of a Protestant identity in Ulster was not necessarily paralleled in the national church organisations. This is particularly true for the Church of

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[13] Alan Megahey, *The Irish Protestant Churches in the twentieth century*, (London, 2000) p.1.

[14] For example Megahey, *The Irish Protestant Churches;* D. H. Hempton and Myrtle Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism and Ulster Society, 1740-1890*, (London, 1992); Flann Campbell, *The dissenting voice: Protestant democracy in Ulster from plantation to partition*, (Belfast, 1991); I. M. Ellis, *Vision and reality: a survey of twentieth-century Irish inter-church relations*, (Belfast, 1992); Janice Holmes, *Religious Revivals in Britain and Ireland, 1859-1905* (Dublin, 2000); and Patrick Mitchel, *Evangelicalism and national identity in Ulster, 1921-1998*, (Oxford, 2003).

[15] Exceptions to this are the two principal works on reform of the Church of Ireland: P. M. H. Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales*, (London, 1969) and D. H. Akenson, *The Church of Ireland: ecclesiastical reform and revolution, 1800-1885*, (New Haven,1971).

Ireland and the Methodist Church, as a significant proportion of the members of both resided outside of Ulster.[16]

The historiography of Irish Methodism can be divided into three categories: those that narrate the doctrinal and ecclesiastical development of the denomination; those that chart the social and political impact that Methodism had in the country; and those which address the Irish contribution to international Methodism. The seminal work in the first category is Crookshank's 1885 *History of Methodism in Ireland,* which charted the development of Irish Methodism from its introduction to the island until the Ulster Revival of 1859.[17] Written in the immediate wake of the reunion of the two branches of Irish Methodism, the tone of this book is rather triumphal, and it predicts a glorious future for the denomination both in Ireland and abroad. Crookshank's work is complemented by work in the 1960s, which brought the story of Methodism into the twentieth century.[18] More recently, D. A. L. Cooney has revisited the entire history of Methodism in Ireland, from the first communities to the early twenty-first century, thus giving an overview of the development of the beliefs and organisation of the Church.[19] These broad studies are supplemented by a proliferation of publications concerning individual circuits.[20] These have revealed patterns of development within the local context and the relationship of Methodism to the community, while demonstrating that Methodism was not solely an Ulster phenomenon. The complimentary nature of Methodist structures and beliefs are

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[16] The 1861 Irish Census revealed that 44 per cent of Anglicans resided outside of Ulster, as did 29 per cent of Methodists. Despite its claims to being a national Church, 96 per cent of Presbyterians lived in Ulster.

[17] Crookshank, *A History of Methodism in Ireland.*

[18] R. L. Cole, *A history of Methodism in Ireland, 1860-1960,* (Belfast, 1960); Frederick Jeffery, *Irish Methodism: An historical account of its traditions theology and influence* (Belfast, 1964); and R. D. E. Gallagher, 'Methodism in Ireland' in Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George, Gordon Rupp (eds), *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain,* iii, (London, 1965-1988) pp.232-251.

[19] Cooney, *The Methodists in Ireland,* and *idem*, 'Irish Methodism' in Brendan Bradshaw and Dáire Keogh (eds), *Christianity in Ireland: Revisiting the Story,* (Dublin, 2002).

[20] D. A. L. Cooney, *"So Civil a People": The story of Methodism in the Irish Midlands,* (Tullamore, 2004); *idem, Methodism in Galway* (1978); *idem,* 'Methodism in Cloughjordan', *Cloughjordan Heritage,* 1 (1985), pp16-19; *idem, Asses' colts and loving people : the story of the people called Methodists on the Carlow circuit* (Carlow, 1998); *idem, "Artless, earnest and serious": 250yrs of Methodism in Laois 1748-1998,* (n.p., 1998); *idem, The Methodists in Ormond,* (n.p., 1984); *idem, Methodism in Galway,* (n.p., 1978); Norman Johnston and Desmond Preston, *Methodism in Omagh: an historical account of Methodism, over two centuries, in the Omagh and Fintona circuit,* (Omagh, 1982); Éamonn MacCormaic, *Methodism in County Longford since 1750,* (Longford, 1995); and Neville McElderry, *Methodism in the Pettigo area,* (n.p., 1991). Many of these circuit histories are privately printed pamphlets, often commemorating the centenary of the chapel's erection and intended for distribution among the worshipping community.

presented and their parallel development have been used to highlight the distinctive areas of Methodist belief and specific suitability for the evangelical mission. A common theme is the response of Methodism to the challenges presented by the rapid changes in Irish society during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly the distress suffered by the urban poor. Methodists are portrayed as possessing a sense of social responsibility throughout this period, typified by Methodist work for the relief of poverty, their numerous temperance campaigns undertaken in conjunction with evangelical mission societies but usually undertaken with corresponding preaching efforts. While the 'souperism' of the early and mid nineteenth century soon waned, Methodists nevertheless believed evangelism was an essential accompaniment to poor relief.

These studies of Methodism as an ecclesial body are complemented by the exploration of the socio-political impact of Methodists as a community. To date, this work traces the rapid growth of Methodism from its establishment in the mid-eighteenth century to the 1880s. For Ireland, Hempton (with Myrtle Hill) emphasises the rapid growth of Methodism in the Linen Triangle and Loch Erne areas of Ulster in the late eighteenth century.[21] Hempton also investigates the Methodist contribution to the development of a regional, pan-Protestant identity in Ulster. Highlighting religious trends that were common to all Protestant Churches, Hempton explores the social context in which evangelical religion flourished in Ulster and the factors that rendered those communities susceptible to evangelical ideas.[22] This work has been supplemented by studies of generational revival that were prevalent in the province.[23] These are demonstrated to have facilitated the rapid growth of Methodism in a manner foreign to the rest of the country.

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[21] Hempton and Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism*, pp31-44; D. N. Hempton, 'The Methodist Crusade in Ireland 1795-1845' *Irish Historical Studies* [hereafter *IHS*], 22 (1980), pp33-48; and *idem, Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, (New Haven, 2005), pp18-29.

[22] Hempton and Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism*, pp161-87; and D. N. Hempton, '"For God and Ulster": Evangelical Protestantism and the Home rule Crisis of 1886' in Keith Robbins (ed.), *Protestant Evangelicalism Britain, Ireland, Germany and America, c.1750-c.1950: essays in honour of W. R. Ward*, Studies in Church History, 7 (1990) pp225-254.

[23] The term revival was used to describe outbreaks of religious fervour, particularly associated with evangelicalism, often fuelled by itinerant and lay preaching and large outdoor meetings. Holmes, *Religious Revivals in Britain and Ireland;* D. W. Miller, 'Did Ulster Presbyterians have a devotional revolution?' in J. H. Murphy (ed.), *Evangelicals and Catholics in nineteenth century Ireland*, (Dublin, 2005), p51-3; and Andrew Holmes, 'The experience and understanding of religious revival in Ulster Presbyterianism, c.1800-1930', *IHS*, 34 (2005), pp362-385.

Moreover, this expansion was paralleled by the strength of Presbyterianism in the same area.[24] This approach illuminates how the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches in particular were able to capitalise on the familiar religious patterns in the community, thus reinforcing their influence within the province. The regional study is, however, somewhat problematic when considering the response of the Churches to national political developments. While the events of the third Home Rule crisis of 1912-14 were clearly characterised by a distinct Ulster dimension, partition arrived relatively late on the political agenda and earlier events should be addressed in a national context which takes full account of the Union with Great Britain.

Hempton also highlights how the development of a distinct political identity among Methodists was rooted in support for the British Protestant Constitution. Unlike Ulster Presbyterians, therefore, Irish Methodists had no history of subscription to a contractual theory of government in which, if the government failed to govern in the interests of its citizens, civil authority could be rejected to the point of armed resistance.[25] In 1798 for example, Methodism was 'consistently on the side of the government' throughout the crisis, and the authorities had permitted the Conference to meet in that year, despite the ban on gatherings exceeding five men.[26] Cooney argues that there were five influences shaping the Methodist response to the rebellion: the principle of respect for law and order bequeathed to them by John Wesley; the fact that the society had not been politicised as it was too small to have ever had significant influence over government; that Methodism was essentially conservative and had no radical wing; that the inspiration for the rising came from the French Revolution, which Methodists inherently distrusted because it had attempted to abolish religion; and the influence of landlords who had encouraged to their tenants to become Methodists, but also encouraged them to be law-abiding.[27] While the political situation had changed markedly by the middle of the nineteenth century, the first three of these influences on the Irish Methodist outlook had

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[24] Miller, 'Presbyterianism and "modernization" in Ulster', pp66-80.
[25] D. W. Miller, *Queen's Rebels: Ulster Loyalism in historical perspective*, (Dublin, 1978), pp1-6; Marianne Elliott, *Watchmen in Sion: the Protestant idea of liberty*, (Derry, 1985); David McConnell, 'The Protestant Churches and the Origins of the Northern Ireland State', Unpublished PhD Thesis, (Queen's University Belfast, 1998), p.90.
[26] Cooney, *The Methodists in Ireland*, p.49 and p.52.
[27] *Ibid.*, p.51.

remained fairly constant, reinforced by the 'no politics' ruling conferred on the denomination by its founder. Methodism as a body was thus reluctant to become involved in controversial political campaigns, and it did not approve of recourse to violence against a duly constituted government. It did, however, attempt to exercise moral leadership and encouraged members to fully participate in the formation of public policy through constitutional methods. Methodism in Ireland was never numerically significant enough to influence government policy for Ireland on its own, but looked for support from its sister Church in England, an organisation that was increasingly aware of its own influence in the nineteenth century.

The cultural debt owed by Irish Methodism to England in its religious outlook resulted in a particularly close relationship with its sister Church across the Irish Sea. This relationship is key to understanding the Methodist response to changing events, particularly the unequal size (and therefore influence) of the two Methodist Connexions,[28] allowing the English Church to exert pressure in a manner unavailable to their Irish brethren. This theme of inter-connectivity between Britain and Ireland is particularly evident in Hempton's work covering the period 1770-1830, where the contrasting patterns of Methodist expansion in Britain and Ireland are explored. Concurring with Thompson and Halévy that Methodism was a stabilising force within British society, Hempton, nevertheless argues that the issue of Ireland and the advance of Catholicism was key to Wesleyanism's stance.[29] The support of Wesleyan Methodist leaders for the Established Church is thus presented as a product of the antagonism of Methodism towards the Roman Catholic Church and the fear that it was attempting to undermine the essential Protestantism of the English Constitution.

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[28] The term connexion was used generally in the eighteenth century in social, political and economic contexts, to refer those connected to some person or group, and to the relationship thus created. The term was initially used in Methodism to denote the relationship that the preachers and societies had with John Wesley, and therefore with each other. 'Connexionalism' became a technical term used to describe a particular principle of church organisation that emphasised the interdependence of the constituent parts, recognising common rules of discipline and transferable membership. Receiving a minister 'into full connexion' denoted acknowledgment of their right to preach (and later administer the sacraments) within Wesleyanism. Methodism in England and Ireland thus described their relationship as connexional, and permitted full transfer of members and ministers between the two organisations.

[29] Elie Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, vols 1-4 (London, 1926-27) and E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963).

The relationship between British and Irish Methodism also emerges as an important factor in their response to politics in the later nineteenth century. While Hempton presents a convincing argument that Wesleyanism was inherently Conservative throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, this is not the case later in the century when nonconformity became closely associated with the Liberal Party. David Bebbington has suggested that commencing in the 1840s, there was shift towards political Liberalism amongst the nonconformist Churches in Britain.[30] Although the methodology of electoral sociology has now been largely discredited as a mode of ascertaining the political loyalties of large communities, Bebbington effectively illuminates the political concerns and allegiance of the leadership of Methodism in England and how they attempted to assert influence as a political pressure group.[31] The period following electoral reform in England in 1867 heralded a period of religious influence in British political life not seen since Cromwell's Commonwealth in the seventeenth century.[32] The nonconformists relished their opportunity to shape the political debate, and found the Liberal leader Gladstone particularly amenable to adopting their demands.[33] This analysis has provoked a re-assessment of the political tendencies of the Wesleyans, which concluded that they were predominantly Liberal from 1832, and re-configured Methodism within the framework of evangelical belief and activism. [34]

The role of religion and specifically the 'nonconformist conscience' in shaping Liberal policies under Gladstone has been emphasised in recent historiography.[35] This

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[30] D. W. Bebbington, 'Nonconformity and electoral sociology, 1867-1918', *Historical Journal*, 27:3 (1984), pp633-656 and p.638.

[31] *Ibid.*, and J. M. Lawrence and Miles Taylor (eds), *Party, State and Society: Electoral Behaviour in Britain since 1820*, (Aldershot, 1997).

[32] Bebbington, *The nonconformist conscience*, p.ix.

[33] Bebbington, 'Gladstone and the Nonconformists', pp369-82 and Timothy Larsen, 'A nonconformist conscience? Free Churchmen in Parliament in nineteenth-ventury England', *Parliamentary History*, 24:1 (2005), pp107-119.

[34] D. N. Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland: From the Glorious revolution to the Decline of Empire*, (Cambridge, 1996); Bebbington, *The nonconformist conscience*; *idem*, 'Nonconformity and electoral sociology, 1867-1918', *idem*, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A history from the 1730s to the 1980s*, (London, 1989).

[35] J. P. Parry, *Democracy and Religion: Gladstone and the Liberal Party, 1867-1875*, (Cambridge, 1986); *idem*, *The rise and fall of Liberal government in Victorian Britain*, (London, 1993); *idem*, 'Religion and the collapse of Gladstone's first government, 1970-1874', *Historical Journal*, 25:1, (1982), pp71-101; Bebbington, 'Gladstone and the Nonconformists' pp369-82; *idem*, *The nonconformist conscience*; *idem*, 'Nonconformity and electoral sociology'; Larsen, 'A nonconformist conscience?'; Christopher Oldstone-Moore, 'The fall of Parnell: Hugh Price Hughes and the nonconformist conscience', *Éire-*

perceived alignment of Wesleyanism with Liberalism was entrenched in political discourse by the 1870s and was dominated by 'anti-Catholicism, imperialism and denominational particularism'.[36] This was reinforced by the rise of the 'nonconformist conscience' in the late 1880s and 1890s, epitomised by the campaigns for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts and the pressure applied for the resignation of the Irish Parliamentary Party leader, Charles Stewart Parnell. Within Wesleyanism this phenomenon coincided with the ascendancy of the progressive minister Hugh Price Hughes, editor of the *Methodist Times* and President of the Methodist Conference in 1898.[37] The extent to which Hughes was representative of the majority of Wesleyans is, however, contested, as the incidence of Tories among leading Wesleyans remained higher than in other English nonconformist denominations.[38] The perception by contemporaries and historians that British nonconformity was a directing force in British politics between the years 1867 and 1914, suggests that the maintenance of the strong relationship with British Methodism would have been to the political advantage of Irish Methodism as a means of exerting pressure on the government by proxy. This thesis will explore this relationship and assess the response of British Methodism to the concerns of the Irish brethren, and *vice versa.*

The third strand of historiography that has developed in recent decades concerns the international connections of evangelical religion and its relationship to the British Empire. Overseas mission was a consistent priority of Methodism in the nineteenth century: the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) was established in 1818. The particular role that Irish Methodists believed that they fulfilled in the missionary endeavour is evident in the contemporary nineteenth-century sources, and this tradition has subsequently been explored in detail by historians.[39] This distinct Irish contribution to world Methodism was presented at home as

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Ireland, 30:4 (1996), pp94-110; and Greg Cuthertson, 'Pricking the "nonconformist conscience": religion against the South African War', in Donal Lowry (ed.), *The South African War reappraised,* (Manchester, 2000), pp169-187.

[36] Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture,* p.38

[37] Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes: Founder of a New Methodism, Conscience of a New Nonconformity,* (Cardiff, 1999).

[38] Stephen Koss, 'Wesleyanism and Empire', *Historical Journal,* 18:1 (1975), pp105-118.

[39] *Wesleyan Conference Minutes of Great Britain* [hereafter *WCM*], *1905; Christian Guardian,* 29 November 1865; N. W. Taggart, *The Irish in World Methodism, 1706-1900* (London, 1986) p.13; *idem, William Arthur: first among Methodists,* (London, 1993); and Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit.*

compensation for the weak state of the Irish Church frequently attributed the depreciation of the membership through emigration. Several new world connexions credited Irish immigrants with the foundation and sustention of their churches throughout the century.[40] A by-product of this overseas activity was the complex and multi-layered relationships that Irish Methodists had with their sister churches across the world, evident through the exchange of dignitaries for the annual Conference.[41] The significance of these relationships to the perception of Irish Methodism at home and across the world has been highlighted as significant by a number of historians but has yet to be fully explored.[42]

It is difficult to assess the impact that overseas mission had on the average congregant, although support for the WMMS remained strong throughout the period. The commitment to mission also affected the attitude of Methodists to the British Empire. The sole study that specifically addresses this issue focuses on the Methodist leader, social radical and pro-Home Ruler, Hugh Prices Hughes, who 'celebrated the British Empire as a triumph of Wesleyan influences'.[43] Hughes, through his newspaper the *Methodist Times,* encouraged broad support among English Wesleyans for the Boer War, promoting an understanding that war was permissible where Britain was not the aggressor, but was defending her interests or was combating acute injustices such as slavery. More recent studies have taken a wider view of attitudes across the century, emphasising the moral quandary many nonconformists faced, evaluating the relative evils associated with the Empire and its expansion and the potential benefits of imperial expansion.[44] Bebbington highlights how attitudes shifted during the later part of the nineteenth century from deep suspicion concerning imperial expansion that co-existed with ascribing imperial successes to the work of Divine Providence to active support for the British Empire around the turn of the century. Drawing on this body of existing research, this

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[40] For example, in 1871, the Canadian Methodist conference claimed an equal number of Irish-born ministers serving their congregations as did the Irish themselves, with similar claims also emanating from the United States. (*WCM, 1871*).
[41] *WCM, 1871.*
[42] Taggart, *William Arthur; idem, The Irish in World Methodism;* and Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit.*
[43] Stephen Koss, 'Wesleyanism and Empire' p.109.
[44] D. W. Bebbington, 'Atonement, Sin and Empire' Andrew Porter (ed.), *The Imperial Horizons of British Protestant Missions, 1880-1914,* (Cambridge, 2003), pp14-31.

study will explore attitudes towards the Empire among Irish Methodists, particularly concentrating on how these attitudes influenced the debates surrounding the Home Rule crises of 1886-1914.

The Methodist Church in Ireland in the late nineteenth century

In the eighteenth century Methodism introduced a new form of evangelical religious enthusiasm to Ireland. John Wesley was one of the first English evangelicals and articulated the belief in the need for the individual to experience the love of God and subsequently pursue personal holiness. Wesley bequeathed to his followers this core belief, and it is the key factor in placing the worldwide Methodist Church comfortably within the evangelical wing of the theological spectrum. Evangelicalism first arose in the eighteenth century with the intention of reforming the public worship of the Established Church and, as noted above, emphasised personal holiness. The key aspects of this reform programme have been neatly summarised by Bebbington:

> *conversionism,* the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism,* the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicalism,* a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism,* a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.[45]

Another defining feature of the evangelical movement, and one which was particularly associated with Wesley's teachings, was the doctrine of 'Christian perfectionism' or 'scriptural holiness'. John Wesley argued that it was 'God's purpose to bring all believers to a state where they no longer sinned, but were "made perfect in love"' through the active intervention of the Holy Spirit.[46] This was a controversial doctrine as it directly contradicted the Calvinist belief that everyone remained unregenerate sinners throughout their lives. Furthermore, even among those who subscribed to the principle, arguments persisted as to whether Christian perfection arrived as a 'second blessing' or as a more gradual process taking a whole lifetime. Despite the controversy associated with Christian perfection, it was revived in America as a key component of evangelicalism from the 1860s. Through

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[45] Bebbington, *Evangelical Religion in Modern Britain,* pp2-3.

[46] J. A. Vickers (ed.), 'Christian Perfection', *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland,* (Peterborough, 2000).

the agency of evangelists such as Phoebe Palmer, the Holiness Movement reintroduced the doctrine to Britain. It became increasingly popular and was the catalyst for the well-known Keswick Conventions, the first of which was held in 1875.[47]

Evangelicalism was always pan-Protestant in nature. It was particularly influential among groups who attempted to revive the spirituality of the Church of England. Evangelical theology was, however, slow to have much impact on the Presbyterian Churches, since the emphasis on conversion was seen to contradict the central Calvinist tenet of salvation of the elect. Miller notes, however, that this denomination did not altogether escape the influence of evangelicalism, highlighting the schisms between 'old light' and 'new light' synods as an example of the theological divisions.[48] Further, a parallel development that responded to the needs of the laity is noted. It comprised a division in the forms of popular religious enthusiasm, which Miller respectively categorises as 'old leaven' and 'new leaven'. Although these categories may appear to be merely popular reflections of theological preoccupations, Miller convincingly presents it as a far more complex phenomenon in which the two are in fact separate in origin. This hypothesis rests upon the market-place model where religion is considered a manufactured commodity, and 'professionals of different religious systems compete not only with each other's products but also with the home-brewed output of their own customers'.[49] As a result the various churches adopted the ideas of the people in an effort to win congregations. In this context religious change is seen 'primarily as an outcome of complex interactions between religious professionals and ordinary folk – between official religion and popular religion'.[50] With regard to Methodism, it is clear that it is a primarily 'new leaven' movement, evangelical in theology, responsive to a popular need to revitalise the Established Church and successfully convincing the authorities that it did not constitute a political threat.

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[47] Bebbington, *Evangelical Religion in Modern Britain,* pp151-180.
[48] Miller, 'Did Ulster Presbyterians have a devotional revolution?' pp39-41, 45.
[49] *Ibid.,* p.52.
[50] *Ibid.,* p.2.

Intense mistrust of the Catholic Church and what was perceived as 'Romish superstition' was another key feature of religion of all Protestant denominations.[51] This had been common the Reformers' protests against the abuses of the medieval Church. For evangelicals, particularly in Ireland, it embodied a greater part of their mission to reinstate 'scriptural holiness'. This anti-Catholic feeling primarily manifested itself in two ways in the nineteenth century: as abhorrence of sacerdotalism and as a protest against Rome's political power. This was exemplified by a resolution passed at the Irish Methodist Conference in 1867, protesting against increasing 'ritualism' in the Church of England under the influence of the Oxford Movement, which was seen as betraying the values of the Reformation.[52] Evangelicals also feared the ultramontanism that the Roman hierarchy were espousing at the time, considering it 'hostile to civil and religious liberty' by appearing to advocate that a Catholic's first loyalty was to the Pope, a potentially hostile foreign power, rather than to the civil authorities of the United Kingdom.[53] Most nineteenth-century Protestants believed that the civil and religious liberty enjoyed by subjects of the British Crown were direct products of the English Reformation and were in danger of being eroded should Roman Catholics gain power and influence. This was a primary cause of the confrontations regarding education and frequently inspired Methodists to declare:

> Ireland is really the battlefield of Christianity in the present age. The most formidable foe that evangelical truth has ever been called upon to confront, has its stronghold here.[54]

It is, therefore, apparent that the mistrust of Roman Catholicism was not solely because of theological disagreement, but was much further reaching, encompassing the political and social spheres.

The greatest difference between the respective positions of the Methodist Church in England and that in Ireland was the relative number of adherents. This affected the churches' self-definition within society. In Ireland, the major confessional division

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[51] *ICM, 1865.*
[52] *Ibid., 1867.*
[53] *WCM, 1868.*
[54] *ICM, 1864.*

had always fallen along Protestant-Catholic lines. Therefore, all the Protestant Churches tended to define themselves on terms of their opposition to the Church of Rome, resulting in an increasingly homogeneous evangelical theology. On the other side of the Irish Sea, the principal religious divide was between the Established Church and the other Protestant denominations forming the Nonconformist-Dissenting bloc, of which the Wesleyan Methodist Church was the largest constituent part. English Methodists, therefore, defined themselves in opposition to the Church of England and consequently were less likely to find common cause with Anglicans on social, political and theological matters.[55]

Despite the continuing theological and ecclesiological differences between Protestant groups, it has been characteristic of recent historiography to emphasise the pan-denominational nature of evangelical religion.[56] This movement significantly weakened denominational loyalty among the populace as it specifically stressed the need to attend churches in which the Bible was emphasised over tradition and reason regardless of the denomination. This trend is particularly evident in urban areas, such as Belfast, where a number of different denominations were active.[57] It is not clear, however, that evangelicalism facilitated much meaningful cooperation between church hierarchies, or local congregations except perhaps as a matter of political expediency. Discussions concerning 'home reunion' with Anglicanism foundered in the 1890s over the issue of apostolic succession, and it was not until 1904 that the Irish Conference started exchanging official fraternal greetings with the Presbyterian General Assembly.[58] Methodist membership figures were, however, less likely than other denominations to be augmented by a transient evangelical body with loose denominational allegiances, because such groups were unlikely to be prepared to submit themselves to the discipline of the church, and consequently excluded themselves from official Methodist membership figures.

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[55] This was further demonstrated in the British Conference's rejection of the Archbishop of Canterbury's proposals for home reunion in 1890. *WCM, 1890*

[56] Hempton and Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism*; Bebbington, *Evangelical Religion in Modern Britain;* Holmes, *Religious Revivals in Britain and Ireland;* and Megahey, *The Irish Protestant Churches.*

[57] Hempton and Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism*, pp105-128.

[58] *ICM, 1890* and *1904.*

It is in the political arena that the unifying factors of evangelicalism were most apparent, with the dual emergence of a Protestant political identity in Ireland and the nonconformist conscience in England creating powerful pressure groups able to significantly influence government policy. Throughout this period the Churches perceived themselves as being in direct competition with the other denominations for members, and were not inclined to overcome theological differences for purely political gain. Political alliances tended to be for means of expediency and were not permanent. For example, the 'alliance of papists and Dissenters' preceding the Irish Church Act of 1869, is rightly considered 'bizarre' by Foster since these two groups quickly reverted to antagonistic opposition.[59] The appearance, however, of para-church organisations, such as the Evangelical Alliance in 1846 and the Free Church Congress in 1892, partially obscures the fact that serious theological and ecclesiological differences remained between the denominations.

It is therefore evident that Protestants in Ireland and the various nonconformist groups in England were prepared to cooperate in matters perceived as politically important. Theological and ecclesiological differences were, however, too great to permit any church amalgamation or productive dialogue at a national level during the course of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the emphasis placed on the pan-denominational nature of evangelicalism causes many historians to underestimate the diversity of opinion within the increasingly polarized political blocs, and how a single denomination might choose to influence its members on political matters through official pronouncements, the religious press and community relations.

The late nineteenth century was a period of rapid change within Irish Methodism, as it struggled to reconcile its inherited structure based on being a religious society within the Established Church, to being an independent denomination. Although the main body of Wesleyan Methodism had separated from the Church of Ireland in 1818 over the issue of administration of the sacraments, it took many decades for their affection for their parent body to wane, and for the Connexion to adopt the trappings of a distinct Church structure.[60] This process included the reassessment of

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[59] R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, (London, 1989), p.396.
[60] This is discussed more fully in Chapter Two.

Methodist worship practices, especially the role of the class meeting, and the status of the sacraments, and the inclusion of children as members. On an organisational level, these developments entailed a shift away from ministerial domination and increasing the role of the laity.

The complex structure of the Methodist Church in England and Ireland requires some explanation since the development of the organisation was primarily organic, having grown out of the original 'Rules for Societies' rather than being planned. John Wesley had never intended that the Methodist Societies should split from the Established Church and thus did not structure Methodism to function independently. This caused numerous complications after his death in 1791 as leading preachers attempted to create a viable organisation capable of acting independently but also conforming as closely as possible to the ideals of its founder.

In 1744 John Wesley convened the first Conference of Wesleyan preachers in Britain and Ireland. This became in effect the governing body of Methodism and was responsible for the placement of preachers and for ministerial discipline. This first Conference was comprised of the hundred most senior Methodist preachers. This was followed in 1752 by the first Conference of Irish preachers, convened by Wesley and inaugurating the division of the Methodist bodies in England and Ireland, although the two bodies remained close and continued to share a President. The hundred most senior ministers were established in the Deed of Declaration of 1784 as the formal governing body of Wesleyan Methodism for both Britain and Ireland, with the Irish Conference nominating eleven representatives. This body was thereafter known as the Legal Hundred from which the President of the conference was chosen annually. The President was the most senior Methodist minister for the year, the public face of Methodism, and chaired the Conferences of both Britain and Ireland. The Wesleyan branch continued to have very close relations with the English Church through the President, and from 1868, the Irish Wesleyan Conference nominated a Vice-President from the Irish members of the Legal Hundred to perform the same role in Ireland. The Conference, however, only met once during the year, typically towards the end of June, when the major decisions about the future year were made. However, an executive body entitled the

Committee of Privileges and Public Exigencies could be convened by the President (or Vice-President) to respond to urgent developments in the rest of the year.

The maintenance of a joint presidential role for Ireland and Britain highlights both the intimacy of fraternal relations, but also the moves for increased independence of the Irish Church. It is, however, interesting to note that a number of influential Irish ministers, particularly in the mid-nineteenth century, transferred their membership to the English Conference, making it responsible for their placements and their disciplining body, but also allowing them to rise to positions of influence that they might not otherwise have achieved. A classic example of this is the case of William Arthur[61] who transferred his membership to England in order to be eligible for overseas mission work (Ireland did not have a separate Mission Society). Arthur demonstrates the closeness of association between the two Conferences and since he is not an isolated example of this movement, perhaps indicates a greater degree of Irish influence within the English Methodist hierarchy that informed the political position taken by the English Conference with regard to Irish matters. The fraternal greetings expressed at the beginning of each conference are thus more than mere politeness; they reflected the deeper emotional and institutional ties between the two churches, with the Irish Methodists dependent on England for continual support. This degree of intimacy with each other's affairs make the arguments of the late nineteenth century all the more fascinating, where for the first time major political differences are apparent and cannot be obscured by theological agreement or gospel platitudes. The true significance of this is demonstrated during the three Home Rule crises where even close familial ties could not reconcile either side to the position taken by their co-religionists on the other side of St George's Channel.

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[61] Held in high regard within both Irish and British Methodism, William Arthur was born in Antrim in 1819. Raised an Anglican, he converted to Methodism as a teenager before entering the ministry in 1838. He served abroad for many years, before returning to serve in England as the Secretary of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. A noted author of religious texts, including the *Tongue of Fire,* (London, 1856), Arthur served as the President of British Methodism in 1866 and as Principal of Methodist College, Belfast between 1868-1871, before again returning to serve in England. Politically, until the introduction of the government of Ireland bill in 1885 Arthur was a staunch Liberal, however, he was vehemently opposed to Home Rule and campaigned throughout his life for the maintenance of the Union.

Unlike the Church of Ireland or the Catholic Church, the basic administrative unit of Methodism was not the parish, but the circuit. From the very earliest days, Methodism had more societies than licensed ministers. A circuit, therefore, consisted normally of two or more chapels, assigned at least one stipendiary minister, but would also have the services of local lay preachers who would lead many of the services. Circuits were administered by the leaders' meeting consisting of ministers, lay preachers and leaders of the mid-week class meetings. This body then sent representatives to the local district synod, chaired by a clerical superintendent, which was responsible for preparing the annual reports to Conference on membership, finances and the fabric of the church. The Irish districts varied considerably in size: the Belfast district contained the largest number of circuits but was fairly compact geographically, whereas the Waterford district contained only seven circuits but covered the whole of south-eastern corner of the country below Dublin.

While the basic ecclesiology of Methodism was maintained throughout the nineteenth, and into the twentieth century, several significant modifications were undertaken as the Wesleyan connexion struggled to adjust to its status as an independent denomination. The main body of Methodism in Ireland, the Wesleyan Methodist Society, separated from the Church of Ireland in 1818 regarding the administration of the sacraments. A smaller body, the Primitive Wesleyan Methodists continued to exist as a religious society within the Established Church until Methodist reunion in 1878.[62] Although both the British and Irish societies had to make similar adjustments on course to becoming a denomination, the Irish Conference was quicker to respond to changing circumstances and propose adaptations to various Methodist procedures. The possibility of reunion between the two Methodists bodies in Ireland, the Wesleyans and Primitive Wesleyans[63] in the 1870s prompted the Irish Conference to resolve to admit lay representatives to the body in 1876, encouraging the British Conference to emulate their decision the

[62] This is discussed more fully in Chapter Two.
[63] The Primitive Wesleyan Connexion was a smaller branch of Irish Methodism, which had remained as a society within the Church of Ireland in 1818, rather than forming a separate denomination. This is discussed more fully in Chapters One and Two.

following year.[64] Likewise, Irish Methodism responded more rapidly to the concerns of its congregations regarding the stringent prerequisites for membership, relaxing the requirement of regular attendance at the mid-week meeting and permitting Sunday worshippers to appear on the membership rolls.[65] This brought the denomination into line with the practice of other Protestant churches, and corresponded with the development of Methodism from a religious society, to a denomination, the official change in nomenclature having taken place in 1892.[66]

The late nineteenth century also saw an explosion of social awareness in Irish Methodism as they attempted to combat the social ills, especially drunkenness and gambling, which they feared were becoming rampant in the industrialising cities, particularly Belfast and Londonderry. Methodists were active in the Irish Temperance League established in 1854, and the Conference repeatedly advocated that individuals 'refrain entirely from the use of these drinks' and promoted the reform of the licensing laws.[67] Non-alcoholic communion wine was first permitted in 1878, and by the end of the century was used universally.[68] In addition, in the 1880s and 1890s saw the establishment of two City Missions in Belfast, and an additional two in Dublin and Londonderry respectively. These provided a three-strand programme: religious services and meetings; a 'cultural' programme of concerts, lectures and recreation; and the provision of social relief to the local community and designed to help individuals become self-supporting.[69] Foreign as well as local missionary activity was encouraged, primarily through the London-based Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, to whom (through the English Conference) Irish ministers could apply if they wished to serve abroad.

Education was also a recurring issue throughout the period. Methodist College, Belfast was opened in 1868 to complement the work of the Church's existing educational institution Wesley College in Dublin that had opened in 1845. This new educational endeavour coincided with the new Liberal government's bill to expand

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[64] *ICM, 1876;* and *WCM, 1877.*
[65] *ICM, 1907.* This is discussed more fully in Chapter One.
[66] *Ibid., 1892.*
[67] Megahey, *Irish Protestant Churches,* p.49 and *ICM, 1884.*
[68] Jeffery, *Irish Methodism,* p.69.
[69] Cooney, *The Methodists in Ireland,* p.91.

primary education across the United Kingdom. Methodists in both Britain and Ireland had clear ideas about what should be included in this bill, and their respective campaigns exposed differences between the two bodies. Education reappeared on the agenda of the Irish Conference on a nearly annual basis, but more especially when the government attempted to appease Catholic demands and create a National University for Ireland.[70] This thesis will, therefore, explore how Methodist social and theological preoccupations influenced their political actions and how Wesleyan ecclesiastical structures were utilised for political purposes during the period 1868-1914.

Sources

The primary sources used in this thesis are varied in nature and thus require a brief explanation. The personal papers and correspondence of a number of prominent Methodists have been used in the earlier chapters, where there were existing and accessible archival deposits. Unfortunately, little survives from the later period, particularly the years surrounding the third Home Rule crisis of 1912-14. Similarly, there exist significant repositories of pamphlet material aimed specifically at Methodists for the years 1861-93, whereas during the passage of the third Government of Ireland bill most efforts were focussed on the production of pamphlets articulating a specifically political view, rather than framing the arguments for a specific religious audience. The official publications of the Methodist Churches in Britain and Ireland, primarily the annual Conference minutes, exist for the whole period and are an accurate record of the business of the connexion and their official resolutions. The denominational press was also very active and widely read in the late nineteenth century with rival publications providing a weekly snapshot of Methodist affairs.

The Methodist press in the late nineteenth century was a dynamic platform for the public discussion of ideas. The newspaper occupies an ambiguous territory both shaping and reflecting the views of its readership, and attempting to direct public policy. The strong political identities adopted by the Methodist journals meant that readers bought a newspaper that confirmed their pre-existing prejudices, rather than

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[70] *ICM, 1880, 1884, 1898, 1899, 1900, 1901, 1903, 1907, 1908,* and *1909.*

creating converts.[71] Peatling, nevertheless, argues that during the late nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries, 'politics and press were intimately connected' and politicians courted the editors of influential newspapers.[72] This is equally true of the Methodist denominational press, which exerted pressure on the Conference regarding ecclesiastical decisions and by the 1890s, as representatives of nonconformity, on the government.

In the mid-century the *Watchman* had been the pre-eminent Methodist journal, articulating the Conservative political views of the Wesleyan leadership, having been founded to supplement the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* that printed mainly devotional articles.[73] In 1861 the *Methodist Recorder* was established to provide an alternative Liberal political viewpoint, indicating a movement away from the traditional association of Wesleyanism Methodism with Toryism. The decline of the *Watchman* was confirmed in the 1860s, and it ceased publication in 1884. Until 1859, Irish Methodism had no separate denominational journal, but this changed when the *Irish Evangelist* was established in Dublin to promote the events of the Ulster revival.[74] Published monthly, the newspaper suffered from a lack of capital and despite its foundation in the midst of the revival, it never achieved mass popularity. Many Irish Methodists in this period chose to subscribe to the London-based newspapers, which consistently covered significant Irish events and published the opinions of Irish Methodists, again demonstrating that congruence of Irish and British Methodist interests.

The 1880s saw two significant new departures in Methodist publishing. A new weekly denominational newspaper for Irish Methodism, the *Christian Advocate,* was founded in 1883 in Belfast and in 1885 the *Methodist Times: A Journal of Religious and Social Movement* was established under the editorial leadership of Hugh Price Hughes. The parallels between the *Christian Advocate* and the *Methodist Times* are striking. Both weekly newspapers marked a new direction in their respective national

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[71] G. K. Peatling, *British opinion and Irish self-government, 1865-1925: from unionism to liberal commonwealth,* (Dublin, 2001), p.7.
[72] *Ibid.*
[73] D. N. Hempton, "'The Watchman" and "religious politics" in the 1830s', *Proceedings of the Wesleyan Historical Society,* 1 (1979), pp2-14.
[74] Cooney, *The Methodists in Ireland,* p.85.

Methodist societies, highlighting a break with the traditional values and striking towards a new conception of the denomination within Britain and Ireland. As noted, the late-nineteenth century witnessed the transformation of Methodism in Britain and Ireland from being connexions of ministers towards increased lay involvement. The *Methodist Times* and *Christian Advocate* appealed thus to the social and political concerns of their lay readership, moving away from the previous preoccupation of the denominational press with internal affairs and moral musings.

The *Christian Advocate* replaced the *Irish Evangelist* as the principal journal of Irish Methodism and its base in Belfast was indicative of the transfer of power, from the wealth of Dublin, to the popular heartlands in Ulster. The new journal was quite different from the dry, factual reporting of the *Irish Evangelist.* The *Christian Advocate* was eager to engage with contemporary political issues, and adopted in its editorials and articles the more dynamic 'new journalism' approach, pioneered by W. T. Stead in the *Pall Mall Gazette.* Characteristic of this style was the dominance of the editorial column, frequently polemical in style, exhorting the readership to consider specific aspects of the social or political condition. This was complemented by commissioned articles from high-profile Methodists in support of the cause, and the publication of extensive correspondence to the editor, engaging the readers in lively debate on current affairs. This new approach was particularly evident under the editorial leadership of the Rev. Dr Henry Evans, in the years 1885-8. Evans was very clear about the issues facing contemporary Methodism and was not afraid to tackle them head on, even when this brought the journal into conflict with other branches of Methodism.

At its inception, the *Christian Advocate* appeared to have a similar form and function to the *Methodist Times,* reflecting the voice of educated, Liberal, Methodist opinion. Indeed, during the 1885 election, both the *Christian Advocate* and *Methodist Times* highlighted the same issues as being of key concern for the forthcoming parliament – temperance, social purity and education – that were the cornerstones of the nonconformist social movement. This political harmony was, however, unsustainable after the introduction of the Home Rule bill into Parliament, as British and Irish Methodists took diametrically opposed positions. The tensions that this bill

engendered within Methodism will, therefore, be explored in the following chapters. Methodism in the United Kingdom was united in its theological and social outlook, but, despite its official apolitical stance, political divisions took their toll on the connexional relationship.

The analysis presented here will examine how Irish Methodists reacted to political developments between the first administration of William Gladstone in 1868 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. It will seek to explore the relationship between the Irish and British Methodist Connexions and challenge the view that there was a homogeneous Irish Protestant bloc with a unanimous political voice in the late nineteenth century. The first chapter, therefore, will examine who were the Methodists of Ireland between 1868-1914. This demographic analysis will reveal the strength of Methodism in Ireland, its geographical distribution and electoral influence of its members. The second chapter will explore the emergence of a distinct Methodist political position during Gladstone's first administration, specifically focussing on the passage of the Irish Church Act of 1869 and the Education Act of 1870. The following chapters will analyse the development of Methodist political attitudes over the course of the three Home Rule crises of 1885, 1893 and 1912-14. They will chart how the Methodist response to the proposals to establish a Dublin legislature changed over the course of the three episodes.

Chapter One:
Methodist Demography, 1861-1914

Methodist Membership

The concerns and preoccupations of the Methodist Church in Ireland between 1861 and 1914 cannot be understood without reference to its numerical strength and dispersal of its congregations. The analysis presented below argues that during this period, Irish Methodism was widely disseminated across the country and consequently was more influential than previously thought. The denomination thrived in urban centres across the island and became concentrated in, but not exclusive to, the northern province of Ulster. In contrast to the prevailing demographic trend, which saw the population of Ireland decline, Methodist membership steadily increased throughout the late nineteenth century in three of the four Irish provinces. This expansion has been overlooked by historians, who have focussed on the overall population decline and the concentration of Protestantism within Ulster and its 'long retreat' in the rest of the country.[1]

The quantification of Methodist membership in late nineteenth-century Ireland took two forms: the official church membership figures and, from 1861, the decennial census. These contrasting sets of figures allow the historian to analyse the number of active and committed Methodists in the country and the relative strength and influence of the denomination in comparison to other churches. The official membership records of Irish Methodism had been compiled since their first annual Conference in 1744. The publication of membership figures in the annual Conference minutes was practiced by both the major Methodist denominations in Ireland, the Wesleyan and Primitive Wesleyan Connexions throughout the nineteenth century until re-union in 1878. The practice was subsequently continued by the new combined society. The data was collected and collated by officials within the local circuit and presented to the quarterly district meeting for verification, prior to being submitted to the annual Conference. This data is an accurate record of

[1] Liam Kennedy, *Colonialism, Religion and Nationalism in Ireland,* (Belfast, 1996), pp1-34.

individuals active within each circuit who fulfilled the strict membership criteria of regular attendance at Sunday worship and the class meeting.[2] Both the Wesleyan and Primitive Wesleyan Connexions operating in Ireland retained virtually identical conditions for membership throughout their period of estrangement allowing direct comparisons between the two.[3]

Methodist membership reflected John Wesley's vision of a religious society within the Established Church, governed by strict qualification criteria. Membership for the British and Irish Methodist Connexions was calculated on the number of individuals in a circuit possessing a class ticket, indicating regular attendance at the mid-week class meeting. Classes were intended to meet at least once a week as a 'gathering of kindred hearts for spiritual improvement' and membership tickets for these were issued quarterly at the discretion of local ministers on the recommendation of the class leaders who operated as sub-pastors within a circuit.[4] An individual did not qualify for a ticket until they had demonstrated their commitment to Methodism and were 'recommended by a [class] Leader with whom they have met, for at least two months, on trial'.[5] Those who neglected their class attendance, or who were considered to have morally lapsed, were refused tickets by ministers; although there was a right of appeal to the annual Conference.[6] Possession of a class ticket also permitted entry into restricted events such as Love-feasts[7] and facilitated the transference of affiliation across circuits around the country.

These principles of membership were originally drawn up in the eighteenth century and were founded upon the assumption that members would attend public worship on a Sunday at the local Anglican parish church, as was fitting for members of a religious society. The class meeting became the ecclesiological distinctive of Methodism, effectively creating churches within churches. While Methodism

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[2] Robert Currie, A. D. Gilbert and Lee Horsley, *Churches and churchgoers: patterns of church growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford, 1977), p.16.
[3] William Arthur, *Ought not the Two Methodist Bodies in Ireland to become one?*, (Dublin, 1869), p.7.
[4] *WCM, 1866.*
[5] *Ibid., 1869.*
[6] *Ibid.*
[7] Love-feasts were simple fellowship meals (often only bread and water) which took place at regular intervals in imitation of the Agape meals of the New Testament Church. In Methodism, they were often accompanied by the sharing of religious experiences and congregational singing.

remained within the Established Church, the restrictive system of calculating membership on the basis of class attendance was consistent with the desire to promote and enforce personal holiness, and 'exclusion from the "Society" was not then exclusion from the Church'.[8] The decisive split between Methodism and the Church of Ireland in 1818 altered the situation however, with Methodism slow to adapt to its new status as a distinct denomination. The result of this slow adjustment was a continuous debate concerning membership qualification criteria throughout the nineteenth century. Compulsory class attendance as a prerequisite to full Methodist membership became increasingly unpopular as the initial evangelical zeal for scriptural holiness waned, and adherents lobbied the Conference for a re-definition of membership to reflect Sunday attendance, similar to that of other major denominations.

Advocates in favour of relaxing the membership criteria proposed extending full membership to include those 'who, Christian and Methodist too in every respect except that of being register in a Class-book'. This would have altered the situation so that consistent Sunday attendees would have the benefits of membership but 'regular attendance at Class would be optional'. Methodist membership in the British Isles would have then corresponded with common practice of the Episcopal Methodist Churches in the United States and Canada.[9] Nevertheless, throughout the nineteenth century, Methodism within the United Kingdom repeatedly asserted that 'the class-meeting is the vital principle of Methodism' on which they were not prepared to compromise, despite pressure from the laity who apparently lacked enthusiasm for mid-week activities as well as attendance at communion.[10] The final decade of the nineteenth century saw full membership extended to those who could not attend class on account of 'afflictions, distance, or other reasons satisfactory to the Ministers of the Leaders' meeting', but only on account of physical impediments to attendance at class.[11] Membership criteria were further clarified in 1908, with the Irish Conference issuing new guidelines regarding eligibility for full membership,

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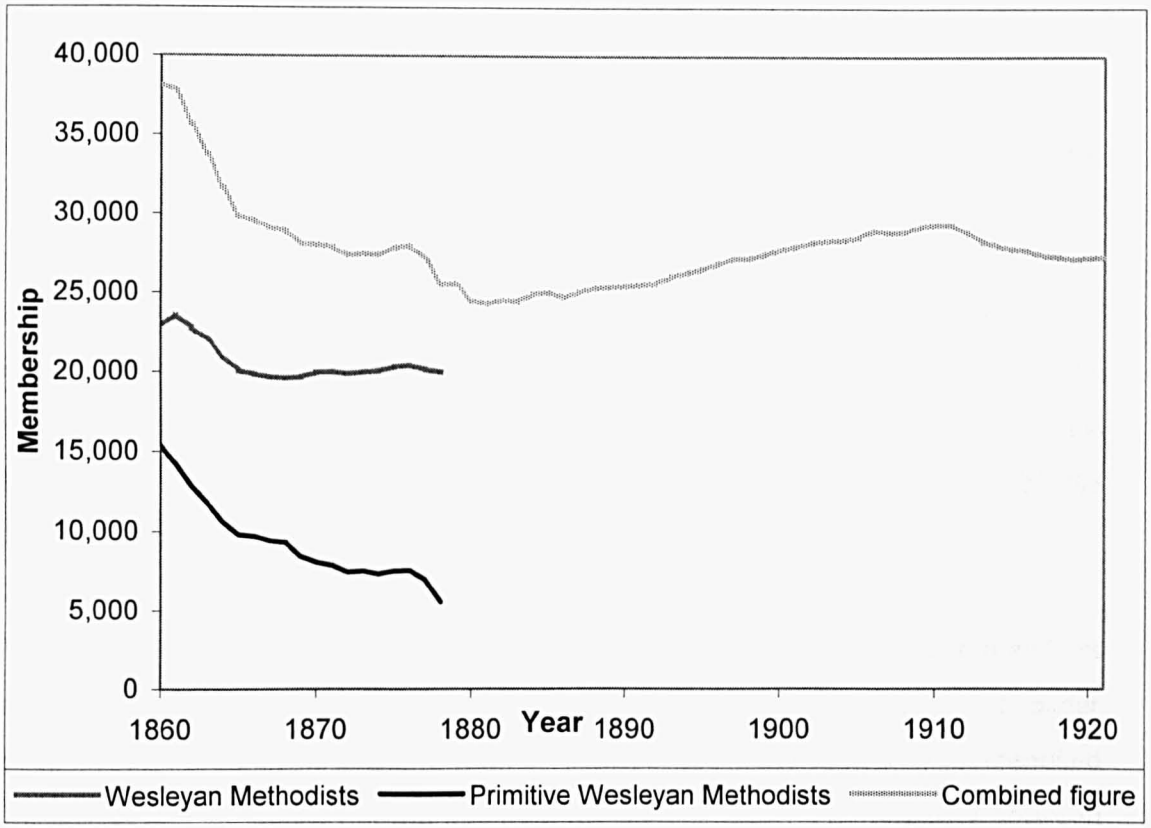
[8] *Methodist Recorder*, 24 November 1865.
[9] *Ibid.*, 10 November 1865 and 24 November 1865.
[10] *WCM, 1866* and *ICM, 1862*.
[11] *ICM, 1892*.

which were adopted by the British Conference the following year.[12] The revised rules emphasised that the class meeting should continue to be 'encouraged as a conduit for spiritual growth' and should not be neglected because attendance was no longer compulsory.[13] Those who opted not to attend class were to be 'placed under the pastoral care of a leader who shall visit them, and their names placed in a class book as normal'; the membership rolls could then be compiled from the class books, as had been the previous practice. Moreover, it was clearly stated that members were expected to 'contribute financially as they are able' and attend the annual aggregate society meetings. The class, therefore, remained the principal method of discipline within all strands of Methodism throughout this period, although the practice of meeting mid-week does appear to have declined. The strict regulation of membership kept the official figures relatively low since they were not a record of all who attended Methodist Sunday services, but only those who fully participated in the class system. Thus, this enumeration method does not account for congregants who identified themselves as Methodist but did not hold full membership.

[12] *ICM, 1908* and *WCM*, 1909.
[13] *ICM, 1908.*

Figure 1: Methodist Membership 1860-1922[14]



The period commencing in 1860 demonstrates a peak in Methodist membership with a combined Wesleyan and Primitive Wesleyans figure of 38,201 members. This was a consequence of the religious enthusiasm engendered by the 1859 Ulster Revival. However, the dramatic decline throughout the 1860s, particularly in the Primitive Wesleyanism, suggests that the adherents gained as a result of the revival were already members of a church, but as a result of the spirit of religious enthusiasm chose to attend extra meetings provided by Methodists through the class system. This commitment, however, was not sustained over a number of years and the number of Primitive Wesleyan adherents rapidly receded to the level of the pre-revival figures for membership: the total of 9,805 in 1865, comparable to the 1859 figure of 9,979. The Primitive Wesleyans also suffered significant decline in the years that immediately preceded Methodist re-union in 1878: the healthy total of 7,529 members in 1876 had decreased to 5,537 in 1878.[15] This indicates that many

[14] *Ibid., 1860* and *Primitive Wesleyan Methodist Conference Minutes* [hereafter *PWCM*], *1860-78.* As noted, the Wesleyan and Primitive Wesleyan Connexions reunited in 1878. This is more fully discussed in chapter two.
[15] *PWCM, 1876-8.*

Primitive Wesleyans considered their primary loyalty to be to the newly-disestablished Church of Ireland. The Primitive Wesleyan preacher the Rev. Robert Orr recalled that when he returned to the Athlone circuit in 1874, the 'large congregation of five years before was completely scattered, and the Chapel was almost empty', a situation he ascribes to disestablishment and the proposed Methodist union.[16] Although the defection of these members was distressing to contemporaries, their secession was solely concerned with Methodist re-union.[17] Subsequently, the newly-combined Church resumed the steady growth evinced by Wesleyanism between 1868 and 1878. This growth continued throughout the final decades of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, peaking at 28,863 members in 1912.

While presenting historians with a detailed picture of active Methodist members across Ireland, the official Conference data does little to illuminate the broader influence of Methodism, since it fails to account for congregants who identified themselves as Methodists but did not hold full membership. The disparity between official members and those who merely identified with the denomination is significant, with many historians of British Methodism multiplying the Conference figure by a factor of three, to give an approximate figure of Methodist affiliation.[18] David Hempton has argued that in England even this multiplied figure may be an underestimation of the true influence of Methodism in the social and political spheres. He suggests that the multiplied figure might be a low estimate, and moreover, Methodism was 'but the largest and most influential element in a much wider evangelical constituency' popular among the urban artisan classes who the government most feared in periods of public disorder.[19]

While these factors clearly do not directly transfer to the Irish context, Methodism was the largest of the 'new leaven' Irish evangelical churches that were steadily gaining adherents in the later nineteenth century.[20] The disparity between official

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[16] Robert Orr, *Extracts from the diary of Robert Orr, Methodist minister, 1833-1915,* (Omagh, 1965), p.38.
[17] See Chapter Two for a fuller discussion on reunion.
[18] D. N. Hempton, *Methodism and politics in British society, 1750-1850,* (London, 1984), p.12.
[19] *Ibid.*
[20] Miller, 'Did Ulster Presbyterians have a devotional revolution?', p.52.

membership figures and self-declared Irish Methodists is further demonstrated by the official returns for services held at army bases in Ireland. In 1881, the number of 'declared Wesleyans' in these camps totalled 1,024, the number of actual members, as recognised by the Conference, was a mere 32.[21] There was clearly a considerable divergence between those that the Conference recognised as members and those who associated themselves with the Methodism, a pattern reinforced by an examination of the census figures.

The decennial census

From 1861, the decennial census for Ireland contained information regarding religious affiliation. It is somewhat surprising that provision for investigating religion was included in the 1860 legislation with no significant opposition in parliament and with encouragement from the Dublin press, since a religious enquiry had been specifically forbidden for the 1851 Irish census.[22] The major area of debate concerned the method to be used to collect and tabulate the data. It was finally resolved that the methodology for data collection for the Irish Census of 1861 should request the head of household to identify the religion of occupants, and allowed the individual 'the most entire freedom of description as concerns their definition of belief'.[23] Space constraints in the enumerators' reports, however, restricted the number of categories. The 1861 census figures were tabulated in eleven categories, although this was reduced to five for the 1871 census to conform to the 'Imperial Census' format.[24] The census achieved a high level of accuracy since from 1861 there was no longer any need to use civilian enumerators and the collection of information had passed to the Royal Irish Constabulary and Dublin Metropolitan Police.[25] Unlike the English Religious Census of 1851, the Irish religious

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[21] *WCM, 1881.*

[22] M. P. A. Macourt, 'The religious inquiry in the Irish census of 1861', *IHS,* 21 (1978-9), p.174.

[23] The only exception to this was the 1861 Census when members of the Church of Ireland were requested to describe their religion as that of the 'Established Church'. Post-disestablishment full freedom of description was permitted to all faiths. (*Census Ire., 1871*).

[24] 1861, Established Church, Presbyterians, Methodists, Independents, Baptists, Society of Friends or Quakers, All other persuasions, Total Protestants, Roman Catholics, Jews, Unspecified, 1871, Protestant Episcopalians, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist and Other, *Census Ire., 1861, 1871.* In the following graphs the categories of Independents, Baptists, Society of Friends, and All other Persuasions have been combined under the heading 'Other' to allow comparison of the data across the whole period.

[25] E. M. Crawford, *Counting the People: A survey of Irish censuses, 1813-1911* (Dublin, 2003), p. 25.

figures were collected as part of the main census proceedings, and from 1871, the census included tables on the religious profession and education of the people. This method of collection avoided the duplication inherent in the British Religious Census of 1851 where attendances were counted rather than attendants. The Irish census reports also tabulate the data by county and province, making it possible to gauge the relative strength of the denomination in various parts of the country. Furthermore, unlike the corresponding English censuses for this period, these boundaries do not significantly change and this facilitates a direct comparison of figures over the whole period.[26] In addition, the census reports are the most accurate method of comparing the relative strengths of the various churches active in the country. Qualification for membership and enumeration varied massively across the denominations, and official church figures do not exist for the Presbyterians for the whole of this period, or indeed, for the Anglican or Roman Catholic Churches at all.[27] However, it is unfortunate that the enumerators' books for the late nineteenth-century censuses were destroyed in 1922, since this hinders socio-economic analysis of adherents to the various churches and data regarding the geographical spread of the small religious groups is completely lost.

Regarding the representation of Methodism in the census, there is the potential for confusion when studying the 1861 and 1871 figures for Methodism, because Primitive Wesleyans Methodists received the sacraments from other denominations until Methodist unification in 1878. It is thus unclear whether in 1861 and 1871 censuses Primitive Wesleyans would have described themselves as 'Methodists' or as members of the denomination from which they received the ordinances. As the Rev. A Hume noted in 1864:

> many persons who were Churchmen [Anglicans] or Presbyterians, attended the meetings of Methodists, Baptists &c., and thus appeared to

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[26] The county town was, however, increasingly included in the main county figures as the population declined. The sole exception to this was in Co. Londonderry, whereby the city was extracted from the county figures in 1901 to reflect its growth. In addition, the Parish of Inishbofin was transferred from Mayo to Galway in 1873.

[27] The Presbyterian Church in Ireland started collecting membership figures in 1891, however, the Church of Ireland and the Roman Catholic Church appear to have relied upon the Census figure and the incumbents' local knowledge to assess membership. (Currie, *et al.*, *Churches and churchgoers*).

> cultivate two forms of Christianity; but in filling up the returns they were represented as the creed which they regarded as more important[28]

Consequently, it is difficult to build an accurate picture of how Primitive Wesleyan Methodists chose to describe themselves on the census form. At the 1861 census however, it seems likely that Primitive Wesleyans attending the Church of Ireland for the ordinances, referred to themselves as of the 'Established Church' to boost numbers at a time when pressure was increasing for its disestablishment and disendowment, with all the associated hysteria about the defeat of Protestantism on the island. Furthermore, it can be seen in the 1871 census report that of the 112 sub-categories of those tabulated under the religious classification of 'Other' although there were 23 'Bible Christians', nine 'Calvinistic Methodists' and seven 'New Connexion Methodists' recorded, not one person recorded their church as 'Primitive Wesleyan Methodist'.[29]

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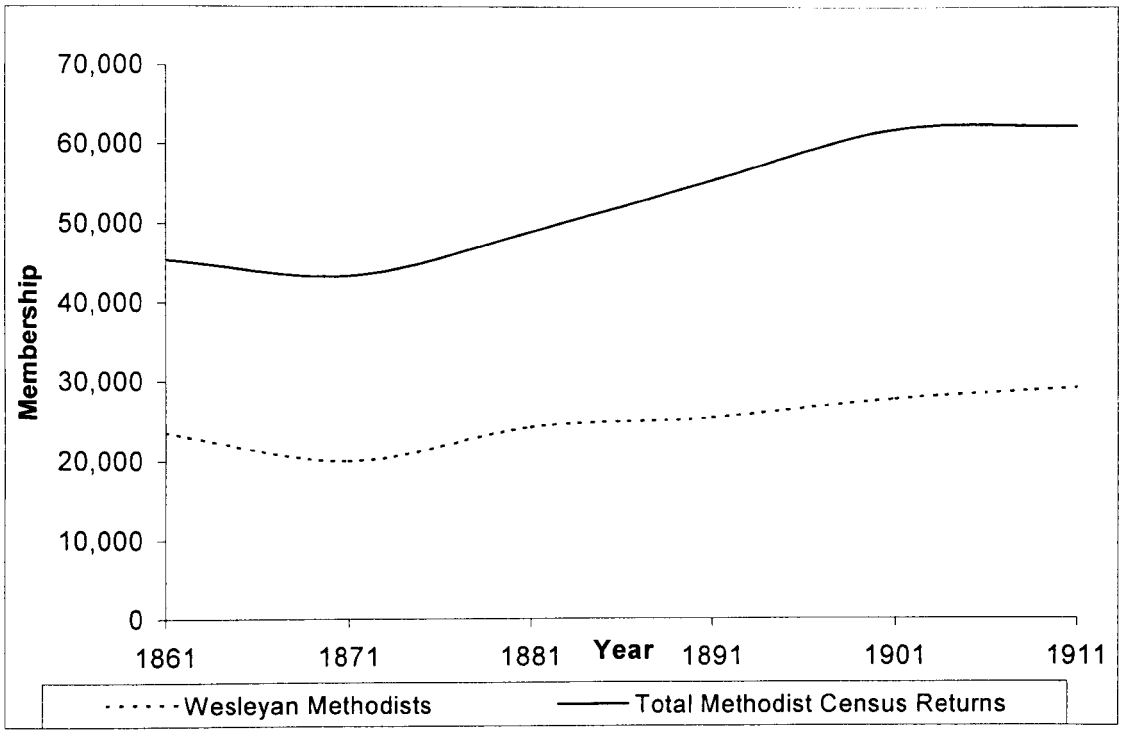
[28] Rev. A. Hume, *Results of the Irish Census of 1861, with special reference to the condition of the Church of Ireland*, (London and Dublin, 1864), p.20.

[29] *Census Ire., 1871*. The Bible Christians, Calvinistic Methodists and New Connexion Methodists are presumably members of the English Churches of that name, which never established a significant presence in Ireland.

Figure 2: Methodist Census data and official membership data, 1861-1911.[30]



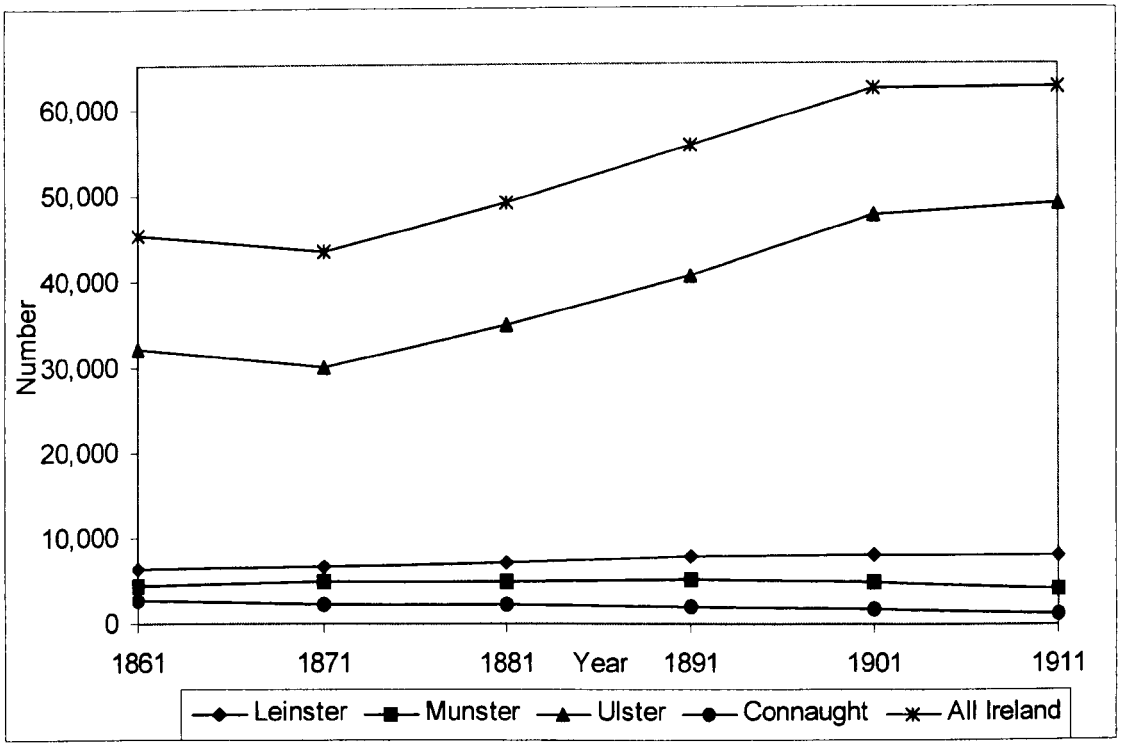
The census of 1861 revealed that 45,399 people in Ireland identified themselves as 'Methodist', which was approximately one per cent of the total population. This is significantly higher than the Wesleyan Methodist official Conference membership figures for the same year, which stood at 23,551, less than half the census figure. Some of the discrepancy may be accounted for by children in Methodist families who were not considered by the Church to have reached the age of accountability, which was required for full membership and are therefore absent from official figures. This does not fully explain the discrepancy however, as the divergence increases slightly over time. This suggests that although more people were choosing to identify themselves with the Methodist Church in Ireland, the census data does not accurately represent their religious activity. This is corroborated by the persistent complaint of the Methodist Conference throughout the nineteenth century that there were an increasing number of nominal members, unprepared to commit themselves to the rigours of the class system.[31] In addition, the discrepancy may

[30] *ICM, 1861-1911* and *Census Ire., 1861-1911.*
[31] J. R. Binns, 'A History of Methodism in Ireland, p.111.

indicate that the Methodists had an influence disproportionate to their size as recorded in their official Conference membership figures.[32]

The later census data shows similar, but more pronounced, trends to that of the Wesleyan Conference data. Between 1871 and 1901, the number of Wesleyan adherents in Ireland increases by 42.74 per cent; after the turn of the century, however, the growth rate slows with the rise in membership in the decade after 1901 of only 376, or 0.6 per cent. The expansion of Methodism is most apparent in the province of Ulster, which reflected the prevalence of Protestantism in that region: the total number of Methodists grew 58.4 per cent between 1871 and 1901 to 47,400. During this period, Methodist adherence also expanded in Leinster and Munster, where an increase of 22.16 per cent and 4.54 per cent occurred respectively.

Figure 3: Census Returns for Methodists in Ireland, 1861-1871.[33]



Across Ireland as a whole, of the four largest denominations Methodism is the only one that shows any increase in affiliates over the period. All the other churches

[32] Myrtle Hill, 'Expressions of faith: Protestantism in Nineteenth-Century Tyrone' in C. Dillon, H. A. Jeffries and W. Nolan (eds), *Tyrone: History and Society* (Dublin, 2000), p.647.
[33] *Census Ire., 1861-1911.*

experienced steady decline, with the Roman Catholic Church showing the sharpest fall in membership, from 4,505,265 in 1861 down to 3,242,670 in 1911. The Anglican population declined from 693,357 in 1861 to 576,611 in 1911, similarly, Presbyterian affiliation dropped to 440,525 in 1911, compared to 523,291 in 1861.[34] Significantly, only the Methodist Church managed to deliver an absolute, as well as a proportional, increase in membership during this period when the population of the island was decreasing. The total population of the country declined from 5,798,967 in 1861 to 4,390,219 whereas in the same period Methodist affiliation grew from 45,399 to 62,382. This suggests that Methodism's vital evangelical and experiential brand of Christianity held a particular appeal during tense political circumstances. This appears to echo its earlier successes in the aftermath of the 1798 rebellion, providing 'individual assurance and communal discipline' for those fearing Catholic resurgence.[35]

Most dramatic though is the increase in those tabulated in the census under the category of 'Other', which between 1861 and 1911 grew from a total of 31,252 to 68,031 persons. This would appear to indicate a sharp rise in the popularity of the smaller churches, such as the Baptists and Congregationalists. The largest proportions of this 'Other' category consisted various types of mainstream evangelical churches affiliated to larger bodies in Great Britain, over 95 per cent in 1871. The proportion of the 'Other' classification affiliated to mainstream denominations declined slightly towards the turn of the century, with more individuals registering their faith in idiosyncratic and esoteric beliefs, with a proliferation of tiny (including single member) denominations appearing on the census.[36] This appears to demonstrate an increasing dissatisfaction with the established denominations within Ireland, encouraging small schismatic bodies to emerge. Aggressively evangelical churches also appear to have benefited from this discontent: between 1861 and 1871 Baptist affiliation increased by 17 per cent and Quakers by 3.22 per cent.[37] It was therefore, relatively marginal groups that were

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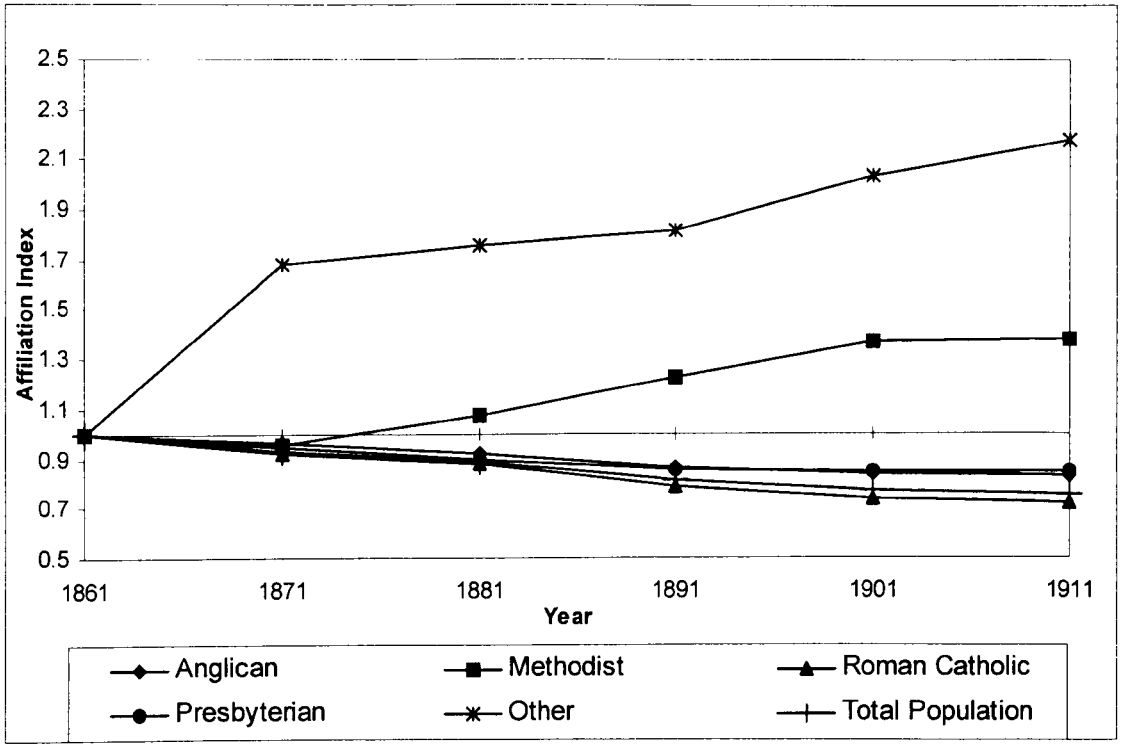
[34] *Census Ire., 1861* and *1911*.
[35] Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, p.28.
[36] Examples include Absorbtionist, Believer in the Lord, Christian Catholic, Eclectic Christian, Hallelujah, New Churchman, Protestant Primitive, Scripturist. (*Census Ire., 1881*).
[37] *Census Ire., 1861* and *1871*.

gaining affiliates during the period, perhaps in an effort of individuals to avoid the traditional entrenched positions. This phenomenon benefited the smaller religious groupings, including the Methodists, facilitating its growth despite the overall decrease in the Irish population.

Figure 4: Denominational Affiliation Index (Ireland), 1861-1911.[38]

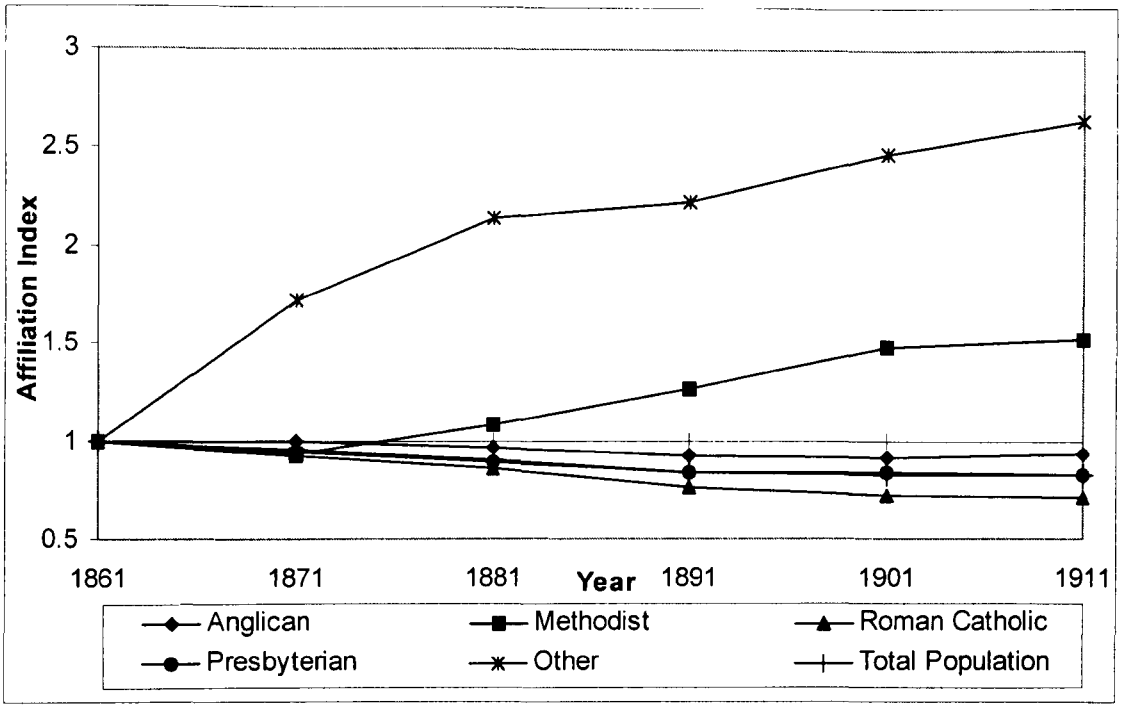


Analysing the census data by province gives a clearer picture of how this trend towards evangelicalism was manifested across the country. The increase in Methodist affiliation in Ulster is clearly the most dramatic, both in the percentage increase over 50 years, which was 52.41 per cent, and the absolute growth from 32,030 to 48,816 adherents. Those denominations tabulated under 'Other' also experienced a significant rise in affiliations, expanding by 163.57 per cent over the same period. This success of the smaller churches in the province is likely to have come at the expense of the two larger Protestant denominations, since attempts to convert Catholics were notoriously unsuccessful.[39] The expansion of evangelicalism also corresponds with concern among Presbyterians that they were failing to retain

[38] *Census Ire., 1861-1911.*
[39] Hempton and Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism,* pp23-8.

newly awakened individuals in the wake of the 1859 revival who were leaving in droves for churches with superior fellowship and greater 'enthusiasm'.[40]

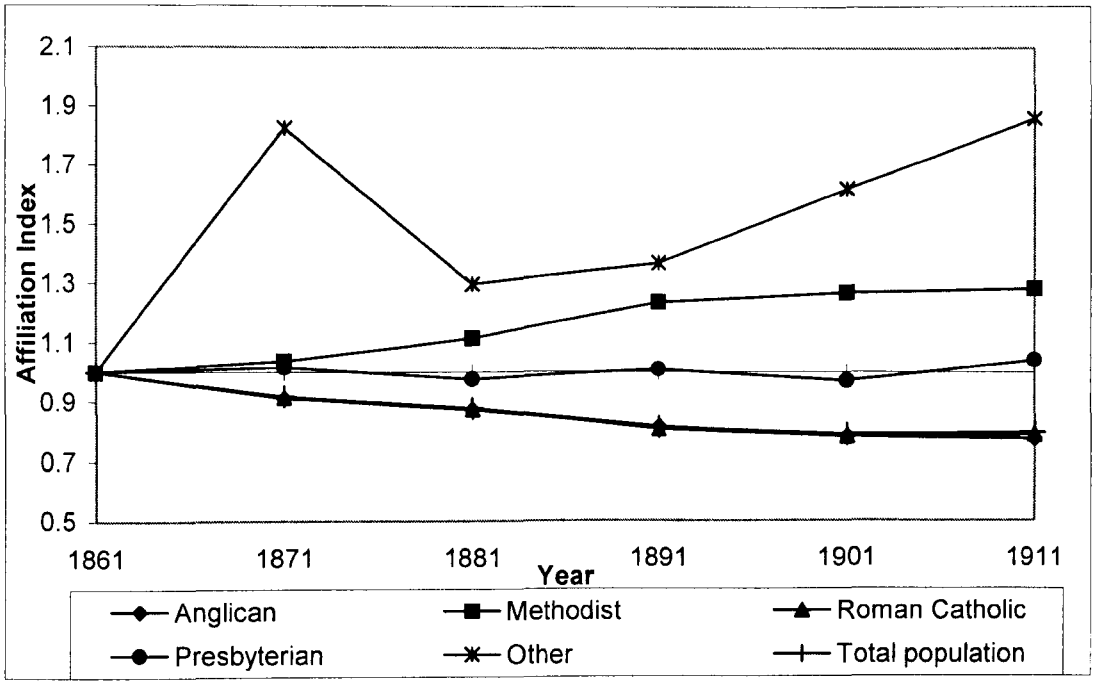
Figure 5: Denominational Affiliation Index (Ulster), 1861-1911.[41]



In Leinster, since Wesley's first visit to the country in 1747, Methodism had traditionally been centred on Dublin and had attracted some wealthy and influential families to its cause. This continued to be the case throughout the nineteenth century, for while Methodism in Dublin made significant gains, adherence in the rest of the province slightly declined. Established in 1893, Dublin boasted the only City Mission outside of Ulster, which undoubtedly contributed to maintaining and accelerating the growth in membership there, in contrast to the situation outside of the metropolitan area.

[40] Miller, 'Did Ulster Presbyterians have a devotional revolution?' p.53.
[41] *Census Ire., 1861-1911.*

Figure 6: Denominational Affiliation Index (Leinster), 1861-1911.[42]



The figures for Munster tell a more complex story; over the period as a whole the number of Methodists in the province slightly increased from 4,436 in 1861 to 5,521 in 1891. Between 1891 and 1901, however, affiliation starts to decline, dropping to 4,175 in 1911. Most interesting is the apparent movement of Methodists from rural to urban areas in significant numbers. In 1901, the number of Methodists in Cork City and County were 841 and 2,221 respectively; this had dramatically reversed by 1911 when the figures were 2,047 and 643, suggesting significant rural to urban migration.[43]

The deferred date for the start of the Methodist decline in Munster demonstrates the comparative vitality of Methodism in the region, and the tenacity of adherents. This is particularly notable when compared with the fate of those Protestant churches tabulated in the 'Other' census category, which after a significant increase in numbers between 1861 and 1871 from 4,173 to 5,739, halved in the next censual period to 2,847, a position from which these organisations were unable to recover.

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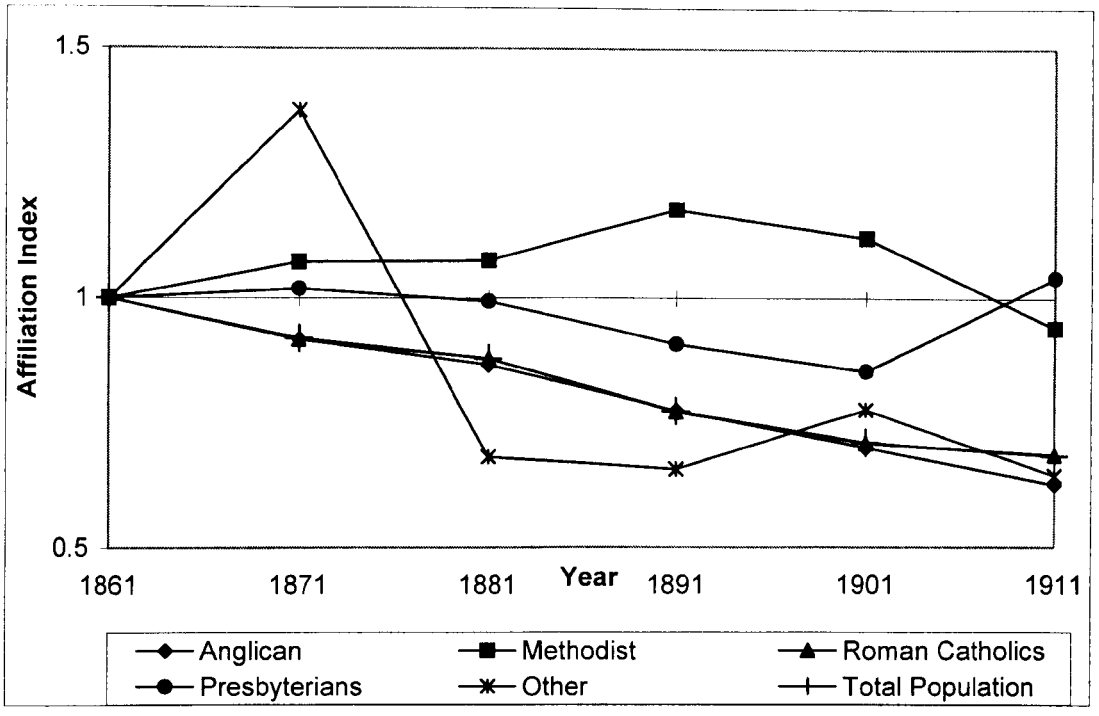
[42] *Ibid.*.
[43] *Ibid., 1901 and 1911.*

It thus appears even more remarkable that Methodism was able to retain its membership, and even experienced growth between 1861-91.

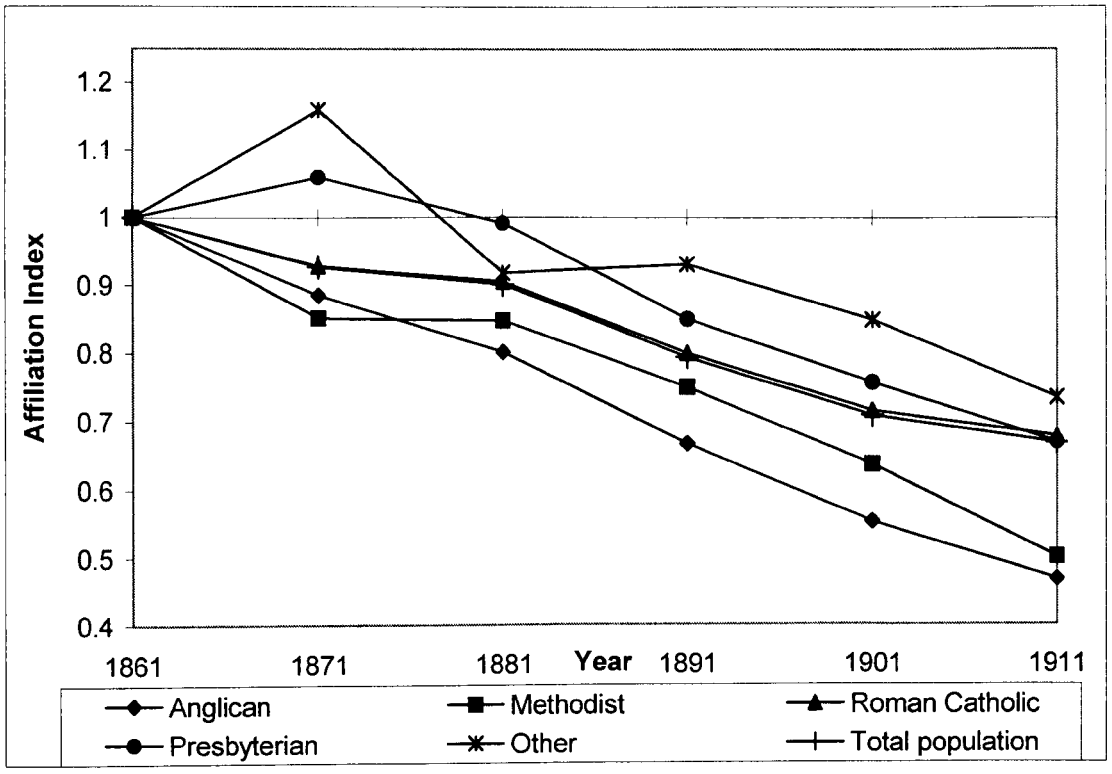
Figure 7: Denominational Affiliation Index (Munster), 1861-1911.[44]



Connaught was the only province not to see any phases of growth in Methodist membership. Here Methodism experienced a period of rapid decay, and significantly, at a marginally quicker rate than the overall population decline in the province. This demonstrates not only the lack of appeal that Methodism had in the poorest and least urban of the provinces, but suggests outward migration from the most Catholic of the four provinces. The drift away from rural areas corresponds with the trends also noted in the provinces of Munster and Leinster, where, although the overall number of Methodists was increasing, rural congregations were in decline.

[44] *Ibid., 1861-1911.*

Figure 8: Denominational Affiliation Index (Connaught), 1861-1911.[45]



The census data thus demonstrates that Methodism was primarily an urban phenomenon, with the largest clusters of adherents in the cities of Belfast, Londonderry, Dublin and Cork. Methodism had the least appeal in Connaught, which was the province with the least urban and industrial development. In rural areas, practising Protestant families were often a rarity, which during periods of political and sectarian tension may have encouraged migration to urban areas.

Nationwide, therefore, the figures show the increasing popularity of Irish Methodism, particularly in, but not confined to, the province of Ulster. Whereas the official church figure accurately records the number of adults active in the Methodist Church, the census provides a valuable source for assessing the relative strength of Methodism across Ireland, and is useful for comparing Methodism with the other denominations. The increase of Methodist membership proportional to the population over the period requires careful consideration. There is no evidence to suggest that Methodists had radically different patterns of marriage, family size or

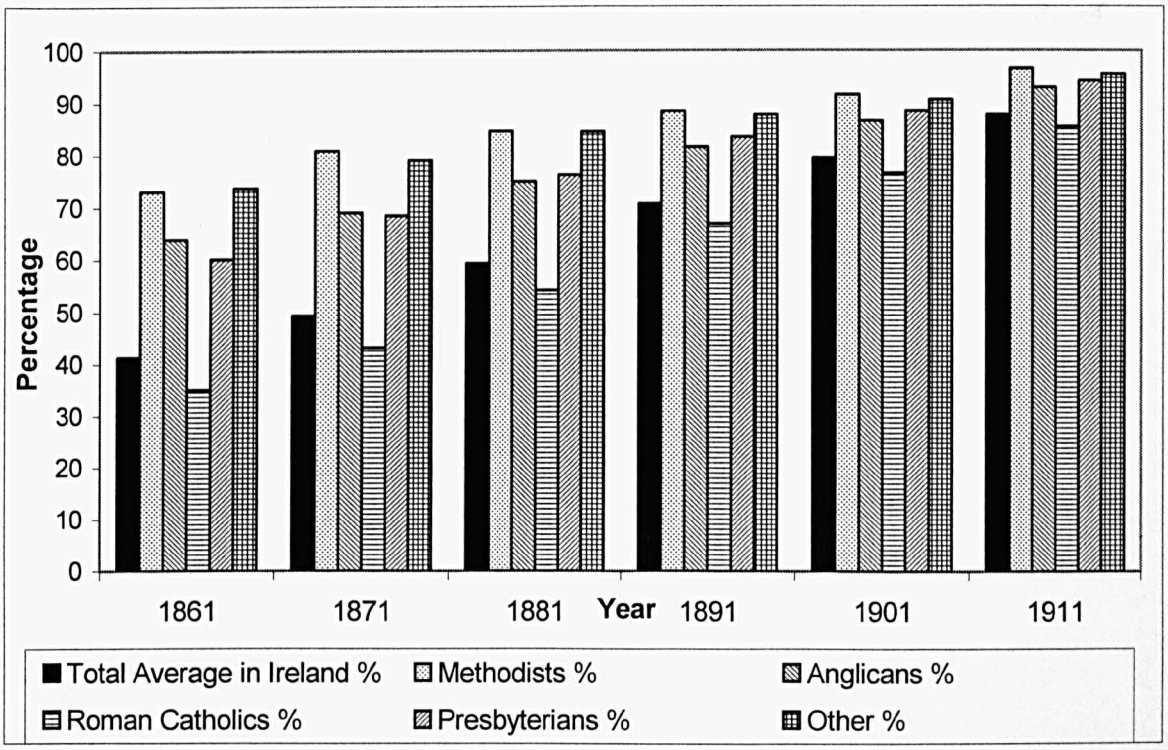
[45] *Ibid.*

rate of emigration from the rest of the population.[46] Another reason, therefore, for the growth of Methodism must be sought, with particular reference to the wider trend towards evangelical religion.

Methodist Literacy

Figures concerning literacy tabulated by denominational allegiance taken from the same series of censuses demonstrate that throughout the period 1861-1911, a large majority of Methodists were literate. Unlike the English experience where Methodism had initially been a lower-class phenomenon, in his travels to Ireland, Wesley had concentrated on existing Anglican communities. Methodism thus grew primarily among the more affluent classes of Ireland, outside of the landed classes for whom a nonconformist congregation held little appeal.

Figure 9: Irish Literacy by denomination (read and write), 1861-1911.[47]



Methodists had the highest level of literacy of all the religious categories, well above the national average.[48] This demonstrates the high regard in which education was

[46] J. H. Cooke, 'The development and distribution of Methodism in Ireland: A demographic study' (unpublished M.A. thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1964).
[47] *Census Ire., 1861-1911.*

held, since it was perceived as an aid to salvation allowing individuals to access directly the word of God. Moreover, it was believed to produce industrious and responsible members of society; an attitude which came to the fore during the debates preceding the Education Act of 1870. Additionally, these figures suggest that Irish Methodism in the late nineteenth century had not significantly expanded its appeal across class boundaries from Wesley's day, failing to appeal to the very poorest in society and the landed classes. The exception to this was in the province of Ulster, which shows markedly lower literacy rates among Methodists than in the rest of the country, suggesting that here Methodism was able to attract adherents from among the lower classes, in common with the other Protestant denominations in the province. Ulster was the most industrial of the Irish provinces and Belfast in particular had 'all the characteristics of a quintessentially British Victorian city', including a large urban working class, the target audience of the Methodist city missions.[49] It is only in the figures for Ulster, therefore, that the effect of the 1870 Education Act can be seen to be having a significant impact on the literacy of Methodists.

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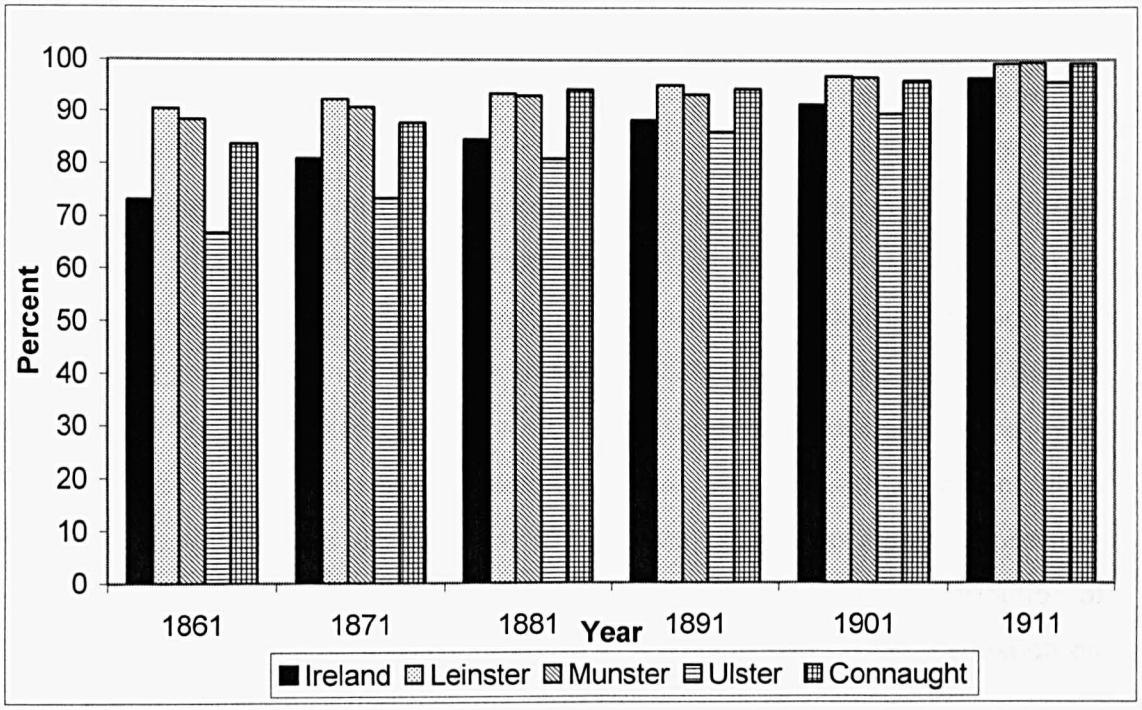
[48] This data was collected for all persons over the age of five years, apart from in 1901 where the data was collected for those over the age of nine years.

[49] D. N. Hempton, 'Belfast: The Unique City?', in Hugh McLeod (ed.), *European Religion in the Age of Great Cities, 1830-1930,* (London, 1995), p.145.

Figure 10: Methodist Literacy (read and write), 1961-1911.[50]



When considered in conjunction with the geographic distribution of members, it can be concluded that Methodism in the provinces of Leinster, Munster and Connaught was primarily an urban, middle-class phenomenon; trends which became more pronounced as the twentieth century approached.

Methodist electoral influence

The urban bias of Irish Methodism also increased its effectiveness as a voting bloc in the period between 1850 and 1885. The 1850 Irish Franchise Act enfranchised £8 rate-paying householders in boroughs and £12 householders in the counties, as well as introducing the annual revision of voter registers to replace the old system of eight-year certificates. This change tripled the Irish electorate to 163,500, since landlords were no longer able to exclude their tenants from the electorate by refusing to grant leases.[51] Despite this, the proportion of enfranchised males remained relatively low compared to that of the rest of the UK. In 1871, only 15.9 per cent of adult males in Ireland were enfranchised, compared to 33.6 per cent in

[50] *Census Ire., 1861-1911.*

[51] K. T. Hoppen, 'The Franchise and Electoral Politics in England and Ireland, 1832-1885', *History,* 70 (1985), p.208.

England and Wales.[52] Protestants, however, remained slightly over-represented in urban areas where they could often exercise a disproportionate influence.[53] The redistribution of parliamentary seats and the equalisation of the county and borough franchise during the 1884-5 session abolished all but the nine largest boroughs in Ireland, merging the rest with the new county divisions and enlarging the electorate to 728,000.[54] This fundamentally changed the political landscape of Ireland, forcing the urban electorate to engage with the concerns of their Catholic rural counterparts and diluting the influence of the Protestant vote.[55] For a brief period, therefore, in the late nineteenth century, urban working Protestants were over-represented as a proportion of the electorate. This coincided with a moment when British nonconformity was just beginning to realise its influence as a political pressure group. This situation, however, proved to be fleeting, as the 1885 redistribution of seats swung the balance of power to Catholics resident in rural areas, a situation on which Parnell and the Irish Parliamentary Party were quick to capitalise.

Conclusion

The census data of 1861-1911 therefore demonstrates that Methodism was a primarily urban phenomenon, only in Ulster successfully appealing to a broad section of society. It is equally important, however, to recognise, that although Methodist numerical strength was rooted in Ulster, it continued to sustain and nurture communities throughout the island. Moreover, Methodists resident in the south of the country could often exert a disproportionate influence on connexional affairs, as they were more affluent than many of their Ulster brethren. Fundamentally, the figures presented here demonstrate that Methodism was a growing, educated sector of the population, which continued to have a truly national presence on the island. The national dimension of the denomination shaped its reaction to political events throughout the period 1861-1914 as, unlike the Presbyterian Church, it was less able to simply retreat to its Ulster heartlands. Thus, Irish Methodism conceived of itself as a countrywide Church, separate from the British connexion and distinctly Irish in character.

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[52] *Ibid.*, p.215.
[53] Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History 1800-2000*, (London, 2003), p.57.
[54] Alan O'Day, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921*, (Manchester, 1998), p.93.
[55] K. T. Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society in Ireland 1832-1885*, (Oxford, 1984), pp87-8.

Chapter Two:
Methodism and Politics during Gladstone's First Administration, 1868-1874

Introduction

Gladstone's first ministry was determined by four strands of policy, which were shaped by the Liberal leader's religious principles. The four classes of Liberal concern have been identified by Jonathan Parry as 'legislation for social and moral improvement', particularly of the working classes of the country; the 'development of the democratic principle'; the Irish issue, dominated by the question of Irish disestablishment; and the 'drive for economy and efficiency in government' by reducing government patronage.[1] The Irish Church Act (1869) and the Education Act (1870) were thus integral to this broader programme. The Fenian disturbances of 1867 had highlighted the condition of Ireland as a key issue in British politics, spurring both the Conservative and Liberal parties to consider legislation to rectify the apparent problems. Gladstone believed that Ireland could be reconciled to the Union of 1801 through reforming legislation that restored respect for national institutions and removed symbols of injustice, initially through disestablishment of the Church of Ireland.[2] Legislation for national primary education would facilitate the dissemination of morality and religion, and thus improve the character of the population.[3] Local management of schools would also further the democratic principle within society and assist in the reconciliation of the Irish population to rule by Westminster. Moreover, it was desired by the Liberal administration that educational provision be standardised across Britain and Ireland, and plans developed to legislate jointly for the two countries: education was a particularly pressing issue

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[1] J. P. Parry, 'Gladstone, Liberalism and the Government of 1868-1874' in D. W. Bebbington and Roger Swift (eds), *Gladstone Centenary Essays*, (Liverpool, 2000), pp95-7.

[2] W. E. Gladstone, *Speeches of the Right Honourable William Ewart Gladstone, MP, in South-West Lancashire, October 1868*, (Liverpool, 1868).

[3] Parry, 'Religion and the collapse of Gladstone's first government', p.72.

in England, which unlike Ireland had no national framework for the provision of primary education; schools were operated by voluntary bodies.

Both these parliamentary bills threatened to impinge on Methodist interests. Disestablishment would upset the religious *status quo* in Ireland and raised the spectre that Protestantism might be extinguished in the country. The evangelical imperative of Methodism required that the true Protestant faith should be expanded across Ireland; the only question regarding the Established Church was whether it assisted or hindered this process. In a similar vein, education was an issue at the core of Methodist social outreach, and the denomination ran many primary schools in both England and Ireland. The catechesis of children in the essentials of Christian doctrine and morals was considered essential to their development as valuable, responsible members of society.[4] The proposed legislation had the potential to substantially alter the influence of the church in the education system and the religious instruction given to Methodist children. The desire of the Liberal administration to compose a single piece of legislation to apply in both countries obliged Methodists throughout the United Kingdom to consider the impact that the proposed reforms would have across both islands. The attendant debate highlighted the radically different situations of Methodism in England and Ireland, whereby the denominational system of education being urged for England would destroy Methodist education in Ireland. It also raised the sensitive issue of the extent to which the larger English Conference was responsible for representing the concerns of Irish Methodism within Britain.

The introduction of these bills by the Liberal administration thus ignited a debate within Methodism as to the appropriate response, if any, to the government's political agenda. Wesley had bequeathed to his society a 'no politics' rule, which specifically determined that politics should not deflect Methodism from its religious objectives.[5] This was an inherently conservative position, although not uncritically supportive of Toryism. Implacably opposed to revolution, Wesley and his

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[4] J. H. Rigg, *The History and Present Position of Primary Education in England in Connexion with Wesleyan Methodism: An Address to the Students in the Wesleyan Training Institution, Westminster February 11th, 1870,* (London, 1870), p.15.

[5] Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society,* p.45.

supporters were, however, naturally inclined to policies promoting increased civil and religious liberty, such as the extra-parliamentary campaign to abolish the slave trade.[6] This reflected Wesley's own love of the monarchy and the British constitution and worked to actively discourage political radicalism within Methodism.[7] In Ireland, Methodism had been consistently loyal to the government in times of upheaval.[8]

"No unworthy compromise": The Irish Church Act of 1868 and Methodist Re-Union of 1878

When Liberal leader William Gladstone received the news that he had been invited to form a government in 1868, he reportedly announced 'my mission is to pacify Ireland'. The first piece of legislation that he introduced to fulfil this aim was the Irish Church bill, which he believed would help resolve wider issues that threatened the stability of Ireland, and had the potential to disturb the whole United Kingdom. The Church of Ireland was a vulnerable target for reform, since the enumerators' reports for the last Irish Census, published in 1865, revealed that the church had relatively few adherents compared to its wealth. Members of the Established Church accounted for a mere 12 per cent of the total population, but the organisation had an annual revenue of approximately £700,000, and a capital revenue estimated in the region of £16,000,000.[9]

Gladstone had long been concerned with the state of religion in Ireland, which had occasioned his two-volume treatise, *The State in its Relations with the Church,* and also precipitated his resignation from the government in 1845 over the Maynooth grant.[10] After the publication of the Irish census data, however, Gladstone clearly indicated that his opinions about the maintenance of the Established Church had been reversed and he now believed that the difficulties in which the church found itself were due to its 'false position' in the country.[11] The question of Irish Church reform was, however, left in abeyance until early 1868, when the House of Commons

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[6] *Ibid.,* pp210-11.
[7] *Ibid.,* p.48.
[8] Cooney, *The Methodists in Ireland,* pp49-52.
[9] *Census Ire., 1861* and *Hansard 3,* cxciv, 451-454, (1 March 1869).
[10] Gladstone, *The State in its Relations with the Church,* (London, 1838).
[11] *Hansard 3,* clxxviii, 422-434, (28 March 1865).

scheduled a series of debates concerning the condition of Ireland. These debates at the beginning of March appeared to indicate that both major parties were prepared to consider legislation to ameliorate religious inequality in Ireland. The Conservatives, represented by Lord Mayo in his role as Chief Secretary for Ireland, appeared to favour a system of concurrent endowment, including the creation of a Catholic University in Dublin, and severely deprecated any suggestion of 'levelling down' with regard to the religious establishment.[12] Gladstone, however, condemned the proposals of increased government grants to both Presbyterians and Catholics, and declared that the Church of Ireland 'as a State Church, must cease to exist'. [13] Consequently, he turned his attention to ecclesiastical reform. Given the statements by Lord Mayo, it was somewhat surprising that the Conservatives strongly opposed the Liberal proposals for disestablishment, and attempted to rally their supporters around a defence of Protestant values.[14] In addition, on 28 May, Mayo announced that the government and the Irish Catholic hierarchy had failed to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement regarding a Catholic University for Ireland and, therefore, the government had withdrawn the offer of a Charter.[15] This effectively removed the last remaining constructive element of the Conservatives' Irish policy, allowing the Liberals to take the initiative.

For the Liberals, the personal commitment of Gladstone to removing the root causes of Irish dissatisfaction, persuaded them to adopt the policy of Irish Church reform as a principle plank of their election campaign of autumn 1868: although the details of the legislation were not widely discussed. Gladstone indicated in his 'Address to the Electors of South-west Lancashire' that he intended to proceed with 'regard for Irish interests and feelings, an enlarged equity for those who would lose in point of civil privilege, and a careful heed to the spirit of equal dealing throughout the detailed arrangements'.[16] Nonetheless, the only detail of policy that he was in a position to reveal was that an approach including 'endowment for all ... is out of the question'.[17] The policy of Irish disestablishment proved popular with the electorate,

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[12] *Hansard 3*, cxc, 1388-1393, (10 March 1868).
[13] *The Times*, 17 March 1868 and Crosby, *The Two Mr Gladstones*, p.120.
[14] Parry, *Democracy and Religion*, p.271.
[15] *The Times*, 29 May 1868.
[16] *Ibid.*, 10 October 1868.
[17] *Ibid.*

propelling the Liberals to victory, with the party capturing 382 parliamentary seats overall, including 65 in Ireland, compared to the Conservative total of 276.[18]

In fulfilment of his electoral promise, Gladstone introduced the Irish Church bill on 1 March 1869, which proposed a comprehensive overhaul of the ecclesiastical system in Ireland. This included the total disestablishment and disendowment of the Church of Ireland, the reconstitution of that church as a voluntary body, the redistribution of former ecclesiastical property and the cessation of the Maynooth grant and *Regium Donum.*[19] The bill thus appeared to offer 'something to nearly everyone': the Church of Ireland received generous compensation for its loss of status; Irish Catholics and Presbyterians were pleased to see the demise of the loathed Establishment, as were the increasingly influential British nonconformist lobby, epitomized by the Liberation Society.[20]

Methodists, like other religious groups, were horrified by the escalating violence connected with Irish Nationalism in the 1860s and were anxious that Gladstone should pursue policies that would bring peace to the island. Disestablishment challenged the Methodist understanding of the Protestant Constitution of the United Kingdom, specifically how future Methodist expansion in Ireland would be hindered by Roman Catholic advances.[21] This, combined with the revelation that Wesleyan Methodism was the second largest denomination in England, galvanised the denomination into taking a more prominent role in national debates.[22] Some within the governing Methodist Conference suggested that the policy of political neutrality could be waived in the case of moral and religious issues; where it was important that the Church gave a clear lead, both to its membership and to MPs in

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[18] O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p.25.
[19] *Hansard 3*, cxciv, 412-464, (1 March 1869).
[20] O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p.27. The Liberation Society was the abbreviated title of the 'Society for the Liberation of the Church from State Control and Patronage', which had been established in 1853. The organisation evolved out of the Anti-State Church Association (1844) and campaigned for religious equality and the disestablishment of the national churches of Great Britain and Ireland. The society was primarily a tool of Protestant dissenters who suffered from religious discrimination and who argued that effectiveness of the church in spreading true religion would be improved by disestablishment.
[21] *PWCM, 1868.*
[22] Currie *et al.*, *Churches and churchgoers*, p.216. The 1851 Religious Census for England enumerated 5,292,551 Church of England attendances and 1,544,528 Wesleyan Methodist attendances. (*Census of Great Britain, 1851*).

Westminster. This raised the difficult question of which issues were appropriate for Church involvement, and how Methodists, as a body, could avoid being caught up in party politics. Previously, as the 1868 Methodist Conference reflected, it had 'not been accustomed to take part in public affairs, unless they have had a very distinct and important religious character, and unless we have felt that a solemn sense of duty compelled us to interfere.'[23] This approach was justified by regular appeals to the 'no politics' rule instituted by John Wesley, although, as the Conference statement above clearly recognises, ethical issues such as the abolition of slavery and national education had always been exempt from this ruling.[24] Hempton, however, has argued that in the first half of the nineteenth century, this was merely a mask for political conservatism.[25] This view is supported by an analysis of the political sympathies of many leading Wesleyan Methodists; the Conservative bias of the weekly denominational newspaper, *The Watchman*, established in 1835; Methodist involvement in the anti-Maynooth agitations in the 1840s; and the Liberal-Radical inclinations of the break-away Methodist sects, for example the (English) Primitive Methodists, New Connexion Methodists and Bible Christians.[26] It is evident that by 1870, however, the Wesleyan-Methodist Conference was more inclined towards a Liberal political outlook.[27] The Conference was, nevertheless, careful to avoid officially associating the denomination with either political party, maintaining that where an individual placed his vote was a personal decision that should be undertaken with reference to his conscience.[28]

The relationship between the Methodist Connexions of Britain and Ireland was close, and Irish Methodists were quick to capitalise on the new political awareness of their English brethren, impressing on them the unique problems of Ireland and their

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[23] *WCM, 1868.*
[24] *Ibid.*
[25] Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*, pp179-223.
[26] *Ibid.*, see also Hempton, 'The Methodist Crusade in Ireland', pp33-48; Larsen, 'A Nonconformist Conscience?', pp107-119; and Bebbington, *The nonconformist conscience*, pp1-17.
[27] Bebbington, 'Gladstone and the Nonconformists', pp369-82.
[28] William Arthur, *The Householder's Parliament: A Word to the Electors of 1885*, (London, 1885), p.14. Wesleyan-Methodism did permit the debate and adoption of resolutions pertaining to proposed legislation and Acts of Parliament relating to moral and ethical issues at the annual Conference, or between these conventions, through the Committee of Privileges.

preferred solutions.[29] However, unlike many Dissenting Churches, Methodism had no history of opposing either the legality of the Established Church, or its organisation or theology.[30] This was particularly apparent in Ireland, where the decisive break between Methodism and the Church of Ireland occurred in 1818, twenty years after their separation in England. This process of separation from the Established Church produced the only notable split in Irish Methodism, whereby the Primitive Wesleyan Society, also known as Church Methodists, seceded from the main society. The larger body of Irish Methodists quickly adopted the name of 'Wesleyan' by which the corresponding group in Britain was known, and with which they maintained close constitutional ties and shared a President. Despite their separation from the Established Church, the Wesleyan Methodists retained a degree of affection for their parent body, recognising their historical links and the role of the Established Church in the life of the nation.[31]

The smaller Primitive Wesleyan Society was led by the Rev. Adam Averell (an ordained deacon in the Anglican Church), and opposed the decision of the majority of Methodists to allow local preachers to administer the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, affirming that the Established Church was the appropriate dispenser of these channels of grace.[32] The new connexion retained the traditional practices of Methodism, including meeting in class and the provision of additional Sunday preaching services. Primitive Wesleyans continued to gather in an annual Conference to consider connexional affairs and decide on the deployment of preachers. They also maintained that they remained true to the original vision of John Wesley, continuing as an evangelistic society within the Church of Ireland and revitalising the spiritual lives of its members. Although the sacramental question was the principle cause of the schism, the political milieu in which these events took place was also relevant, particularly since it was dominated by the O'Connellite campaigns for Repeal and Catholic Emancipation.[33] These were perceived by many Methodists to be an attack on the privileges of the Established Church and an issue

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[29] See correspondence of William Arthur to J. H. Rigg: Methodist Church Archives [hereafter MCA], John Rylands University Library, Manchester, (PLP.2.59.23-25, PLP.2.60.4-7).
[30] Larsen, *'A Nonconformist Conscience?*, pp107-119.
[31] Parry, *Democracy and Religion*, pp217-8.
[32] Cooney, *The Methodists in Ireland: A Short History*, p.66.
[33] Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society*, p.117.

that could potentially undermine the Protestant nature of the constitution.[34] Accordingly, there was fear among the founders of the Primitive Methodists that separating from the Established Church would undermine its position when it was already under threat.[35] Of particular concern was that a weakened Anglican Church would be unable to fulfil its evangelistic mission to the Catholic majority and counteract the encroachments of Rome. This anxiety remained a pressing concern to the Primitive Wesleyan connexion as the century progressed and influenced wider Methodist attitudes towards disestablishment later in the century.

The revelations of the 1861 census regarding the state of religion in Ireland exposed the Established Church of Ireland to an increased number of attacks regarding its purpose and privileged role in society, including some from within Methodism. The London-published weekly journal, the *Methodist Recorder,* scathingly remarked on the ineffectiveness of the Irish Church, commenting that 'the time has gone forever when we can make the Establishment the basis for a simple evangelism anywhere'.[36] The failure of the Church of Ireland to successfully convert the vast majority of the Irish population, despite its legal and financial advantages, clearly demonstrated to many that it was not fit for purpose. The process of disendowment and the abolition of tithes, however, which were expected to accompany disestablishment, raised the spectre of Protestantism being virtually extinguished in many areas of the country, as local Anglican churches would be forced to close.[37] It was, therefore, anticipated that Protestant mission in Ireland would be seriously hindered. Furthermore, disestablishment also presented a threat to the legal bulwark against Catholic advances into public life, which, if coupled with the state endowment of that Church, many Protestants feared would result in the Papal domination of Ireland, and herald the disintegration of the Union.[38] Nevertheless, it was also genuinely anticipated that evangelical religion would eventually prevail, and that the 'stronger

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[34] J. C. Bowmer, 'Church Methodists in Ireland', *Proceedings of the Wesleyan Historical Society,* 34 (1963), pp73-75.
[35] Jeffery, *Irish Methodism: An historical account of its traditions, theology and influence,* p.36 and Cooney, *The Methodists in Ireland,* p.66.
[36] *Methodist Recorder,* 6 December 1861.
[37] *Irish Evangelist,* March 1868.
[38] Anon., *"Knock down the Established Church" Speech of Alderman Dillon at the first meeting of the National Association held at the rotunda, Dublin 21st February, 1865,* (Dublin, 1865).

Protestant character' of the Church of Ireland would save it from total disintegration.[39]

The proposed disestablishment of the Church of Ireland also had significant ramifications for the English situation. The abolition of the State Church in one area of the United Kingdom predictably raised questions about the maintenance of the other Established Churches. The total abolition of religious establishments appealed to a wide range of nonconformists in Britain, represented by the Liberation Society, who resented the political influence of the Church of England in the House of Lords and campaigned for the abolition of the State Church and progress towards religious equality.[40] Although abolition of the Established Church had not traditionally appeared on the agenda of British Methodism, from the 1850s the more radical, modernist wing of Wesleyanism increasingly defined Methodism in opposition to the Established Church, preferring to forge alliances with other Dissenting Churches, such as the Congregationalists and the Baptists.[41]

For the Methodist Churches of England and Ireland, therefore, the issue of disestablishment was a particularly difficult one. Although disestablishment of the Irish Church would offer apparent benefits to the progress of Methodism in Ireland, it also entailed certain risks: in particular, Conservative plans to endow the Catholic Church in Ireland.[42] This exacerbated Methodist concerns about the ambitions of Catholicism; a topic which was a recurring theme in the annual exchange of greetings between the British and Irish Conferences, for example, the 1866 letter from the Irish Conference to the British stressed that the 'antagonism of ultramontane Popery was never more strenuous'.[43] The fear of Catholic encroachment into public life was also at the root of Wesleyan attacks on those who campaigned for the voluntary

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[39] WCM, 1869 and William Arthur, *Ought not the Two Methodist Bodies in Ireland to become one?,* (Dublin, 1869), p.19.

[40] Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales,* pp17-21.

[41] Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation,* pp171-4.

[42] de Vere, *Ireland's Church Question; Hansard 3,* cxc, 1388-1393, (10 March 1868); and Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales,* p.80, pp84-7.

[43] *WMC,* 1866. This concern, however, appears in all the official greetings between the two Conferences in the years 1865-72.

principle, suggesting that through their efforts, Britons 'may live to see two establishments in Ireland instead of one'.[44]

The publication of the Syllabus of Errors by Pope Pius IX in 1864 did nothing to calm these fears, as it re-asserted the official Vatican position that only the Catholic Church could be established, that freedom of religion for non-Catholics should not be tolerated and that the Church (rather than the state) should oversee the education system.[45] Many Methodists, therefore, assumed that if the principle of a Protestant state church was conceded, the Catholic Church in Ireland would be quick to take advantage and press for its own establishment, despite the apparently more limited ambitions of the Irish hierarchy.[46] Consequently, the Irish Conference of 1868 asserted its firm opposition to any system of state 'endowment of either the Clergy or institutions of the Roman Catholic Church', that would turn the island from the principles of the Reformation, which Methodists believed underlay the development of the United Kingdom population as a 'free and enlightened people'.[47] Many Methodists were thus prepared to support an Anglican establishment with which they competed for members, purely because it presented a safeguard against Roman Catholicism.

But, as the political debate progressed, and plans for concurrent endowment were abandoned, Methodist opposition to disestablishment abated. The influential Irish Methodist, William Arthur, while noting the value of the Anglican Church as a legal safeguard against Rome, contended that the Established Church had in fact proved itself ineffective when working alone, requiring the aid of nonconformity to stir it to good works.[48] Arthur also believed that Methodism was peculiarly adapted to the role of providing an effective defence against Catholicism. Moreover, he decried the comparisons made between the steady decline of the Episcopal Churches of Scotland and the United States, and the likely fate of a disestablished Church of Ireland. He claimed that the vigorous Protestant character and missionary focus of the Church

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[44] *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 1867, p.711.
[45] *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, xiii, pp651-654, http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9syll.htm (accessed 21.08.06).
[46] *PWCM*, 1870 and Anon., *"Knock Down the Established Church"*.
[47] *ICM* 1868, and *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 1867, p.711.
[48] Arthur, *Ought not the two Methodist Bodies*, p.19.

of Ireland would save it from such a dismal fate. Arthur concluded that disestablishment would not necessarily herald the destruction of Protestantism in Ireland, as the Church of Ireland itself was dynamic enough to withstand the process, and furthermore, Methodism was uniquely situated to cover any Anglican deficiencies in maintaining and expanding the evangelical Protestant presence in the country.[49]

With the passing of the Irish Church Act inevitable by June 1869, the question of Methodist reunion became an issue of pressing importance.[50] Although the question had been discussed for several years, the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland proved to be the catalyst for serious debate. The act left the Primitive Wesleyan Methodists with the decision of whether they were Churchmen or Methodists, since their existing ambiguous position was clearly untenable.[51] Moreover, the re-vitalisation of the Church of Ireland and the vigour of the clergy in the second half of the nineteenth century had denied the Primitive Wesleyans their primary reason for existence.[52] The Primitive Wesleyan Society occupied uncertain territory, with a significant disparity between the position they claimed for themselves within Anglicanism, and the role that the Church of Ireland was prepared to grant.[53] Furthermore, the Primitive Wesleyan Society was too small, at just over 9,300 members in 1868, to be a viable lone evangelical movement.[54] Consequently, it was in their best interests to end the uncertainty in which they had been operating, and be fully absorbed into a larger church body. This would strengthen Protestantism as a whole, and remove a significant financial burden from local communities who forthwith would only have to support two congregations, rather than three.[55]

Notwithstanding the Primitive Wesleyans' longstanding connection to the Church of Ireland, the argument for union with the Wesleyan Methodists was compelling. Despite their separation in 1818, they were recognised as 'true scions of the one

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[49] *Ibid.*, p.19.
[50] MacCutcheon, *The Irish Conference and Methodist Union in Ireland*, (n.p., 1878), p.694.
[51] *Methodist Recorder*, 23 July 1861 and Arthur, *Ought not the two Methodist Bodies*, pp3-4.
[52] Bell, *Disestablishment in Ireland and Wales*, pp33-4 and Cooney, *The Methodists of Ireland*, p.77.
[53] Binns, 'A history of Methodism in Ireland', p.164.
[54] *PWCM, 1868.*
[55] Arthur, *Ought not the two Methodist Bodies*, p.17.

stock' with little diversity in doctrine or practice.[56] Disestablishment was thought to have removed the most significant barrier to union, leaving the questions of the administration of the sacraments and lay representation at Conference as the two greatest issues to be overcome. Proposals of reunification, however, were not universally popular, and there continued to be a sense of mistrust between the societies, especially in areas where they had been in direct competition with each other. A Primitive Wesleyan minister, the Rev. Robert Orr, who favoured Methodist re-union, described his experience in two circuits in Athlone and Clones in between 1874-78, stating that the merger was 'strongly denounced' by leading laymen within the district, and the preparations leading to the amalgamation in 1878 'was opposed at every point'.[57] A Belfast correspondent of the *Methodist Recorder* in 1870, claimed that there was 'no sympathy or love for Wesleyanism amongst the great majority of Primitive preachers', and that he would oppose national reunion on those grounds.[58] However, he also noted that in its current state Primitive Wesleyan Methodism would inevitably disintegrate, and should be absorbed on a local level by existing Anglican and Wesleyan communities as appropriate.[59] This appears to be an overtly pessimistic and minority view of the national situation which failed to recognise the substantial commonality of the two bodies, and was castigated by contemporary commentators as attempting 'to excite suspicion and distrust' between brethren.[60]

Despite the predictions of incompatibility between the Primitive Wesleyans and the Wesleyan Society, negotiations commenced in 1869. In 1871, the legal position of the Primitive Wesleyans was altered by an Act of Parliament, permitting the society, to 'unite or co-operate with any church or religious body or association, upon such terms and conditions as the Society by a vote of Conference may determine'.[61] This provided the legal framework for amalgamation and the disposal of property through a board of trustees. The Primitive Wesleyans thus proceeded to simultaneously engage in discussions with the Church of Ireland as well as the Wesleyans, and

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[56] *Ibid.*, p.6, *PWCM*, 1876.
[57] Orr, *Extracts from the diaries of Robert Orr*, pp38, 40.
[58] *Methodist Recorder*, 18 February 1870.
[59] *Ibid.*
[60] MacCutcheon, *The Irish Conference*, p.695.
[61] *Acts of Parliament, U.K. 1871.*

consequently, negotiations were protracted as they appeared to vacillate between the two.[62] The decision of the Primitive Wesleyan Conference of 1871 to permit preachers to 'give the ordinances of religion' had a significant impact on the course of the discussions, as it removed a substantial barrier to re-unification with the Wesleyans, while simultaneously reducing the likelihood of assimilation into the Church of Ireland, which maintained that the administration of the sacraments should be reserved to episcopally ordained ministers.[63] The Wesleyans made a reciprocal gesture of goodwill in 1875, announcing that they were to pursue plans to permit lay representation at the annual Conference. This was completed rapidly, allowing lay representatives to make their first appearance at the Conference in 1877.[64] The financial arrangements attending re-unification remained of concern, although not considered an insurmountable barrier to the process.

The major concessions regarding administration of the sacraments and lay representation facilitated the conclusion of negotiations in 1877, and allowed Dr Pope, President of the Conference, to declare that 'the union is no unworthy compromise; that not one principle has been sacrificed on either side'.[65] Both Conferences therefore accepted the proposals for re-unification, without amendment, in that year.[66] This permitted the formal amalgamation of the two societies to occur during the Conference of 1878.[67] The combined body had a total membership of 19,950 in its first year, of which 6,650 had previously been Primitive Wesleyan. This new era of Methodism in Ireland was enthusiastically heralded as perpetuating 'the principles of Methodism; to spread Scriptural holiness, and thus promote the Glory of God.'[68]

Methodist concern with the terms of the Irish Church Act displays many of the characteristics associated with their previous forays into political debates earlier in the century. The predominant concern of the connexion was to guarantee the

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[62] Binns, 'A History of Methodism in Ireland', pp153-64.
[63] *PWCM, 1871.*
[64] *ICM, 1875, 1877.*
[65] MacCutcheon, *The Irish Conference*, p.695.
[66] *ICM, 1877, PWCM, 1877.*
[67] *ICM, 1878.*
[68] *Ibid.*

future of evangelical Protestantism across the United Kingdom, but especially in Ireland where it appeared to be under most threat. This concern primarily focussed upon the freedom to evangelise through denominational efforts, but also through ensuring that the Catholic Church did not gain any advantage. The role of the Church of Ireland was thus discussed principally in terms of its effectiveness in promoting evangelical Christianity, and the impact that legislation would have upon this. The Methodist experience was that successful mission could be undertaken solely funded through voluntary donations.[69] This inclined them to believe that the Church of Ireland could be effective if self-financing, and not otherwise hindered.[70] Thus, the most vigorous statements from Methodism regarding the Irish Church legislation occurred in response to proposals for concurrent endowment of religion, since this was perceived to harm the Protestant cause and substantially aid the Catholic Church. It was also feared that such policies would encourage the Roman hierarchy to pursue further concessions. Therefore, while many individual Methodists were concerned about the potential effects of disestablishment, the Wesleyan Methodist Conferences of England and Ireland determined that, once the spectre of Catholic endowment had been removed from the political agenda, the Irish Church bill did not constitute an issue on which they should publicly comment: it did not directly affect their organisation, nor was it obviously a moral issue. Therefore, throughout the debates preceding the Irish Church Act, the Wesleyan Conference maintained an official position of 'friendly neutrality', noting that while it expressed its 'warmest sympathy' for the situation the Church of Ireland faced, Methodism never interfered in the affairs of other churches.[71]

For the Primitive Wesleyan Society the reorganisation of the Irish religious landscape heralded momentous change, obliging them to completely reassess their function and relationship with the Church of Ireland. The Primitive Wesleyans' position appeared ultimately unsustainable and inherently unstable without the support of a larger organisation. Disestablishment exposed the possibility of re-union and the potential expansion of Methodism in the country through combined evangelistic efforts. Moreover, many Methodists (of both persuasions) believed that the 1818 schism had

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[69] Taggart, *The Irish in World Methodism.*
[70] Arthur, *Ought not the two Methodist Bodies,* pp15-17.
[71] *WCM, 1868* and *ICM, 1869.*

marred the history of the denomination in Ireland, and were delighted to see the breach healed.[72] The result of disestablishment for Methodism was a detailed analysis of the effectiveness of their message and a re-assessment of their role in Irish society. The re-union of Irish Methodism was a direct consequence of this, and served to augment the confidence of the denomination, and increase its efficiency. Although since Primitive Methodist membership had declined in the years immediately prior to 1878, and its income had consequently diminished, this put particular strain on the finances of the new united Methodist body as they standardised the rate of remuneration for preachers. This did not, however, have a lasting impact on the new Church, and growth in membership of the combined body commenced in 1882.[73] Re-unification bolstered Methodist confidence in an era of widespread Protestant uncertainty in Ireland, and Methodist leaders were eager to predict a 'bright and prosperous future' for the Church on the island.[74]

The Education Act of 1870

Methodism's somewhat muted reaction to the proposed disestablishment of the Irish Church, was, however, quite different in tone and character to its reaction to the education bill of 1870. The latter presented the first instance where Methodist administrative affairs, the welfare of their membership and the moral needs of the nation intersected to demand a political response. Education was key to the political programme of Gladstone's first government, which was reliant on the continued support of nonconformity to retain power. It thus needed to steer a careful course between the demands of the progressive wing of the party, led by Joseph Chamberlain, for 'free education'; the claims of the Established Church to determine the religious norms for the nations; the clamour from Catholics that the state assist in providing acceptable educational opportunities for their children; and the requirements of the nonconformists.

Education formed an integral part of Methodist life as it was considered essential for building moral character by facilitating the reading of the Bible. In addition, it was

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[72] *ICM*, 1878.
[73] Primitive Wesleyan membership declined from 8,065 in 1870 to 5,537 in 1878, (*PWCM*, 1870-78. and *Methodist Times*, 21 July 1887).
[74] MacCutcheon, *The Irish Conference*, p.689.

regarded as the route to improving an individual's situation in life, thus increasing their contribution to society and steering them away from the evils associated with poverty. Wesley encouraged his lay preachers to educate themselves through an extensive programme of reading and provided a source of theological texts through the book rooms that he founded.[75] Yet, throughout the nineteenth century the number of preachers attending University remained relatively small, as most Methodists were suspicious of the required religious tests.[76] This should not, however, be interpreted as indicating that they were ill-educated.[77] Under the supervision of their circuit superintendent, training ministers were required to complete a four-year scheme of reading and study as directed by the annual Conference, which was examined at the end of the year, prior to ordination. This included studying the scriptures in Hebrew and Greek, as well as studies of noted Methodist divines, most obviously the sermons of John Wesley.[78]

This drive to self-improvement and education was also encouraged among ordinary chapel members, and from the earliest period Methodists had been committed to the provision of Sunday schools, and later day schools.[79] From the 1830s Irish Methodism provided primary and secondary education across Ireland through the national school system and their two intermediate colleges in Belfast and Dublin. In 1863, Methodists in Ireland controlled 40 national schools with approximately 2-3000 pupils, and by 1888, this had risen to 81 schools, educating 7,600 pupils of which 2,588 were Methodist.[80] This emphasis on education clearly manifested itself in the literacy figures included in the 1861 census, in which 73.1 per cent Methodists over the age of five claimed to be able read and write. This was significantly higher than the national average of 41.3 per cent and members of the other Irish Churches: 63.8 per cent of Anglicans attained this standard and 60.1 per cent of Presbyterians.

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[75] The Foundry bookroom in London for the storage and sale of Methodist publications was established by John Wesley in 1739. The Irish Conference established an independent bookroom in Whitefriar Street, Dublin in 1802, which from 1830 was a distribution centre for the London bookroom.

[76] F. C. Pritchard, 'Education', in Davies *et al., A History of the Methodist Church,* iii, p.282.

[77] Megahey notes that far fewer Methodist ministers attended University than their Presbyterian and Anglican counterparts in the nineteenth century and interprets this to mean that they were poorly educated, when in fact this was not the case. (Megahey, *Irish Protestant Churches,* p.18.)

[78] *ICM, 1861.*

[79] Pritchard, 'Education', p.283.

[80] *ICM, 1863* and *1888.* Methodist education of non-Methodists is discussed further below.

Integral to Methodist belief about the importance of education was the principle that it could not be separated from religious and moral instruction. James Harrison Rigg,[81] Principal of Westminster College, neatly summarised the official position in 1870:

> A religious education is the greatest blessing a child can receive; religion is the most important element in the education of immortal and responsible beings: religion is the deepest and mightiest force in the moulding for good of the whole character, in the education of the whole man.[82]

This conviction that religion should underpin all teaching was a primary motivation for the Methodist stance on all educational matters. If religion and education could not be rightly separated, it was therefore necessary that all schools had a strong religious ethos and attempts to create a secular education system should be resisted. This would ensure that all children would be given a strong moral foundation to life and, in time, create a better society. Concurrent with the alarm that encroaching secularism would remove all religious instruction from schools was the concern that Methodist children would be subject to the proselytism of other denominations, causing Methodism to die out within a generation. In Ireland, this fear was primarily directed towards the Roman Catholic Church, whereas in England it looked towards the Established Church. Within Methodism, therefore, it was debates concerning the nature of religious instruction in schools that dominated the passage of Forster's Education Act of 1870.

In the 1830s, the Methodist Conference of Ireland had been opposed to a system of non-denominational schools. Hempton argues that this was because the legislation was initially perceived to impede their missionary activities in schools, however by

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[81] Rev. Dr James Harrison Rigg, born into a strong Methodist family, his father, John was a Wesleyan minister, as was his maternal grandfather James McMullen who served as an Irish Methodist missionary to Gibralter. Rigg followed their example and entered the ministry in 1845 and was twice President of the Conference in 1878 and 1892. He was particularly noted for his work as in Wesleyan education, and was Principal of Westminster Training College for day-school teachers between 1868 and his retirement in 1903.

[82] Rigg, *Primary Education in England,* p.15.

1870 Irish Methodism was fully reconciled, and even supportive of, their existence.[83] This change in stance was primarily because under the board system Methodists were able to maintain control of many schools, while in receipt of government funding to defray costs. The 40 schools that the Methodist Conference transferred to the board in 1863 continued to use Wesleyan ministers, the Methodist catechism and hymn-books.[84] This allowed Methodists to participate in the national school system without compromising their principles concerning the spread of evangelical truth through education. Furthermore, in rural areas where there was no Methodist day school, and no chance of a Methodist school being established, the national system provided an acceptable non-denominational alternative to Catholic controlled schools.[85] The non-denominational nature of the mixed teaching was strictly enforced by the educational commissioners and religious instruction was provided by ministers of the child's own denomination.[86] The system, therefore, upheld both the principles of integrated religious education and parental choice. This had proved particularly advantageous to a minority denomination such as Methodism, for while it prevented them actively evangelising in schools, it also prevented others from proselytising Methodist children.

The situation in England was somewhat different, where Wesleyan Methodism was the second largest denomination after the Church of England.[87] The British Conference had consistently rejected government initiatives to extend and fund primary education throughout the early and mid-nineteenth century, acting as an extra-parliamentary pressure group to persuade the administration not to act. The Whig proposals of 1839 were opposed on the basis that the state would be indirectly supporting Catholicism, which ran contrary to their understanding of the 'Protestant Constitution'.[88] The 1843 plans were rejected because they were too favourable to the Church of England, and Methodists were implacably opposed to the ritualistic Tractarian movement that they feared was gaining ascendancy and

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[83] D. N. Hempton, 'Wesleyan Methodism and educational politics in early nineteenth-century England' *History of Education*, 8:3 (1979), p.209 and *ICM, 1863.*
[84] *ICM*, 1863.
[85] Arthur to Rigg, 23 October 1869, (MCA PLP.2.59.23).
[86] D. H. Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment*, (London, 1970) p.160.
[87] Church of England, 5,292,551 attendees, Wesleyan Methodist Church, 1,544,528 attendees, *English Religious Census, 1851.*
[88] *Ibid.*, p.210.

corrupting the Protestant values of the Established Church.[89] The denomination had negotiated state grants for their schools in 1847, but the extension of that scheme to Catholic foundations in the following year provoked the 'ultras' in Conference to declare that Methodism should henceforth reject the government funding on the basis that it was being shared with heretics.[90] These arguments were all founded on the belief that education could not be separated from religion, and it was therefore imperative that correct doctrine should be taught to all English children. By 1870 there thus existed in England a strong tradition of denominational elementary schools and many believed that the Liberal bill would extend funding to further Methodist foundations. The extension of the Irish system of national schools into England was not considered a desirable option by many at the British Conference, especially if there was any reasonable hope of furthering the cause of Methodist schools.[91] Perceived advantages of a denominational system were that it averted attempts by clergy of other denominations to proselytise Methodist children, it avoided the perils of encroaching secularism and would bring faith to the children of the 'irreligious multitudes' revealed by the 1851 religious census.[92] Promoting a strictly denominational system, however, raised the difficult questions of provision of religious instruction for minority denominations and the role of the Established Church in providing such instruction. These issues continued to plague the English Methodist Church right into the twentieth century as they fought to get Methodist education for Methodist children.[93]

Within Methodism, opinion was divided as to whether a single education system for the whole of the UK should be adopted by the government, or whether the situation in England and Ireland was sufficiently different to warrant separate solutions. The option of introducing a denominational system for Ireland was never believed to be desirable. The demands of the Roman Catholic bishops for denominational education were interpreted as demands for indirect endowment of the Roman Catholic Church, whereby the state would fund church schools without having any

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[89] *Ibid.*, pp216-7
[90] *Ibid.*, pp219-20 and J. T. Smith, 'The Wesleyans, the "Romanists" and the Education Act of 1870', *Recusant History*, 23:1 (1996), p.127.
[91] *WCM, 1869.*
[92] Rigg, *Primary Education in England*, p.29.
[93] *WCM 1903.*

influence over the curriculum.[94] This was considered to be an attack on essential Protestant liberties, which for evangelicals lay at the heart of the Empire. The real question was whether a non-denominational system would be an acceptable alternative in England or whether the Methodist Conference should maintain its commitment to denominational schooling in a hope that it might just sway a reluctant government.

In 1869, the British Conference affirmed their commitment to denominational education in England, drawing a stark contrast between the situation there and that which existed in Ireland. By acknowledging the differences, the British Conference also pledged itself to promote non-denominational education for Ireland, in tandem with their own plans for the English system. [95] This stance was of grave concern to the Irish Conference, which remained deeply concerned about the impact that conceding to Roman Catholic demands would have on education in the country.[96] The Irish denominational journal, the *Irish Evangelist,* bemoaned the divisions between the attitudes of the two Conferences of the United Kingdom, stating that the application of the denominational system to Ireland would be 'nothing short of a calamity'.[97] The best chance of Irish Methodism to avoid the institution of such a system would be, therefore, to persuade the British Conference to petition the government on their behalf.[98] This strategy also encouraged the government to treat Methodism across Britain and Ireland as a single entity. Irish Methodists thus attempted to convince their brethren that a single official policy supporting non-denominational education was essential to the survival of Methodist teaching in Ireland.

James Harrison Rigg was at the forefront of the education campaign as chair of the Methodist Education Committee. He was strongly in favour of retaining and expanding denominational education for England, while considering a non-sectarian system a necessity for Ireland. These views were strongly challenged by his close

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[94] *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 1871, p.1129.
[95] *WCM 1869.*
[96] *ICM 1870.*
[97] *Irish Evangelist,* March 1870.
[98] *ICM 1870.*

friend and colleague, William Arthur. Arthur was at this time Principal of Methodist College, Belfast, and had previously been the President of the British Methodist Conference in 1866. He thus had a detailed knowledge of the educational situation on both sides of the Irish Sea. He considered that a denominational system was 'friendly to Popery and High Churchmen, & shuts up Methodism to certain localities'.[99] Arthur was concerned about the effect of the education bill on Ireland, however, he insisted that this point also applied to rural areas of England such as Cornwall, where he feared a purely denominational system would restrict Methodist influence. The extension of the national system would facilitate Methodist religious instruction wherever there were Methodist ministers. Arthur protested to Rigg that '"supplementing the Denominational system" ... is not only short-sighted, but a public wrong', asserting that the 'nation will have schools and ought to have them free' and any policy that hindered this was a morally insupportable.[100] Furthermore, he claimed that in advocating a denominational system Rigg was in fact hastening the 'final triumph of the secular principle', which ran contrary to all Methodist beliefs.[101] Arthur's contention was that if parents were forced to send their children to a school that contradicted their religious beliefs, the population would rapidly start to demand a system entirely free from religious influence, a situation he believed would be intolerable.

It would appear that Arthur was more politically astute than his colleague Rigg. Despite the staunch religious principles of Gladstone there is no indication that he was prepared to support solely denominational schools out of state funds, and other senior Liberals dealing with the bill, such as William Forster and John Bright, treated the religious difficulty 'as comparatively a trifle'.[102] The government had no desire to either foment sectarian tension or offend influential pressure groups such as the National Education League that campaigned for free, non-denominational education.[103] Arthur feared that the threat of a completely secular education system

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[99] Arthur to Rigg, 23 October 1869, (MCA, PLP.2.59.23).
[100] *Ibid.*
[101] *Ibid.*
[102] Parry, 'Religion and the collapse of Gladstone's first government,' pp83-86 and *Methodist Recorder*, 21 January 1870.
[103] Patricia Auspos, 'Radicalism, pressure groups and party politics: from the National Education League to the National Liberal Federation' *Journal of British Studies*, 20:1 (1980), pp184-6.

was in danger of being overlooked by Rigg in favour of an unattainable goal. He argued that the extension of national schools to England was not only attainable:

> but it will still take all you pro-Denominational Education men can do to prevent it in a worse form ... secular schools. Without the aid of the Methodists the Denominational System must die. With it the Free School Movement would gladly attach to itself the Denominational instruction and so carry the day.[104]

Arthur's arguments appeared to have swayed opinion away from an insistence on state funding for denominational schools towards a compromise position. The debates of the English Methodist Education Committee, convened in November of that year, demonstrated a more conciliatory approach to the idea of a non-sectarian system. Under Rigg's leadership, the committee, while stating a preference for denominational schools, accepted the impossibility of filling current gaps in educational provision with Wesleyan schools. The resolutions passed reflect the two chief concerns of its members: that the connexion should resist with all its power the encroachment of secularism into the education system and that the new law should protect Methodist children living in areas without a Methodist school from the proselytism of other denominations.[105] This second point was with particular regard to the expansion of Church of England schools teaching the Anglican catechism, and was in response to a number of instances where Anglican clergy had insisted that children enrolled at a Church of England day school also attend the Anglican Sunday school.[106] In practice, this meant that the English Methodists were now prepared to accept a system of education that included religious instruction, such as Bible reading, while banning the use of specific Church catechisms. The non-denominational character of this instruction would be safeguarded by the addition of a conscience clause, permitting parents to remove their children from this religious instruction if desired. What was not considered acceptable was a completely secular schooling system and the Conference

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[104] Arthur to Rigg, 29 October 1869, (MCA, PLP.2.59.25).
[105] Wesleyan Education Committee Annual Report, 1870.
[106] J H Rigg, 'Denominational and National Education' *London Quarterly Review*, January 1870 and Wesleyan Education Committee Annual Report, 1865.

proceeded to demand that 'ignorance' outside of denominational efforts should be funded by the state as necessary for the moral welfare of the country.[107]

The Methodist strategy henceforth was more defensive. Despite the 'chorus of lamentation raised by a number of good Methodists', neither the Methodist Conference nor the Committee of Education was prepared to develop a distinctly Methodist solution to the education crisis.[108] Methodism was divided and this was reflected in the twofold campaign to protect its own denominational schools, while attempting to shield its children from proselytism. These defensive arguments were characterised by an over-whelming fear of 'priestcraft' from both the High Church party within Anglicanism and the Roman Catholic Church. There was a particular fear of the ultramontanism prevalent in the Irish Catholic hierarchy, which was perceived as an attempt to extend the Pope's temporal power and undermine the foundations of the British Empire.[109] Thus, the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine* in 1871 claimed that:

> What a "denominational" school means, in their [Roman Catholic bishops'] sense of the word, is one in which the priest is supreme, - where the State has no voice, and civil society (except so far as the priest cannot be wholly rid of its influence) has no control.[110]

It was believed that the Roman Catholic hierarchy would never be satisfied by government concessions until they had achieved complete independence from Britain and were free to create a Catholic state. This could never be accepted by the Methodists because they considered themselves to have a civilising mission across the Empire, particularly in Ireland where they saw Protestantism as bringing culture and prosperity.

Having become resigned to a form of non-denominational education being implemented, the question now arose of how religion should be taught in these schools. Complete secularisation of education was insupportable, as was control of

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[107] *WCM*, 1870.
[108] *Methodist Recorder*, 21 January 1870.
[109] *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, 1871, pp1131-2.
[110] *Ibid.*, p.1129.

the religious curriculum by the state. The views of senior Methodists in 1870 were summarised thus:

> Either the Government must decide upon the nature of the religious instruction to be given, or each locality must decide for itself, or religious instruction must be prohibited altogether. The first of these is out of the question. To the third we cannot bring ourselves to assent. The second, therefore, with all its obvious drawbacks, remains as the best course to be taken.[111]

It was not considered appropriate for the government to set the religious syllabus because many Methodists believed that the Church and State should be separate and a centrally imposed programme would naturally favour the Established Church due to their representation in the House of Lords.

The resulting Act was considered an adequate compromise by all concerned. Rigg maintained that Methodism had not been forced to abandon 'any true and vital principles which had been formerly held'.[112] Education in Ireland remained basically unchanged, with national schools at its heart. In England, a dual system of education was instigated whereby the state supplemented denominational schools where there was need with non-sectarian schools. The principle of religious and moral instruction in these schools was also maintained. The religious content was overseen by a locally elected board, and thus avoided domination of the school by a single church and supplied a mechanism whereby the religion of the local population could be reflected in the teaching. Furthermore, a mandatory conscience clause was introduced, allowing parents to remove their children from any religious instruction with which they did not agree. This fully accorded with Methodist principles of parental rights and protected Methodist children from the proselytism of other denominations, while still allowing their own doctrines and catechism to be taught. The only major problem was 'clause twenty-five' of the Act that permitted children in poor law institutions to be sent to denominational schools at the rate-payers' expense. Methodists interpreted this as being biased towards the Established

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[111] *Methodist Recorder*, 25 February 1870.

[112] J. H. Rigg, *England's National System of Education: An Address to the Students in the Wesleyan Training Institution, Westminster, February 10th, 1871*, (London, 1871,) p.4.

Church and contrary to the non-denominational principles of the Act. However, this provision was never widely enacted and was resolved in 1876.[113]

Conclusion

The two decades prior to the first Home Rule crisis saw Methodism in Ireland undergoing a period of gradual change. For the first time, the relative strength of their connexion was able to be assessed in relation to that of the other major denominations. The place of religion in Irish society was dramatically altered by the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland resulting in a voluntary system of church maintenance. For Methodists, the result was the undertaking of a detailed analysis of the effectiveness of their message and a re-assessment of their role in Irish society. The re-union of Methodism in the country that was a direct consequence of this served to augment the confidence of the denomination and increase the efficiency of their missionary activity. Methodism was also beginning to respond to the concerns of its members in the political sphere, taking definite positions on a range of social and moral legislation.

The contrasting reactions of the Methodist Church to the Irish Church and Education Acts demonstrate a development of their political awareness in the period immediately after the extension of the franchise. The over-representation of Methodists in Irish electoral boroughs prior to the reforming legislation of 1884-5 and the revelation in 1851 that in England Methodism was the second largest denomination increased the awareness within Methodism both in Ireland and England about the potential influence they could exert on politicians. This could be achieved both through the electoral process and by the Conference lobbying the government. This new self-confidence within the denomination was re-enforced by the steadily increasing membership, which appeared to demonstrate the validity of their message. The election of Gladstone in 1868 with his political rhetoric combining religion and morality further encouraged nonconformists to consider political questions in a religious light.[114] Moreover, with the successful negotiation of acceptable terms for

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[113] Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience*, pp130-1.

[114] D. W. Bebbington, 'Gladstone and the Nonconformists', p.372.

the education bill, British nonconformists realised the influence that they held over the Liberal administration.

The Methodist reaction to the Irish Church Act also set a precedent for the following years. After reunification, Methodism in Ireland grew steadily from 25,487 in 1878 until it reached a zenith of 28,863 members in 1912.[115] This corresponded with the growth of Wesleyan Methodism in England, when the Church reached the peak of its membership and influence between 1851-1918.[116] The election of Gladstone in 1868, on a political platform combining religion and morality, encouraged Methodists to consider political questions in a religious light.[117] These circumstances combined to produce a situation whereby the Conference chose to re-examine how flexible Wesley's 'no politics' rule could be. The tacit conclusion was that the directive could be interpreted to mean that Methodism should refrain from party political allegiances, but permitted official comment on 'moral' issues. This required re-assessment of what qualified as a moral issue, and this process, having commenced during the debates surrounding disestablishment, was furthered by the introduction of the education bill in 1870, which would directly affect the denomination's management of schools and the education of its children. The subsequent decision to approve statements on political issues set a precedent that went on to influence Methodist reaction to the Home Rule crises.

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[115] *ICM, 1878-1912.*
[116] British Methodist membership peaked at 447, 474 in 1906. (*WCM, 1851-1914*).
[117] Bebbington, 'Gladstone and the Nonconformists' p.372.

Chapter Three:
Methodism and the First Home Rule Crisis

Home Rule presents a 'crucial and extended motif' in the history of Ireland and Britain.[1] It was the single most important issue in Ireland between the 1870s and the partition of the island in 1922, and provided the constitutional backdrop to the struggle for Irish independence. Home Rule also exerted significant influence over British political life. The parliamentary efforts to introduce an acceptable bill defined the closing stages of the career of one of the nineteenth century's greatest statesmen, William Gladstone, and precipitated the bifurcation of the Liberal Party as well as contributing to its decline. Thus the introduction of the Government of Ireland bill to the House of Commons on the 8 April 1886 was a defining moment in the political trajectory of Great Britain and Ireland in the late nineteenth century. It was a moment when a number of factors coincided: electoral success for the Irish Nationalists; Gladstone's conversion to the principle of Home Rule; his efforts to find a cause to unify the Liberal Party; and the breakdown of the hegemonic conception of Ireland within the British Empire.[2] The ramifications of the introduction of the bill shaped the national development of Great Britain and Ireland into the twentieth century, which resulted in a split in the British Liberal Party, and the eventual partition of Ireland.

The campaign for Home Rule was the most highly contested issue in late-nineteenth-century Ireland, and contributed to the polarisation of that society on primarily confessional lines. Consequently, the study of the root causes of the 'Northern Irish problem' has continued to intrigue historians. The historiography of late nineteenth-century Ireland is dominated by the development of the Irish National Party, led by the charismatic figure of Charles Stewart Parnell, 'the uncrowned King of Ireland', and his personal popularity, successful manipulation of the electoral system and parliamentary procedure after 1885 and his use of extra-parliamentary organisations

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[1] Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: An Irish History 1880-2000*, (London, 2003), p.7.
[2] I. S. Lustick, 'Becoming Problematic: Breakdown of a Hegemonic Conception of Ireland in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *Politics and Society*, 8 (1990), pp39-74.

to pressurise the authorities.[3] Similarly, examinations of the growth of Unionism, and particularly Ulster Unionism, have commonly commenced in 1884-5, and focussed their reaction to the adoption of Nationalist ideas at the centre of government.[4] This embodied a teleological approach to the history of the 'long Ulster crisis', which emphasised the concurrent development of Nationalism and Unionism and the function of Home Rule as a prelude to Irish independence.[5]

A counterpoint to this approach was that taken by historians of British politics, who emphasised the decision of Gladstone to champion the Irish cause, proposing that either this was a strictly political manoeuvre or that the 'Grand Old Man' was motivated by a great moral imperative to pacify Ireland. The first approach highlights the internal politics of the Liberal Party, suggesting that Home Rule was the issue around which Gladstone intended to unify the alliance of progressive interests and detract from the 'programme politics' of his younger rival Joseph Chamberlain.[6] The second has been favoured by biographers of Gladstone, who emphasise how the deep religious convictions of the Liberal leader were the driving force of his political career, and formed his desire to deal justly with Ireland by removing religious inequality.[7] These analyses, however, have arguably understated the importance of the advance of Irish Nationalist ideology, and the distinct characteristics of Irish politics outside Westminster, instead focussing on British high politics and the careers of English politicians.

These interpretations have been recently overtaken by the analysis of Home Rule as an over-arching issue that shaped, and was shaped by, both British and Irish political

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[3] C. C. O'Brien, *Parnell and his Party, 1880-1890,* (Oxford, 1957); F. S. L. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell,* (London, 1977), and Alan O'Day, *Parnell and the First Home Rule Episode, 1884-7,* (Dublin, 1986).

[4] James Loughlin, *Gladstone, Home Rule and the Irish Question,* (London, 1986); *idem, Ulster Unionism and British national identity since 1885,* (London, 1995); and Alvin Jackson, *The Ulster Party: Irish Unionists in the House of Commons, 1884-1911,* (Oxford, 1989).

[5] Alan O'Day, 'The Ulster Crisis: A Conundrum', in Alan O'Day and D. G. Boyce (eds), *The Ulster Crisis,* (Basingstoke, 2006), p.1.

[6] A. B. Cooke and J. R. Vincent, *The Governing Passion: Cabinet, Government and Party Politics in Britain, 1885-6,* (Brighton, 1974) and D. A. Hamer, *Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery: A Study in Leadership and Policy,* (London, 1972).

[7] J. L. Hammond, *Gladstone and the Irish Nation,* (London, 1964); H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1875-98,* (Oxford, 1994); Crosby, *The Two Mr Gladstones,*); R. T. Shannon, *Gladstone: Heroic Minister, 1865-1898,* (London, 1999); and Bebbington, *The mind of Gladstone.*

events.[8] Alan O'Day, for example, presents an analysis of the theoretical foundation of Home Rule, which explores how the terminology and interpretations within the movement developed between 1867 and 1921.[9] For O'Day, the ideological debates concerning the future of Ireland primarily occur among the Anglo-Irish elite, and are framed by the imperatives of British parliamentary politics, which correspondingly assisted or hindered the progress of Home Rule in the House of Commons. O'Day suggests that politics between the mid-1880s and the 1920s comprised 'an occasion when a moment or incident in time is decisive in shaping the future', emphasising that the three Home Rule crises can be viewed by historians as a single historical episode.[10] By attempting to force the events surrounding the three Home Rule crises to fit this paradigm of a single event, O'Day conflates the resistance to the bills, each of which had a distinctive platform, albeit resting on the same social and political foundations. This analysis is complimented by Jackson's seminal study of this *leitmotif* of Irish history, in which he presents Home Rule as an evolving political and constitutional issue, particularly in the years preceding the introduction of the third Home Rule bill.[11] Jackson thus successfully traces the development of the political movements for and against Home Rule within Ireland, while simultaneously elucidating the centrality of the 'Irish Question' to British political discourse.

Relatively little, however, has been written specifically about the reactions of the various Protestant churches in Ireland to the Home Rule crises. Moreover, the Protestant churches have often been presented as sharing a common Unionist ideology rooted in their Ulster heartlands.[12] This is exemplified by David Hempton's work regarding Ulster Protestantism and Home Rule.[13] Despite recognising that it 'is misleading to present nineteenth-century Irish Protestantism in crudely monolithic

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[8] Alan O'Day, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921*, (Manchester, 1998) and Jackson, *Home Rule*.
[9] O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*.
[10] O'Day, 'The Ulster Crisis: A Conundrum', p.1.
[11] Jackson, *Home Rule*.
[12] Hempton and Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism*; Hempton, *Religion and political culture*; *idem*, '"For God and Ulster"; Megahey, *The Irish Protestant churches*; *idem*, '"God will defend the right": the protestant churches and opposition to home rule', in D. G. Boyce and Alan O'Day (eds), *Defenders of the union: a survey of British and Irish unionism since 1801*, (London, 2001), pp159-75; *idem*, '"Irish Protestants feel this betrayal keenly..." Home Rule, Rome rule and nonconformity', in D. G. Boyce and Roger Swift (eds), *Problems and Perspectives in Irish history since 1800*, (Dublin, 2004), pp164-179; David McConnell, 'The Protestant Churches and the Origins of the Northern Ireland State'.
[13] Hempton and Hill, *Evangelical Protestantism*; Hempton, *Religion and political culture;* and *idem*, '"For God and Ulster"'.

terms', Hempton nonetheless focuses his attention on the creation of a single, united Ulster Protestant identity in the second part of the century.[14] Hempton emphasises the common experiences of Protestants in Ulster and asserts that prior to 1886 they had 'been thrown together by a formidable range of pressures', which contributed to the creation of a common Protestant identity.[15] More recently, however, Peatling and Walker have begun to reveal that denominational differences among Ulster Protestants continued into the 1880s and the creation of any united political identity was a late development.[16] These approaches, however, do little to elucidate the relationship that northern evangelicals had with their southern co-religionists and the national perspective of the churches that purported to be all-Ireland institutions. By contrast, Alan Megahey, while recognising the national status of the churches, emphasises the commonality of the denominations and presents the events of 1885-1921 as a single political action, punctuated by moments of extreme crisis.[17] This approach highlights the common features of the three Home Rule crises and elides political development over the four decades. Thus, McConnell alone, in his thesis 'The Protestant Churches and the Origins of the Northern Ireland State', separately addresses the reactions of the various denominations to each moment of constitutional crisis, and demonstrates the continuities and innovations of approach taken at each occasion.[18] His work is, however, primarily focused upon the geographical area of Ulster and he emphasises the role of the two largest Protestant denominations: the Church of Ireland and the Presbyterian Church. Although touching on the role of Methodism during the period, McConnell's analysis relies upon the view presented by the Belfast-published Methodist journal, the *Christian Advocate*, and fails to consider how the official response differed from the opinions offered by the journal.[19]

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[14] Hempton, *Religion and political culture*, p.113.
[15] *Ibid.*, p.106.
[16] Peatling, 'Whatever happened to Presbyterian radicalism? pp155-65 and B. M. Walker, *Ulster politics: the formative years, 1868-1886*, (Belfast, 1989).
[17] Megahey, *The Irish Protestant churches; idem*, '"God will defend the right"'; and *idem*, '"Irish Protestants feel this betrayal keenly..."'.
[18] McConnell, 'The Protestant Churches'.
[19] David McConnell, 'Irish Methodism and Home Rule', *Bulletin of the Wesleyan Historical Society (Irish Branch)*, 5 (1999), pp21-30.

The analysis presented here will challenge the focus of the current historiography of Protestantism in Ireland during the first Home Rule crisis. This chapter will explore how one denomination within the 'Protestant bloc', the Methodist Church, responded to the series of events that between the General Elections of 1885 and 1886 that constituted the first Home Rule crisis. This will be achieved through an analysis of three distinct channels of Methodist opinion: the official response of the Conference and Committee of Privileges; published discourse in the denominational journals and private publications; and the contribution of Methodist MPs to the parliamentary debates. Assessing these three arenas of debate and their interaction with each other and the wider political discourse will expose the range of Methodist reaction and reveal common themes and concerns. This will allow an exploration of to where Irish Methodists turned as the crisis developed; their brethren in England or the other Protestant denominations of Ireland, and assess how their reaction was shaped by existing religious and political relationships. The chapter is divided into four sections: the prelude to the publication of the Government of Ireland bill in April 1886; the reaction of the Methodist press in England and Ireland to the publication of the bill; the official reaction of Committee of Privileges and the Conference to the bill; and the contribution of Methodist MPs to the parliamentary debates.

The Householder's Parliament: The General Election of 1885[20]

The General Election campaign of November-December 1885 was the first to be fought on the provisions laid down by the 1884 Franchise Act and 1885 Redistribution Act. This legislation had substantially enlarged the Irish electorate to 728,000 and augmented the influence of the rural vote by equalising the property qualification, and merged all bar nine of the borough constituencies into expanded country divisions.[21] This presented an opportunity for Parnell to align new voters behind his party and strengthen his electoral mandate, as urban Protestant populations were obliged to engage with the concerns of their rural Catholic

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[20] Arthur, *The Householder's Parliament.*

[21] Hoppen, *Elections, Politics and Society* pp87-8; B. M. Walker, 'The 1885 and 1886 General Elections', in Peter Collins (ed.), *Nationalism and Unionism: Conflict in Ireland 1885-1921*, p.3; and O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p.93.

counterparts.[22] Parnell presented the Irish Parliamentary Party manifesto as consisting of a 'single plank, that plank being independence', which was cunningly inter-woven with his own distinctive plans for economic protectionism.[23] Nationalist candidates, however, continued to canvass using a broader platform, particularly emphasising the agrarian struggle, a key concern of many of the party's rural supporters and the National League.[24] Education also became a significant issue for the Parnellites, as the Irish Catholic hierarchy impressed on them a commitment to denominational education in response to the call of English Radicals for 'free education'.[25]

In England, where domestic concerns dominated, Irish Home Rule was not a key aspect of the election campaign. Rather, in England the contrasting styles and policies of Gladstone and Chamberlain held centre stage. Chamberlain promoted his 'unauthorized programme', which he hoped would be adopted by a majority of Liberal candidates, emphasising free education, graduated taxation and agrarian reform to increase the number of allotments and small-holdings. Earlier in the year, Chamberlain had proposed a Central Board scheme, devolving power to local assemblies of the constituent nations of the United Kingdom, however, by the time of the General Election his interest in Ireland had been superseded by a desire to push forward domestic reform.[26] Chamberlain had, however, miscalculated: Gladstone was not prepared to accept his policies wholesale, and published his own more moderate personal manifesto in September.[27] This document focused on the issues of education; local government reform, including control of liquor traffic and land law; and an offer to reconsider the rule of Ireland within the framework of Crown supremacy and the integrity of the Empire.[28] Despite apparent concessions, this programme did not commit Gladstone to the policies of his radical colleagues or

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[22] James Loughlin, *Gladstone, Home Rule and the Ulster Question, 1882-93,* (Dublin, 1996), p.30; T. P. O'Connor, *Memoirs of an Old Parliamentarian,* ii, (London, 1929), pp14-16; and C. C. O'Brien, *Parnell and his Party, 1880-90,* (Oxford, 1957), pp126-33.
[23] *The Times,* 6 October 1885.
[24] Alan O'Day, *Parnell,* pp102-4.
[25] *Ibid.,* pp104-6
[26] C. H. D. Howard, 'Joseph Chamberlain and the "Unauthorized Programme"', *English Historical Review,* 65 (1950), pp480-2, 486, and *idem,* 'Joseph Chamberlain, Parnell and the Irish "Central Board" scheme, 1884-5', *IHS,* 8 (1953), pp355, 359.
[27] Michael Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism: The Reconstruction of Liberal Policy in Britain, 1885-94,* (Brighton, 1975), pp20-1.
[28] *The Times,* 19 September 1885.

the Irish Nationalists. His proposal to consider educational reform was far from a commitment to 'free education'; neither did his stance on Ireland amount to a promise to introduce a Home Rule bill.

Among Methodists, there appears to have been little apprehension during the campaign that a Home Rule bill was imminent. The *Christian Advocate*, the Belfast-published voice of Irish Methodism, urged its readers to consider the Christian credentials of candidates, and to eschew voting on purely party grounds.[29] The *Advocate's* election coverage focused on candidates' attitudes to education, control of drink traffic and repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, which were expected to be key issues during the next parliament.[30] Concern about the liquor trade and the Contagious Diseases Acts demonstrates the commitment of Methodism as a body to the moral and ethical aspects of politics, and the standard advice to electors was that they should assess a candidate's 'attitude to moral questions' before making a decision.[31] Education had remained at the top of the Methodist political agenda since the Act of 1870: this was further emphasised in 1885 when the system of National Schools appeared to be under attack both from the English Radicals and the Catholic hierarchy.[32] In a pre-election address to householders William Arthur, the Irish-born Methodist minister, strongly denounced the implication of the Radicals' campaign that there were no alternatives to the 'godless school or the denominational school', urging Methodists to strongly resist this plank of the radical programme and defend the rights of parents to direct their children's education.[33] The stance taken by Arthur and the *Christian Advocate* throughout the campaign on these 'moral' issues, while ostensibly apolitical, demonstrates their political bias towards the Liberal Party prior to its public adoption of Home Rule.

This Liberal sympathy was reflected in the coverage that the *Advocate* gave to the three Methodist parliamentary candidates standing in the 1885 general election. An electoral advertisement placed by Thomas Shillington, the radical Liberal candidate in

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[29] *Christian Advocate*, 27 November 1885.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] William Arthur to John Wallen Jr., 21 November 1885, (MCA PLP.2.61.4) and *Christian Advocate*, 27 November 1885.
[32] *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, p.701 and O'Day, *Parnell*, (Dublin, 1986), pp104-6.
[33] Arthur, *The Householder's Parliament*, p.14.

North Armagh, was given prominent place in the journal, and commended by the editor.[34] Key to Shillington's campaign was advocacy of land reform and support for female suffrage, and the *Advocate* considered him to be 'a safe pair of hands' on questions of social morality, education, temperance and repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. Shillington was the only Methodist candidate identified by the *Advocate* in November 1885 as standing in Ireland when they decried the fact that the denomination was so anonymous.[35] Shillington's advanced views allowed him to muster support amongst the Catholic community in his constituency, however, his advocacy of free trade proved unpopular with local weavers, who accused him of allowing them to 'starve'.[36] Moreover, the Liberal Party was weak in the area, Shillington finding it 'impossible to get up a meeting of Liberals' to launch his campaign. At the meeting that he did convene, his opponents dominated, reacting to his criticisms of the Conservative candidate, Edward Saunderson[37] by 'booing and hissing', which 'rendered his address inaudible'.[38]

The failure of the *Advocate* to identify the other two Methodist candidates standing in the election is instructive. The journal was unable, or perhaps unwilling, to recognise either Jeremiah Jordan of the Irish Parliamentary Party, or E. S. W. de Cobain standing as an Independent Conservative as members of their denomination. Regarding attitudes towards Jordan, Methodists often presented their dislike of the Irish National Party as an aspect of their concern for morality to pervade public life. William Arthur, for instance, characterised the Parnellite tactic of obstruction in the House of Commons as bordering on treasonable, and suggested that English Liberals, (presumably, including Gladstone), who were prepared to work with those of the Irish Party as 'incredibly gullible'.[39] This attitude was also apparent in the election coverage delivered by the *Christian Advocate,* which omitted to include the campaign of Jeremiah Jordan, a businessman from Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, and the Irish

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[34] *Christian Advocate,* 27 November 1885.
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] *Belfast Evening Telegraph,* 13 November 1885.
[37] Major Edward Saunderson, (later Colonel), first leader of the Irish Unionist parliamentary party. The Liberal MP for Co Caven 1865-74, the Land War pushed him towards an aggressive Orangeism (he joined the Order in 1882), he was returned for North Armagh as a Conservative in 1885, a seat that he held until his death in 1906. Saunderson was the principle driving force behind the creation of the Irish Unionist parliamentary party that emerged in January 1886.
[38] *Belfast Evening Telegraph,* 13 November 1885.
[39] Arthur, *The Householder's Parliament,* p.6 and p.13.

Parliamentary Party candidate for West Clare, provoking Methodists with Nationalist sympathies to accuse the *Christian Advocate* of unfair bias against them. Despite the *Advocate's* criticism that the denomination was politically undistinguished, verging on being completely anonymous, its first mention of Jordan and his Methodist connection was published after the election. This consisted of a denunciation of Jordan for associating 'with a band of men who ignore the moral law and trample underfoot the laws of the land', suggesting that he had forfeited the right to call himself a Methodist.[40] One personal correspondent of Jeremiah Jordan, Alexander Duncan of Co. Kildare, claimed that a letter he had written to the newspaper had been declined solely because it advocated support for the Irish Parliamentary Party.[41] This was never contested by the *Advocate,* which consistently criticised Parnell and his party.

This anti-Nationalist attitude does not, however, explain the failure of the *Christian Advocate* to identify as Methodist the Independent Conservative candidate for East Belfast E. S. W. de Cobain, who identified himself as a 'the candidate of the working classes'.[42] Despite *The Times* publishing an article summarizing the biographies of parliamentary candidates, identifying de Cobain's father as a Wesleyan minister, the *Advocate* contained no coverage of his campaign.[43] The *Belfast Evening Telegraph* described the meeting where he announced his candidature as 'crowded with working men electors' and the proceedings 'of a very enthusiastic character', but did not state de Cobain's religious affiliation.[44] De Cobain was a controversial candidate for the Belfast constituency, standing as an independent in opposition to the official Conservative candidate, specifically appealing to the workingman. Moreover, de Cobain had previously been Grand Master of the Grand Orange Lodge of Belfast for five years, and was, at the time of the election, a Deputy Grand Master of Ireland.[45]

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[40] *Christian Advocate,* 27 November 1885 and 18 December 1885.
[41] Alexander Duncan to Jeremiah Jordan, 16 December 1885, (PRONI, D2073/2/1). The *Methodist Times* was also subject to accusations that it suppressed opposing views by a correspondent of the *Christian Advocate,* 21 May 1886.
[42] *Belfast Evening Telegraph,* 12 November 1885.
[43] *The Times,* 27 November 1885.
[44] *Ibid.,* 12 November 1885.
[45] *The Times,* 27 November 1885.

On the eve of the election the *Belfast Telegraph* urged its readers in the Belfast East division to support Sir J. P. Corry 'the only duly and constitutionally chosen Conservative candidate before the constituency'.[46] The local press coverage of de Cobain was thus rather muted in tone, describing his subsequent victory as 'unexpected' and the result of 'the influence of the Parnellite and Nationalist party'.[47] The *Christian Advocate*, reacting to the general election on 11 December, suggested that de Cobain was a (English) Primitive Methodist, and omitted to mention that he was elected for a Belfast constituency.[48] This rather coy approach by the *Advocate* to de Cobain's return to parliament appears to reflect the uneasiness of local Conservatives about his candidature and election. The Orange and working-class credentials of de Cobain may have discouraged extensive coverage of his electoral campaign. Methodism had traditionally distrusted extreme political views, which conflicted with the self-conscious 'respectability' of the denomination. Across the British Isles, and throughout the nineteenth century, the Methodist Church had closely identified itself with 'moral' campaigns that frequently targeted recreations associated with 'rough' elements in the working classes.[49] The *Advocate* was apparently as wary of associating itself with the rhetoric of Orangeism, as it was reluctant to support Nationalist claims.[50] This approach would also correspond with the appeal of the London-published *Methodist Recorder* for Methodists to 'avoid "Nationalism" and "Orangeism" but seek a balanced path represented by the "moderate Whig" in Ireland or "moderate Liberal" in England'.[51]

The results of the general election revealed both the popularity of the Parnellite platform in Ireland and the failure of British Liberals to successfully capture the

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[46] *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, 25 November 1885.
[47] *Ibid.*, 27 November 1885.
[48] *Christian Advocate*, 11 November 1885.
[49] Hempton, 'Belfast: The Unique City?', p.25
[50] Loughlin, *Gladstone, Home Rule and the Ulster question*, p.226. This uneasiness may, in retrospect, appear to have been justified as de Cobain proceeded to have a controversial career as an MP, being citied by the parliamentary commission that investigated the Belfast riots of 1886 as inflaming the violence and fleeing the country in May 1891 after the issuing of a warrant for his arrest on charges of 'gross indecency with another male person' resulting in his expulsion from the House of Commons. *Royal Commission on Belfast Riots. Report, Minutes of Evidence, Appendix*, PP 1887 [C.4925-I], p.45 and *Report of Warrant for the Arrest of E S W de Cobain MP for East Belfast*, PP. 1890-1 [253].
[51] *Methodist Recorder*, 22 April 1886. While less radical than the contemporary *Methodist Times*, the *Methodist Recorder* nevertheless promoted a Liberal political agenda. Moreover, since the *Watchman* ceased publication in 1884 there was no Wesleyan publication in the Conservative interest.

imagination of the electorate. The Nationalist combination of Home Rule, land reform and education proved a resounding success, seeing them victorious in 85 seats in Ireland, and a further one in the Scotland division of Liverpool. This tally included the Methodist, Jeremiah Jordan who captured the seat of West Clare by the substantial margin of 6763 votes to 289.[52] The election yielded a poor result for the Liberals, who gained a total of 335 seats and were completely obliterated in Ireland.[53] Chamberlain over-estimated the popularity of his 'unauthorized programme': church leaders were concerned that the educational proposals would erode the religious teaching in schools, and the rallying cry of 'three acres and a cow' had less appeal in urban constituencies than expected.[54] In addition, the directive issued on the eve of the election by the Irish National League of Great Britain that in 'no case ought an Irish Nationalist to give a vote, ... to a member of the Liberal or Radical party', undoubtedly harmed the Liberal cause in urban wards with large Irish populations.[55] Estimates of the exact cost of the Irish Nationalist appeal in parliamentary seats to the Liberals ranged between 20 and 65 seats altogether; Chamberlain set it at 25.[56] This, combined with the public dissention among the Liberal leadership, resulted in that party faring poorly in many of the borough seats that they had expected to capture, although some gains in county seats partially compensated for this.[57] The Conservatives were able to capitalise on this weakness and returned a total of 249 members, leaving the Irish Parliamentary Party holding the balance of power in the new parliament. Consequently, the Irish question had an enhanced parliamentary

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[52] B. M. Walker, *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1801-1922*, (Dublin, 1978), p.333 and Kieran Sheedy, *The Clare Elections*, (Dublin, 1993), p.275. The candidature of Jordan in West Clare appears to conform to a pattern favoured by Parnell, whereby he favoured Protestant candidates in order to help allay English fears about the treatment of that community under an independent legislature and minimize the arguments about Ulster religious distinctiveness. Parnell ensured the nomination of the centrally endorsed candidates by appointing an existing MP to chair local conventions and charging then to guarantee, by all means necessary, the selection of the approved contender. Nevertheless, the system of local conventions gave a veneer of democracy to proceedings and rallied local support (including from Catholic clergy) for the candidate. (O'Connor, *Memoirs*, ii, pp14-16; C. C. O'Brien, *Parnell*, pp126-33 and 261 and F. S. L. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell*, pp349-53).

[53] Crosby, *The Two Mr Gladstones*, p.199 and Walker, *Parliamentary Election results in Ireland*, pp130-6.

[54] P. T. Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain: Entrepreneur in Politics*, (New Haven, 1994), pp209-213, Howard, 'Joseph Chamberlain', p.487, Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism*, p.37. 'Three acres and a cow' was the slogan the 1885 campaign for land reform in England. Land reform was desired in order to combat rural poverty, with three acres and a cow considered to be the minimum needed to adequately support a family.

[55] *The Times*, 23 November 1885, O'Connor, *Memoirs*, ii, p.9.

[56] Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain*, p.213.

[57] Barker, *Gladstone and Radicalism*, p.24.

status as the two main British parties manoeuvred to find an accommodation that would allow them to seize power.[58]

"Ulster will never acquiesce": Methodist reaction to the 'Hawarden Kite'[59]

With the general election having delivered Parnell the parliamentary fulcrum that he desired, it was unclear who would be summoned to form the government. Gladstone had the opportunity to make a public statement on his Irish policy, which, if in favour of Home Rule would have guaranteed Nationalist votes in parliament, and given the Liberal Party an effective parliamentary majority. The Liberal leader, however, preferred to wait until the Conservatives revealed their legislative programme for Ireland in the hope that this would resurrect the pre-election alliance between the Tories and the Irish Parliamentary Party. If this occurred, the Liberal Party would be in a position whereby, as the official Opposition in parliament they could nevertheless support Conservative reforms for Ireland, easing their passage through the House.[60] Lord Salisbury, as the current Prime Minister, retained the right to meet parliament in January, a course he resolved to take in the absence of a Liberal declaration. However, these plans were overtaken by events. On the 17 December 1885, the *Standard* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* published Home Rule proposals apparently originating from the Liberal leader, which sparked immediate uproar across the political nation. It was claimed that the 'Mr Gladstone has definitely adopted the policy of Home Rule for Ireland and there are well-founded hopes that he will win over the chief representatives of the moderate section of the [Liberal] party to his views'.[61] This press release, which rapidly became know as the 'Hawarden Kite', gave detailed information about the supposed plans of the ex-Premier. These included proposals for the constitution of a Dublin parliament, the continued presence of Irish MPs at Westminster and the future of commercial relations between the countries. Although Gladstone quickly issued a public disclaimer, denying that the press statements gave 'an accurate statement of his views on the subject', this did little to calm the highly charged atmosphere that the

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[58] O'Day, *Parnell,* pp122-139.
[59] *Christian Advocate,* 24 December 1885.
[60] Crosby, *The Two Mr Gladstones,* pp203-5.
[61] *Pall Mall Gazette,* 17 December 1885, reprinted in the *Freeman's Journal,* 18 December 1885.

newspaper articles had provoked.[62] The Nationalist organ, the *Freeman's Journal* claimed that 'Mr Gladstone's denial of that authority gives to the announcements themselves enhanced importance',[63] while the National Press Agency, from which the announcement had emanated, maintained that although the statement was 'premature, and unauthorized' it nevertheless embodied the 'main features' of the Liberal leader's programme for Ireland.[64] The press agency had solid grounds for defending the revelations, since the information had been obtained in an interview on 16 December from Herbert Gladstone MP, noted Home Ruler and the sometime private secretary of his father. Herbert believed that in the wake of the Liberal defeat in the recent general election, and the resulting leadership vacuum left by his father, 'either the Irish question must be at once taken up or the Party must choose a new leader, or break up'.[65] This prompted him to brief journalists that his father was contemplating the creation of an independent Irish legislature in an effort to rally Liberal support.[66] Although Herbert made it clear at the time, and subsequently, that the 'Kite' was entirely his own initiative, his relationship to the 'Grand Old Man' ensured that his pronouncements on Home Rule were interpreted as an accurate reflection of his father's Irish programme, which had been made with his father's tacit approval.

The *Christian Advocate* reacted with immediate horror to the suggestion that Gladstone had adopted the policy, and the prospect that he would carry his party with him. In its first publication after the Home Rule revelations, the *Advocate* published an extensive rebuttal of the proposals, asking 'on what grounds is a separate legislature needed for Ireland?'[67] The arguments were advanced using religious terms: Nationalism was described as the 'spawn of an alien creed' and Home Rule was a 'war on the Crown rights of Christ'. Moreover, the loyal Protestants of Ireland were being abandoned by those who should defend them, to

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[62] *The Times,* 18 December 1885.
[63] *Freeman's Journal,* 18 December 1885.
[64] *The Times,* 18 December 1885.
[65] Herbert Gladstone to Reid, 14 December 1885, quoted in M. R. D. Foot, 'The Hawarden Kite', *Journal of Liberal Democrat History,* 20, (1998), p.29.
[66] Alan O'Day 'Hawarden Kite', http://www.liberalhistory.org.uk/record.jsp?type=page&ID=90&image=history, (accessed 17.05.06).
[67] *Christian Advocate,* 24 December 1885.

the rule of the disloyal Catholic majority.[68] The main thrust of the *Advocate's* rebuttal of Home Rule was, however, the impact that the creation of a Dublin legislature would have on Irish commerce and the integrity of the British Empire. The suggestion that a number of Irish MPs would be retained at Westminster to assist with Imperial affairs did little to appease Methodist apprehension concerning their loss of influence and fears about the impending disintegration of Empire. Regarding commercial interests, although the press release assured its readers that it was 'not expected' that there would be any revision of the commercial relations between Britain and Ireland, this did not appear to be in any way certain, especially since Parnell was known to advocate economic protectionism.[69]

Likewise, the *Advocate* was derisive about the suggestion that Gladstone was 'fully aware' of the situation of the Protestant minority in the country, and would ensure adequate safeguards were instituted for their protection. It maintained that 'there is no greater delusion than to suppose that a Home Rule parliament would be able to fulfil guarantees, if guarantees were given' concerning Protestant rights.[70] Central to this claim was the assumption that Westminster would be unable to protect Protestant interests, as MPs sitting in London would not retain the power of veto over a Dublin parliament. Consequently, the only aid the Imperial Parliament would be able to give, would be by force of arms, a route it would be unwilling to take. Irish Protestants thus perceived that they would be stranded without recourse to an higher Imperial authority should the new legislature discriminate against their interests. Thus, the *Christian Advocate* was convinced that 'the only hope for a United Ireland is as an integral part of the United Empire ... Ulster will never acquiesce'.[71]

Apart from specific objections to Home Rule, the *Christian Advocate* also sought to cast doubt on whether Gladstone could continue to be considered an 'imperial statesman' or 'responsible politician' if he could 'countenance the cry for Home Rule'

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[68] *Ibid.*, 24 December 1885 and 8 January 1886.
[69] *The Times*, 6 October 1885.
[70] *Christian Advocate*, 8 January 1886.
[71] *Ibid.*, 24 December 1885.

without due regard to Protestant and Imperial interests.[72] Gladstone's apparent perfidy was exacerbated by the reaction of the English Methodist press to the situation. Prior to January 1886, the *Methodist Times*, edited by the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, had made little public comment regarding Irish Nationalism, except to condemn the tactics of the National League and Parnell's parliamentary obstructionism.[73] The emergence of Home Rule, however, as the key political issue in British politics focused Hughes's attention on the Irish situation and he rapidly elevated it to the 'highest priority of Christian politics' through the medium of his newspaper.[74] Although it adopted similar religious imagery to the *Christian Advocate*, in dramatic contrast to the Irish newspaper, the *Methodist Times* aligned itself with the policy for Home Rule, declaring that: 'Nothing is so important as that evangelical Christians should realise that "believing in Christ" means a great deal more than believing in Him as a personal Saviour. It means ... Christ's way of treating Ireland.'[75]

The conversion of the *Methodist Times* to the cause of Home Rule proved significant in shaping relations between the British and Irish churches. The *Methodist Times*, like the *Christian Advocate*, had only been founded at the beginning of 1885, and the publication of the Hawarden Kite marked the first moment of major political divergence between the two journals. Prior to the Gladstonian revelations there appears to have been no inkling that such a potential gulf between the political sympathies of Methodists in the two countries existed, and the *Christian Advocate* reacted with horror to the support for Nationalism emanating from its contemporary.

The publication by the *Methodist Times* on 7 January of 'An Irish Methodist's reasons for supporting Home Rule' by Jeremiah Jordan, newly-elected Nationalist MP for West Clare, only served to add fuel to the fire.[76] The *Christian Advocate* had little love for Jordan whose Methodism they had called into question during the election campaign, suggesting that by allying himself with the Nationalist cause he had

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[72] *Ibid.*
[73] Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes: Founder of a New Methodism, Conscience of a New Nonconformity*, (Cardiff, 1999), p.150.
[74] *Ibid.*
[75] *Methodist Times*, 14 January 1886.
[76] *Ibid.*, 7 January 1886.

forfeited the right to claim the title 'Methodist' even less the epithet 'loyal' bestowed on him by the *Methodist Times*.[77] In his article, Jordan used language specifically designed to appeal to the British audience. He emphasised his roots in the north of Ireland, his up-bringing within Methodism and 'the principles of Protestant Nonconformity'.[78] He accentuated his long-standing support for Gladstonian Liberalism, and highlighted the campaigns supported by British Nonconformists as a significant stage in his development as a Nationalist.[79] Jordan also stressed his perception of Irish Protestantism as inherently illiberal and further claimed that this intolerance and his support for Gladstone had isolated him within Irish Methodism.[80] Published in England, Jordan's article exploited the political affinity that had developed between English nonconformity and Gladstone in the 1860s, and which had been cemented in the 1870s. The Liberal leader's moral crusade surrounding the Bulgarian agitations in 1876[81] confirmed the extent to which his profound religious convictions governed his political action. This political relationship between Liberalism and nonconformity had no parallel development in Ireland, where the debates concerning the Bulgarian atrocities had become inextricably entangled with Nationalist calls for Home Rule.[82]

The suggestion that Jordan might be a representative voice of Irish Methodism appalled many Irish pew-dwellers, and sparked a flurry of correspondence to both the religious press and to the Nationalist *Freeman's Journal*. The latter portrayed Jordan as representing Irish Methodism in the House of Commons, which, while accurate in the sense that he was a Wesleyan Methodist elected for an Irish constituency, obscured the reality that a majority of his co-religionists were firm

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[77] *Christian Advocate*, 18 December 1885.
[78] *Methodist Times*, 14 January 1886.
[79] *Ibid.*
[79] *Ibid.*
[80] *Ibid.*
[81] In 1876 the Turkish authorities ruthlessly suppressed an uprising by Bulgarian Orthodox Christians. The Russians indicated that they would assist their Orthodox brethren in their agitation. Disraeli's government appeared to be on the verge of supporting Turkish authority against Russian ambitions, with the Liberal Party concerned that the United Kingdom was being led into an unnecessary war. Nonconformist opinion was galvanised by the publication of a series of articles in the *Daily News* detailing the Turkish atrocities against the Bulgarians. Gladstone reacted by speaking out against Turkish power in Bulgaria, framing the arguments in clear moral terms, and rapidly becoming the champion of the nonconformists.
[82] R. T. Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation, 1876*, (London, 1963), p.159.

supporters of the Unionist cause. In a letter to the *Journal,* a third generation Irish Methodist, Matthew Tobias, expounded on this theme before extensively criticising the *Methodist Times,* deriding it as 'very much a Radical organ, with very few subscribers'.[83] While the *Methodist Times* certainly was in political sympathy with the progressive wing of the Liberal Party, they preferred to emphasise areas of social reform, rather than supporting leading radicals such as Chamberlain and his 'unauthorised programme'. The extent of the circulation of the *Methodist Times* at this point is unknown, although it was later the most widely read of the Methodist journals.[84] Nonetheless it is clear that the newspaper was plugging a gap in the market, reflecting the shift of Wesleyan Methodism towards progressive Liberalism: the *Methodist Times* commenced publication in the year following the demise of the Conservative *Watchman,* leaving British Methodism with two avowedly Liberal journals. Despite this, the theme of the unrepresentative nature of the *Methodist Times* was adopted by the *Christian Advocate* in its next issue, which, borrowing a phrase from Mr Tobias, ran a substantial article headed 'The *Methodist Times* (so called)' that criticised both the conduct and content of the newspaper. Stating that although the *Advocate* was 'greatly grieved to so openly reprove our contemporary', it questioned the motives of Hugh Price Hughes, accusing him of 'wanton meddling' in matters that did not concern him.[85] The article suggested that an Englishman had no business commenting on Irish affairs, which he could not possibly understand. Furthermore, the *Advocate* argued that as a Methodist, Hughes had a duty to listen to and support the opinion of his brethren who had direct experience of the matter. While this attitude, that the English had no business interfering in Irish affairs, seems to have been popular among Irish Methodists, it also appears to have been primarily an argument of convenience. When British sources promoted an anti-Home Rule agenda, the *Christian Advocate* was quick to cite them.[86] The *Advocate* had no time, and certainly no column space, for those Methodists either in England or Ireland who dissented from what it believed to be the only reasonable course: opposition to any form of Home Rule.

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[83] *Freeman's Journal,* 16 January 1886.
[84] By 1900 the *Methodist Times* had a readership of 150,000. (Greg Cuthbertson, 'Pricking the "nonconformist conscience": religion against the South African War', in Donal Lowry (ed), *The South African War Reappraised,* (Manchester, 2000), p.178).
[85] *Christian Advocate,* 22 January 1886.
[86] See for example, *Christian Advocate,* 16 April 1886.

In the same week as this clash between the two denominational newspapers occurred, the Irish Committee of Privileges met as the governing body of Methodism to discuss the official Methodist reaction to the Home Rule proposals. The resulting resolutions demonstrated an overwhelming commitment to the Union and a determination to contest any decision made to implement Home Rule. The committee declared:

> that in our deliberate and solemn conviction there is nothing in the histories or necessities of this country which requires the establishment of a separate Legislature; and any measure that would even tend towards a dissolution of the legislative union with Great Britain would be highly prejudicial both to the moral and material interests of Ireland, and that its immediate effect would be to increase rather than diminish the animosities which at present unhappily distract this country.[87]

Copies of the resolution were sent to members of both Salisbury's Conservative government and those who had been members of Gladstone's recently defeated administration. In March, the Irish Methodist welcome address to the new Lord Lieutenant reiterated support for the Union and pleaded on behalf of 'over 200 ministers and over 50,000 adherents', that the bonds between Britain and Ireland should not be loosened, and suggested that the cause of Home Rule was 'fraught with evil to the best interests of the United Kingdom'.[88] This appeal was brought to the attention of House of Commons by E. S. W. de Cobain. The unity of denomination on the issue of Home Rule was, however, disputed by the Irish MP William O'Brien who cited the Methodist affiliation of Nationalist Jeremiah Jordan, and the Chief Secretary refused permission for the address to be formally brought before the House because it 'has been already directly accessible to the public in the newspapers'.[89]

The public statements of the Irish Committee of Privileges were interpreted by the *Christian Advocate* (whose editor was a member of the committee), as 'a reprimand'

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[87] *Ibid.*, 22 January 1886, *ICM* 1886.
[88] *Christian Advocate*, 19 March 1886; *Methodist Recorder*, 12 March1886; and *ICM, 1886.*
[89] *Hansard 3*, ccciii, 1372-3, (19 March 1886).

to the *Methodist Times*, 'such as no journal in Methodism had ever received'.[90] Nevertheless, the decision of the committee to officially comment on a political issue was controversial. Methodists on both sides of the Irish Sea protested, firstly, that the Committee did not have the authority to pronounce on purely political matters. Indeed, the resolutions were perceived by some correspondents as demonstrating political partisanship, which the church had previously eschewed.[91] Secondly, it was claimed that it did not represent the full spectrum of Irish Methodist opinion. Although the 'no politics' ruling had been relaxed during the years preceding the first Home Rule crisis, for example during the debates concerning the Education Act of 1870 and demands for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts, this had been justified on the basis that these were moral, rather than purely political issues. Methodism's apparent abandonment of principled neutrality on a constitutional issue was thus perceived in some quarters as a grave error, which would potentially restrict the freedom of the individual regarding political affairs.[92] This concern was reinforced by the experience of Jeremiah Jordan, who frequently protested that his business interests were boycotted, and that he was excluded from office in the Methodist Church because of his political views.[93] Similar accusations of discriminatory attitudes towards ministers who supported Home Rule were reported by the *Methodist Times*, which suggested that the Rev. George Hammond in Belfast had been subject to a violent attack because of his political views.[94] In a similar vein, another correspondent to the British journal suggested that his district meeting had officially resolved to elect to the Irish Methodist Conference only those ministers who were known to oppose Home Rule.[95] This was, however, disputed by another minister who had been present, who claimed that the suggestion to elect only Unionists had merely been an informal comment.[96]

The charge that the Committee of Privileges did not represent the majority of Irish Methodist opinion, however, was more difficult to sustain. The national press

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[90] *Christian Advocate*, 22 January 1886.
[91] *Ibid.*, 29 January 1886 and *Methodist Times*, 4 February 1886.
[92] *Christian Advocate*, 22 January 1886 and *Methodist Times*, 28 January 1886.
[93] *Methodist Times*, 14 January 1886.
[94] *Ibid.*, 4 May 1886.
[95] *Ibid.*, 13 May 1886.
[96] *Ibid.*, 20 May 1886.

reported that the January resolutions had been passed unanimously by the Committee.[97] This was disputed by the Rev. William Gorman, who wrote to the *Freeman's Journal* to correct this view, an action for which he claimed to have been censured.[98] However, it would appear that he did not fundamentally disagree with the content of the resolutions, but dissented because he opposed the Committee commenting on a political matter.[99] Suggestions that those unavoidably absent from the meeting favoured Home Rule were soon discredited as they wrote to the Methodist journals to clarify that they were indeed opposed to the proposals. Moreover, a petition to the Houses of Parliament by the Committee of Privileges in May received near unanimous support within the Committee; two members abstained, but all others voted in favour of the appeal.[100] Furthermore, there were undoubtedly a number of Methodists scattered across Ireland who favoured Home Rule. Prior to the defeat of the bill in June 1886, however, all the district meetings, apart from Dublin, passed resolutions protesting against the scheme.[101] The little protest that occurred concerning the actions of the Committee of Privileges focussed on the principle that the Church should not involve itself in political affairs. Thomas Shillington, the unsuccessful Liberal candidate for North Armagh at the December election, believed that in involving itself directly in a political argument, the Committee of Privileges had set Methodist against Methodist with only 'evil results' resulting from 'this strange departure'.[102] He contended that the denomination's action had not gained the 'goodwill of the masses of the Irish people' but reasserted the values of Ascendancy, to which Methodism should be resolutely opposed. Shillington suggested that instead of waging political campaigns, Methodists should concentrate on being good citizens and 'address themselves to work out the best results under the new circumstances into which their country is coming' through the electoral system.[103]

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[97] *Freeman's Journal,* 19 January 1886.
[98] *Ibid.,* 23 January 1886 and *Christian Advocate,* 29 January 1886.
[99] *Freeman's Journal,* 23 January 1886.
[100] *Christian Advocate,* 29 January and 5 February 1886 and *Methodist Times,* 4 February 1886 and 13 May 1886.
[101] *Methodist Times,* 20 May 1886 and *Christian Advocate,* 14 May 1886.
[102] *Ibid.,* 3 June 1886.
[103] *Ibid.*

The publication of the January resolutions passed by the Committee of Privileges also served to provoke the first foray of the weekly English journal, the *Methodist Recorder* into the debates surrounding the Irish question. Although it had been reluctant to side either for or against Home Rule prior to the publication of the bill, under the heading of 'Hopes and Fears for Ireland' the *Recorder* censured Gladstone for the apparent rashness with which he was embarking on this legislative programme; suggesting that although he clearly felt a 'deep sense of responsibility' towards Ireland, he was entering upon this course of action with a 'confidence, few, if any, beside himself feel when brought face to face with the Irish problem'.[104] The newspaper questioned the level of power that the Nationalists were fit to exercise, suggesting that Gladstone had been misled by his confidence in 'the better side of human nature'. To bring a level of balance to the editorial, however, the *Recorder* was careful to emphasise that 'justice must be done to those who are clamouring for the power of self-government', requesting an impartial assessment of the arrangements for governing Ireland.[105] More temperate than either of its sister publications on the subject of Home Rule, the *Recorder* demonstrates the quandary in which many British Methodists found themselves: they greatly respected Gladstone and desired a solution to the Irish question, nevertheless, they instinctively sympathised with the plight of their Irish brethren in the face of a intractable problem, and were reluctant to devolve power to those who had regularly advocated violence.

This clash between the *Christian Advocate* and the *Methodist Times* after the publication of the 'Hawarden Kite' heralded a period of internecine conflict within Methodism. While there continued to be broad agreement across the denomination in Britain and Ireland concerning purely theological and ecclesiastical matters, there was significant divergence of opinion with regard to political and constitutional affairs. Indeed, the question of how Methodists should reconcile their desire for the moral good with actual policy came to dominate their political discourse. Both those who favoured, and those who opposed Home Rule, couched their arguments in religious language, while airing their opinion of the future trajectory of Irish

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[104] *Methodist Recorder*, 5 February 1886.
[105] *Ibid.*

society. This division within Methodism became further entrenched after Gladstone revealed the exact details of his plans in early April.

"Nothing better than a brilliant failure": Methodist reaction to the publication of the Home Rule Bill[106]

Following the results of the national poll, the Conservative cabinet decided to abandon their pre-election association with the Irish Parliamentary Party, and revert instead to a policy of coercion.[107] Consequently, the Salisbury administration was defeated by the combined votes of the Irish Parliamentary and Liberal Parties over an amendment to the Queen's speech, moved by Jesse Collings. The amendment concerned the implementation of the proposals for allotments and smallholdings presented by the Radical Programme of Chamberlain. Parnell seems to have had little interest in the Collings' amendment itself, but supported the resolution as a means of restoring the Liberals to power, as they would be more likely to pursue a Home Rule bill.[108] Salisbury, therefore, resigned as Prime Minister on the 28 January; Gladstone was summoned by the Queen on the following day and formally assumed the office of Prime Minister on the 3 February 1886. The Liberal Party were thus able to regain power without committing themselves to a specific course of action on Ireland, although Gladstone did pledge to 'examine whether it is or it is not practical to comply with the desire ... for the establishment ... of a legislative body, to sit in Dublin, to deal with Irish as distinguished from Imperial affairs'.[109] However, contrary to the expectations of his senior colleagues, Gladstone chose not to develop his Irish policy in the Cabinet, preferring to deliberate alone.[110] He finally revealed the result of his examination of the situation to the Cabinet on the 26 March.[111] The plan produced by Gladstone was intended to be a final settlement of the Irish question, integrating the need to restore respect for the law, satisfy the Nationalist impulse for self-government and reform land-holding. This would be achieved through two separate but co-dependent bills: the Government of Ireland bill and the Land Purchase bill.

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[106] *Ibid.*, 16 April 1886.
[107] Crosby, *The Two Mr Gladstones*, p.205 and *The Times*, 22 January 1886.
[108] Marsh, *Joseph Chamberlain*, p.222.
[109] Cited in John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone*, (London, 1903), iii, p. 292.
[110] *Hansard 3*, ccciii, 1105, (8 April 1886).
[111] O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p.108.

The publication of the Government of Ireland bill on 8 April 1886, thus inaugurated the second round of public debate concerning Home Rule.[112] Although Gladstone presented the bill as primarily one to restore law and order to the island, the detail revealed the extent to which he had been persuaded by the arguments put forward by Irish Nationalists. The bill proposed the creation of a unicameral legislature in Dublin, composed of 307 members, which would sit for a maximum term of five years. This assembly would be comprised of what Gladstone described as 'two orders'. Order one would consist of 28 representative Irish peers and 75 members elected for ten years on a restrictive £25 franchise. These elected members were to have an annual income of £200 or be worth £4,000 in capital. The representative peers would be eventually replaced by representatives elected on the specified franchise. The second order would be elected on the existing parliamentary franchise as defined in 1884-5 and composed of 204 members. The new assembly would decide whether the Royal University should be accorded two seats to put it on a par with Trinity College, and thus raise the number of members to 206. These two orders would normally sit together, however, either could request that they sit, and vote, independently. Disputed legislation could not be passed before a dissolution or until at least three years had passed, whichever was longer, giving each order a (temporary) veto over the other. The viceroyalty was to be retained, as were all Crown privileges. The new Irish Executive would be responsible to the Dublin assembly and Irish representatives would, henceforth, be excluded from the Imperial Parliament. The majority of domestic affairs would be transferred to Dublin, including the right to raise taxes, although there were a significant number of exclusions, including all foreign and colonial affairs, control of trade and navigation, coinage, weights and measures, copyright and customs revenue. The Royal Irish Constabulary would remain temporarily under Imperial control and the Dublin Metropolitan Police would report directly to the Lord Lieutenant for two years. In addition, the establishment or endowment of any religious institution was proscribed, as was restricting any confessional practice. Furthermore, the Dublin

[112] *Hansard 3*, cciii, 1036-1085, (8 April 1886).

legislature was prohibited from unilaterally amending what Gladstone hoped would become the Government of Ireland Act.[113]

The *Christian Advocate* greeted the publication of the bill with a stinging editorial, headed 'The Repeal Bill', indicating that the Home Rule was merely independence in disguise.[114] The article commenced by announcing that the publication of the bill 'disarms none of our fears, abates the force of none of our arguments, permits no softening of any of our epithets, but calls for the louder assertion of every protest that has been made'. The principal arguments advanced by the newspaper at this juncture were subtly different from the tack taken earlier in the year. Three major issues came to the fore in the *Advocate's* discussion of the bill: the perils of Home Rule to evangelical religion; the disingenuous arguments of the Prime Minister; and the lack of popular mandate for the proposals. Fears concerning Parnell's plans for the commercial future of the island appear to have been allayed by the revelation that the Imperial Parliament would continue to regulate trade and navigation.

Rejecting any suggestion that it was acting from party motives, the *Advocate* maintained that its coverage of the bill stemmed from the 'fulfilment of Christian duty, and from considerations of loftiest responsibility'. The periodical argued that religious principles should 'constrain Christian men from acquiescing' in any measure of Home Rule, as it was inherently prejudicial to 'evangelical religion' as well as imperilling the Empire and having a detrimental effect on the condition of Ireland. The bill was considered to be 'worse than our worst fears', and was expected to give 'intensity to the elements of disagreement' in the country and aggravate 'every condition inimical to capital, property, education and religion'. In particular, the journal berated Gladstone for the use of the phrase 'foreign laws' to describe the rule of Ireland through Westminster, stating that it was 'not possible to conceive of anything less patriotic, less discreet, less statesmanlike, than this language from the First Minister of the Crown'. It claimed that the long-term implications of the use of this language would void the safeguards built into the bill that would prevent its unilateral amendment by the Dublin assembly, as it would provide the justification

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[113] *Ibid.*
[114] *Christian Advocate*, 16 April 1886.

for the Nationalists to argue that they should not be restrained by a 'foreign' power. The implementation of Home Rule was therefore argued to constitute the forerunner of a campaign for full Irish independence, with Gladstone having provided the arguments and rationale, rather than being the mechanism for reconciling the Catholic population to the Union as the Liberal leader contended.

The *Advocate* continued to emphasise that the bill had no electoral mandate, a perception that was exacerbated by the disclosure that 'the Cabinet itself has not been taken into confidence'.[115] The revelations by Chamberlain and Trevelyan that Gladstone had drafted the bill alone infuriated the newspaper, which maintained that the bill could not therefore be the considered judgement of the nation's elected representatives, nor a reflection of public opinion, but was merely an 'invention' of the Prime Minister, which he was 'thrusting down the throats of his colleagues, on pain of resignation'. The newspaper concluded, therefore, that the Home Rule bill was 'not good and right in itself', but was the reaction of a single individual to the threats of the Irish National League.

Regarding the powers of the proposed assembly itself, the *Advocate* considered that it would be an 'absolute legislature', which would herald 'separation in its fullest sense' and the 'disintegration of Empire'. Interpreted in this manner, Home Rule would effectively remove Ireland from Imperial restraint and alienate its population from the beneficial aspects of the world-wide Empire. The newspaper, therefore, concluded that:

> to reject it [the bill] is not enough. What the country must do is so utterly condemn it that no other statesman within a century will ever venture to partition the Empire of Great Britain. No one can listen to the debates in Parliament without seeing that the only thing that obtains a hearing for the measure at all is the wish that so many feel to support Mr. Gladstone. Take Mr. Gladstone from the bill and it would not command one hundred votes in the House, Home Rulers included.[116]

The newspaper, however, continued to maintain that it was not acting from the motives of party consideration, but that its appeal was founded on religious principle.

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[115] *Ibid.*
[116] *Ibid.*

Home Rule was an issue that the *Advocate* perceived to be of fundamental importance, which would imperil the very existence of Methodism on the island. It could not, therefore, be treated as a purely political issue on which it was unseemly for the church to comment, but was a moral question it had a duty to oppose.

In the midst of this crisis, the *Advocate* was nevertheless able to report two more positive occurrences. Firstly, the monthly meeting of Methodist ministers in Belfast passed a resolution opposing Home Rule and requesting the Committee of Privileges to petition both Houses of Parliament against the bill. Secondly, the newspaper was able to announce that the *Methodist Recorder* in England had declared against Home Rule. This development was greeted by the *Advocate* as 'tardy, but we never doubted its fidelity', a striking contrast to the stated position of the *Methodist Times*.[117] The *Recorder,* which had delayed making a definitive statement on the advisability of Home Rule until the bill had been introduced, published two substantial articles on 16 April denouncing the scheme as 'nothing better than a brilliant failure' and declaring their full support for Irish brethren.[118] In the first of these two pieces, the *Recorder* suggested that at the end of 'a long and brilliant career' the Government of Ireland bill had finally exceeded Gladstone's political capacity. The removal of Irish MPs from Westminster was regarded as 'a measure not of consolidation, but of disintegration' that would instigate civil war and the dissolution of the Empire.[119] Gladstone was also criticised for being too reliant on the Irish Parliamentary Party for his view of Ireland, and unjustly ignoring the position and opinion of Irish Protestants. Consequently, the *Recorder* reiterated their contention of 5 February, that Gladstone had over-estimated 'the capacity of the Irish for self-government', given the previous violent tactics of the Nationalists and overlooked the potential for civil war.[120] Regarding the impact that the proposed legislation would have on Protestantism in Ireland, it denounced the 'safeguards' of the bill as 'absolutely worthless', since there would be no method of enforcement except through military intervention.[121] The paper noted that

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[117] *Ibid.*
[118] *Methodist Recorder,* 16 April 1886.
[119] *Ibid.*
[120] *Ibid.*
[121] *Ibid.*

Methodism expected to be particularly affected because of the wide diffusion of the congregations around the country, which would restrict their influence in any given locality. It was anticipated that Methodist education would be the area of greatest concern since the Parnellites had advocated denominational education during the general election campaign. The newspaper's overall interpretation of the bill was that it was so misconceived that it pleased 'few besides Mr Parnell and his followers' and alienated moderate liberal opinion that might have accepted less far-reaching legislation in the form of extended local government.[122]

Like the *Christian Advocate,* the *Methodist Recorder* was anxious to assert that it had no party-political motivation, but was solely concerned with the safety and security of the nation:

> We care nothing for politics or political party; we care not how radical the scheme that can give to weary Ireland peace once more, but we protest, in the name of Methodism against a scheme that would hand over Methodist brethren to the tender mercies of Archbishop Walsh,[123] and the dynamiters of New York; we protest in the name of Protestantism against a scheme which would give to the most intolerant form of intolerant Romanism the weapons which to persecute our co-religionists; we protest as Englishman against a scheme that would weaken out Empire, and out power in the world, hitherto used, on the whole, so nobly and so well; we protest as Christians, ... against a policy that we believe could only have one ending – civil war.[124]

This highlighted the long-standing evangelical belief that the influence of the Catholic majority in Ireland needed to be balanced by an overall Protestant majority within the United Kingdom, and thus maintain the tradition of liberal parliamentary governance on the island.

By contrast, the *Methodist Times,* consistent with its previous support for the Nationalist cause, greeted the Government of Ireland bill enthusiastically as a 'Christian Policy for Ireland'.[125] In contrast to both the *Christian Advocate* and

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[122] *Ibid.*
[123] Following the death of Cardinal Edward McCabe in February 1885, Walsh appointed archbishop of Dublin by Pope Leo XIII on 23 June 1885. Walsh's nationalist sympathies were well known and the appointment was hailed as a triumph by the Irish Parliamentary Party.
[124] *Ibid.*
[125] *Methodist Times,* 15 April 1886.

Methodist Recorder, this journal focused on whether the principle of Home Rule should be pursued, rather than the detail of the bill, utilising biblical imagery and rhetoric familiar from the pulpit. The *Methodist Times* thus challenged its readers to consider what was a Godly reaction to the Irish situation, suggesting that 'Jesus Christ will some day test their religion by inquiring how they spoke and wrote about Ireland in the year 1886'.[126] This situated the issue within an overtly Christian context, demanding that its audience consider how to obey the commandment to love one's neighbour, suggesting that they should be guided by their sense of moral duty rather than purely by their intellect. The article appealed for Irish Methodists to set aside their 'fatal delusion that Protestantism derives any strength from political ascendancy' claiming that it stemmed from 'religious bigotry'.[127] Instead, Irish Protestants should welcome Home Rule as an opportunity to redress historic wrongs, which would allow the evangelical message to be heard more clearly without the overtones of political resentment. This approach would also make the 'British Empire impregnable' by reconciling the Irish population to its existence and maintenance.[128] For the newspaper, the alternatives were clear: 'some form of Home Rule, or Cromwellian atrocities'.[129] Given these options, the *Methodist Times* insisted that justice be done to Ireland, and that any attempt to address the matter must be conducted in the most scrupulous manner, because the majority of the population were Roman Catholic and Christians were bound to obey Christ's injunction to 'love thy neighbour'. However, the refusal of the *Methodist Times* to dwell on the detail of the Home Rule proposals and instead emphasise the moral dimension of the policy suggests that while the journal fully supported a measure of Home Rule for Ireland, it was not entirely comfortable with the bill's content.

The similarities between the language used in the *Christian Advocate* and the *Methodist Recorder* in condemning the Home Rule proposals are striking, although there are also some notable differences. Both journals were anxious to present their arguments as being based on careful consideration and not an expression of party allegiance. Similarly, both newspapers articulated a fear that Nationalists could not

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[126] *Ibid.*
[127] *Ibid.*
[128] *Ibid.*
[129] *Ibid.*

be trusted to rule a country given the violent tactics used by the National League, and previously, the Land League.[130] However, there was significant divergence between the levels of esteem in which the two periodicals apparently held the Prime Minister. The *Methodist Recorder* retained much respect for the 'Grand Old Man', describing his career as 'brilliant', despite their concerns regarding the advisability of the proposed legislation.[131] In contrast, the *Christian Advocate* suggested that in formulating the Government of Ireland bill Gladstone had lost any claim he might have had to the appellation 'statesman', since he was perceived to have abandoned Irish Protestants and disregarded the future of the Empire.[132]

The expressions used by the *Methodist Times* were somewhat different in emphasis, invoking Biblical precedents and stressing the duty of Methodists to work for justice in all areas of society. The *Methodist Times* presented the issue of Home Rule as falling within the tradition of the radical Liberal campaigns that had engendered the support of many nonconformists, and which have been characterised as the extension of the nonconformist value system.[133] Despite this apparent political bias, the newspaper maintained that all discussions were undertaken from a position unaffected by party considerations. Nevertheless, the newspaper demonstrated distinct loyalty to Gladstone over other influential Liberal politicians, such as the Radical Joseph Chamberlain, who opposed the Home Rule proposals.

In the midst of the vigorous debate, Methodist William Arthur published an appeal to British Liberals and nonconformists that they should consider the plight of their Protestant brethren in Ireland. Arthur presented a dichotomy between the 'loyal' and the 'disloyal' populations of Ireland.[134] The former was exemplified by the reforming Protestant tradition, committed to improving the condition of Ireland through capital investment and social action, within the context of the Union. The latter was represented by the Irish Parliamentary Party and the National League,

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[130] *Christian Advocate*, 24 December 1885, 8 January 1886, and 16 April 1886 and *Methodist Recorder*, 22 January 1886 and 5 February 1886.
[131] *Methodist Recorder*, 16 April 1886.
[132] *Christian Advocate*, 24 December 1885 and 16 April 1886.
[133] T. W. Heyck, 'Home Rule, Radicalism and the Liberal Party, 1886-1895', in Alan O'Day (ed.), *Reactions to Irish Nationalism*, (Dublin, 1987), p.262.
[134] William Arthur, *Shall the loyal be deserted and the disloyal set over them? An appeal to Liberals and Nonconformists*, (London, 1886), pp3-8.

whose demands Arthur perceived as handing control to the Roman Catholic Church and leading towards the total separation of Britain and Ireland.[135] The pamphlet highlighted the economic contributions of Protestants to the country, particularly in Ulster, the province with the least climatic advantages. This was contrasted with the slow pace of industrialisation in areas with a majority Catholic population, a situation that he attributed to their religion.[136] He asked nonconformists to look beyond the 'venerable' Prime Minister, his 'virtues' and 'triumphs', to the content of the bill, and consider whether Home Rule was a measure to remove 'inequalities at law' that divided the population.[137] Arthur highlighted three specific areas where the question of equal rights arose: freedom of religion, whereby Catholics and Protestants would have exactly the same liberty to minister; equity of land law in England and Ireland; and local government for the whole of the United Kingdom.[138] Arthur perceived all of these issues to have a specific religious dimension: the Catholic majority of Ireland was not appealing for equal opportunities that would place them on a par with the rest of the United Kingdom, but was requesting special privileges. Under a Dublin administration, Arthur believed that the Catholic hierarchy would have an unprecedented degree of influence, which they would exercise at all degrees of society, from the highest levels of government to every local branch of the 'Land League [sic]'.[139] He demonstrated particular apprehension about the local manifestations of the National League, which he believed 'in almost every case the branch is headed by a Roman Catholic priest', and would be able to direct the legislature, appoint judges, and corrupt juries. Thus, Protestants living under a Home Rule parliament would be virtual subjects of the nationalist organisation and little more than 'citizens-on-condition' within the Empire, reliant on the goodwill of the Catholic hierarchy for civil liberties they previously had by right.[140] This was fundamentally contrary to both Arthur's religious and political sympathies. He believed that Catholicism was essentially an illiberal and reactionary force that would erode the constitutional freedoms that had been secured during the Glorious

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[135] *Ibid.*
[136] *Ibid.*, p.11.
[137] *Ibid.*, p.13.
[138] *Ibid.*, p.15.
[139] *Ibid.*, p.12. Despite his terminology, Arthur was clearly referring to the activities of the National League, rather than the dissolved Land League, in an attempt to emphasise the continuity between the two organisations.
[140] *Ibid.*

Revolution, and which Ireland enjoyed through its association with Great Britain.[141] Moreover, his political outlook mandated that specific regional legislation should be avoided, since all were united under the crown and constitution.[142]

The pamphlet also contained an appeal for nonconformists to recognise their political influence. Arthur suggested that in accepting the 1870 Education Act, nonconformity had made significant concessions to the Anglican and Catholic Churches regarding denominational instruction. Concerning specifically Irish legislation, he praised the Irish Church Act of 1869 as a just measure, but condemned the 1873 University bill and current Government of Ireland bill as extending far beyond the promotion of equity and 'isolated Ireland as the ground of exceptional privilege and virtual ecclesiastical dominion.'[143] This directly appealed to the core nonconformist political values: anxiety about the encroachments of Catholicism and the theme of religious equality that had characterised Dissenting politics throughout the nineteenth century. In addition, nonconformist support had been an apparently vital component to Gladstone's three electoral victories as Liberal leader, Arthur thus appealed for them to recognise their influence within the British political system to ensure a just resolution to the Irish situation.

The Methodist press welcomed the publication of Arthur's pamphlet, detailing the opinions of one of the denomination's most respected ministers on the issue of Home Rule, particularly since he was born in Ireland. Even the *Methodist Times* published extensive extracts from the document, noting that a copy was being sent to the national secular press, every English nonconformist minister and every member of the Houses of Parliament.[144] True to form, the *Christian Advocate* greeted the pamphlet enthusiastically, hailing it as 'worthy' of Arthur's 'dear and honoured name', the church and the country.[145] This newspaper believed that Arthur's 'sober' analysis of the situation made it 'inconceivable' that henceforth any Methodist could

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[141] N. W. Taggart, *William Arthur: First Among Methodists*, (London, 1993), pp129-30.
[142] This was exemplified by Arthur's attitude towards the education reforms in 1870, when he persuaded the English Methodist Conference to campaign for a bill that would be acceptable for the whole of Great Britain and Ireland.
[143] Arthur, *Shall the loyal be deserted*, pp16-17.
[144] *Methodist Times*, 4 May 1886.
[145] *Christian Advocate*, 30 April 1886.

continue to support Gladstone, but would cause them to 'return to a right mind' and support the maintenance of Union.[146] In distributing the pamphlet so widely, the *Advocate* considered that Arthur had 'elevated the reputation of Irish Methodism' so that the 'whole connexion will bless him' for speaking their heartfelt concerns.[147] The most revealing response, however, was that of the *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine,* since it was the only occasion during the crisis that the journal made any comment on the political situation. The *Magazine* broke its silence to claim 'a deferential hearing to such as man as William Arthur especially when speaking on a subject on which he is so exceptionally well informed'.[148] While the *Magazine* did not comment directly on the question of Home Rule, the editors were clearly affected by the 'passionate cry of indignation and alarm' emanating from Arthur, and proposed that a 'hand of warm and throbbing sympathy' should be extended to Irish Methodism, whose plight was likened to the threat which faced 'revolting Israel: "they that hate you shall rule over you"'.[149]

Arthur's prominent foray into the debate though the publication of his pamphlet sparked further controversy within the denomination. The national secular press identified Arthur as a Methodist leader, giving the impression that he was speaking on behalf of the Church.[150] Despite Arthur's protestations that he was writing solely in his capacity as a private individual, his actions caused concern that the political neutrality of the denomination had been compromised, and that he should be disciplined by the Conference.[151] His contribution to the debate was qualitatively different to other ministers: his public profile as a former President of the British and Irish Conferences guaranteed him a respectful hearing, and he deliberately chose to broadcast his concerns widely, as opposed to using the denominational papers that catered to a limited audience. Although Conference decided not to take action against Arthur, he prepared a defence of his decision to publicly campaign on a political issue. In the preface to this document another former Methodist President,

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[146] *Ibid.*
[147] *Ibid.*
[148] *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine, 1886,* p.475.
[149] *Ibid.*
[150] *The Times,* 13 May 1886.
[151] William Arthur, *An Explanation by the Rev William Arthur, MA, Addressed to the Conference,* (n.p., 1886), p.6.

J. H. Rigg, stated that he had decided to publish the *Explanation*, with Arthur's consent, because it included 'statements of permanent interest and importance ... to some points of Christian and Connexional principle'.[152] The document was thus intended to contribute to the continuing debate within Methodism about the appropriate involvement of the denomination in political affairs, rather than because Arthur needed to justify his actions. Notwithstanding this assertion by Rigg, Arthur's defence rested on his interpretation of Methodist customs and directives:

> As to our rules, I know of none forbidding a minister to write on a public question which he believes to involve the interest of morality or religion. Nor did I ever know that so to write was disallowed by our understanding. I did understand that we were to refrain from any party action, or from action in our capacity as Wesleyan Ministers.[153]

Arthur maintained that the publication of *Shall the Loyal be Deserted?* could not be construed as a 'party action' because Home Rule could not be considered an issue of 'mere party politics'. Furthermore, he had previously been identified as a supporter of the Liberal Party and thus could not be said to be acting in the Conservative interest.[154] He maintained that he had acted because he believed that the future of Methodism in Ireland was imperilled, especially the small, scattered chapels in Munster and Connaught.[155] Arthur had a particularly strong emotional attachment to these isolated churches, since it was through their services that he first encountered Methodism, and was convinced that they would be the first to suffer under Home Rule and the civil war he predicted would follow. Arthur also perceived his role as speaking on behalf of his Irish brethren, who expressed to him their sense of abandonment by English Methodism, and that if he had failed to represent their views he would have 'gone guilty to the grave'.[156]

The pamphlet *Shall the Loyal be Deserted?* was not Arthur's first political publication, however, it was his most controversial to date. Previously, despite his distaste for some political viewpoints and tactics, most notably those of the Irish Parliamentary

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[152] *Ibid.*, p.3.
[153] *Ibid.*, p.6.
[154] *Ibid.*, pp6-7.
[155] *Ibid.*, p.8.
[156] *Ibid.*, p.8.

Party, Arthur had managed to steer a neutral course regarding specific party policies. This had been true during the debates surrounding disestablishment, educational reform and the 1885 election campaign, when he framed his arguments in the language of ethics and morality.[157] Advice given by Arthur on these topics potentially transcended an individual's party affiliation. The Government of Ireland bill, however, was a different situation, as attitudes towards the policy were a significant differentiating factor between the major political parties. While it was accepted by a majority of Irish Methodists that Home Rule nevertheless constituted a moral and religious issue, Arthur was a member of the British Conference, not its Irish equivalent, and within that body opinion was much more divided as to whether Methodism had any business commenting on the matter at all.

The Methodist contribution to the parliamentary debates

Methodist contribution to the Home Rule debate was not confined to the denominational journals and the pamphlet war, but extended to the House of Commons and political pressure groups. Gladstone's surprise conversion to Home Rule, his swift introduction of the Government of Ireland bill into parliament, and its rapid progress through the legislature meant that in the short-term the former was more important in the resolution of the crisis. In the longer-term, however, particularly with regard to the second and third Home Rule episodes, the creation of extra-parliamentary organisations focussed solely on the issue of Irish independence were deeply influential. Unfortunately, it is difficult to gauge how many Methodists were actively involved in such groups as traditionally Methodist ministers were not permitted to campaign on political issues, and it is more difficult to trace individual members of the laity. Moreover, the *Christian Advocate* refused to advertise the activities of most of these organisations, and did not publish reports on their activities, and the other Methodist journals tended to be similarly reticent.

A notable exception to this during 1886 was the creation of the Irish Protestant Home Rule Association. This body was founded at the end of May 1886, with

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[157] William Arthur, *Ought not the Two Methodist Bodies in Ireland to become one?*, (Dublin, 1869), *idem*, *The Householder's Parliament.*

executive branches in Belfast and Dublin, and local groups in Cork and Limerick.[158] The organisation was established to counteract the impression that all Irish Protestants were opposed to Home Rule, and aimed to convert Irish landed society to supporting an Irish legislature. The association received significant coverage in the *Methodist Times,* mainly due to the reports sent to the journal by Hughes' protégé and correspondent at Trinity College, Dublin, Henry Lunn.[159] The first meeting of the Dublin executive was chaired by the Methodist Home Ruler, Thomas Shillington, the unsuccessful Liberal candidate at North Armagh in 1885. The resolutions passed at the inaugural meetings appealed to Gladstonian Liberal values, and emphasised the essential unity of the Irish people and the divisive effect a dissatisfied Ireland would have on the Empire.[160] The Association was a relatively small and unrepresentative group. However, as Loughlin rightly notes, 'protestants sympathetic to the movement did not make themselves conspicuous' and thus accurate numbers of affiliates are virtually impossible to estimate.[161] Nevertheless, the organisation clearly attracted those unafraid to publicise their support for Home Rule, including Thomas Shillington and Henry Lunn, Jeremiah Jordan and his correspondent, Alexander Duncan.[162] These Methodists, however, as was demonstrated above, were not representative of the majority of the Irish Church.

Whereas the involvement of Methodists in political pressure groups is difficult to accurately analyse, assessing the contribution of Methodist MPs in the House of Commons in 1886 is more straightforward and reflected the divisions within the wider denomination. A majority of Methodists in the Lower House sat in the Liberal interest, and perceived themselves to be on the progressive wing of the party. Liberal radicals generally supported efforts to assuage Irish Nationalist demands, but felt that in treating Ireland separately, the proposals were inherently unfair to the

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[158] James Loughlin, 'The Irish Protestant Home Rule Association and nationalist politics, 1886-93', *IHS,* 24 (1985), p.342 and p.345.
[159] (Sir) Henry S. Lunn was born in Lincolnshire in 1859. Ordained in 1882, he studied medicine at Trinity College Dublin before serving as a missionary in India from 1887-8. A protégé of Hugh Price Hughes, the two became embroiled in a controversy over Lunn's missionary work, causing him to resign from the ministry in 1893. In later life he was very active in international ecumenical work, which resulted in the establishment of the Lunn travel agency. He joined the Anglican Church in 1910, and was knighted in the same year. A staunch Liberal throughout his life, he was an ardent supporter of Home Rule, and was offered, but declined, a parliamentary seat by Parnell in 1886.
[160] *Methodist Times,* 27 May 1886 and 24 June 1886.
[161] Loughlin, 'Irish Protestant Home Rule Association', p.349.
[162] *Ibid.,* p.346.

rest of Great Britain, preferring a system of 'home rule all round', a scheme for a federal system of 'national councils' for the constituent nations of the United Kingdom as proposed in Chamberlain's Radical Programme.[163] After the first reading of the bill, only two Wesleyan members were called upon to speak, although a greater Methodist contribution was furnished at the second reading. The divergence of Methodist opinion within the House is revealing, with all of the speakers referencing their religious beliefs within their political analysis, suggesting that they were driven by spiritual concerns rather than purely by party considerations. This reflected the range of views within the denomination as a whole, which ranged from those completely committed to the Union, to ardent Home Rulers.

The two Wesleyans to speak after the first reading, W. S. Allen (Liberal member for Newcastle-under-Lyme) and E. S. W. de Cobain (Independent Conservative member for East Belfast) criticized the content of the bill, suggesting that in attempting to respond to Nationalist demands, Gladstone had gone too far and the proposals amounted to a separation of Great Britain and Ireland. Allen rose on 9 April to condemn 'the system of crime and outrage by which the demand for Home Rule had been more or less supported from Ireland'.[164] He suggested that Parnell and the Irish Parliamentary Party had not explicitly condemned the 'outrages' prevalent in Irish society, including the practice of 'boycotting'. He surmised, therefore, that since much of this activity was funded by American dollars, nothing short of the institution of an Irish Republic would satisfy that party, precipitating the disintegration of the Empire. Allen defended his progressive credentials, but maintained that despite his radicalism, he could 'unhesitatingly and with a clear conscience vote against the Prime Minister's scheme because he believed it would be hurtful to great Britain, absolutely ruinous to Ireland, and would assuredly end, if it was carried, in the entire separation of Ireland from the United Kingdom.'[165] Allen maintained that the United Kingdom should be treated as exactly that, united, and proposals for extended local government should apply all of the constituent nations: Ireland should not be treated as a special case. In Allen's opinion loyalty to

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[163] Howard, 'Joseph Chamberlain and the "Unauthorized Programme"', p.479 and *idem*, 'Joseph Chamberlain, Parnell an the Irish 'central board' scheme', pp355-6.
[164] *Hansard 3*, ccciv, 1224, (9 April 1886).
[165] *Ibid.*, 1226, (9 April 1886).

Gladstone and the Liberal Party was subordinated to his right to assess the proposal on merit.

Addressing the Commons four days later, de Cobain claimed to 'give effect to the voice of the loyal minority' who opposed Home Rule.[166] He calculated this minority to be 1.25 million Irish Protestants united in purpose to 'protest this scheme'.[167] De Cobain then denounced the 'vicious doctrine that Imperial matters were to be subservient to the conflicting claims of nationality'.[168] He suggested that if Gladstone had adopted the intention to provide a 'uniform law for a united Empire' prior to the 1885 Franchise Act, this would have been beneficial for the country and would have averted such legislation as the Irish Church Act and Irish Land Acts that had set precedent for specific regional legislation.[169] De Cobain argued that the needs of the Empire should always be given a higher priority than the competing demands of the constituent nations of the United Kingdom, as to do otherwise would tend towards 'the disintegration of the Empire'.[170] The speech concluded with the assertion that he 'opposed it because he considered it to be an outrage upon humanity, an abrogation of the most sacred obligations of Government, and because it inflicted an indelible stain and blemish upon the fame of a great and ancient Empire.'[171]

In contrast to the contributions of Allen and de Cobain in the House of Commons, during the debate and vote following the second reading of the bill, a majority of Methodist MPs rose to support the Home Rule proposals. On the first night of the debate, Jeremiah Jordan spoke in support of the bill, emphasising his credentials as a 'northern man and an Ulster Protestant'.[172] He attacked the claim of de Cobain to represent Ulster Protestantism and suggested that many of his co-religionists in the north were obsessed by wealth, and corrupted from true and sincere religion by the Orange Order.[173] Specifically, Jordan challenged the assertion that 'the Methodists of Ireland are unanimously against Home Rule', suggesting instead, that although still in

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[166] *Ibid.*, 1483, (13 April 1886).
[167] *Ibid.*, 1486.
[168] *Ibid.*, 1484.
[169] *Ibid.*, 1484.
[170] *Ibid.*, 1484.
[171] *Ibid.*, 1488.
[172] *Hansard 3*, cccv, 651, (10 May 1885).
[173] *Ibid.*, 654-5, (10 May 1885).

a minority, there was 'an intelligent, and a growing, and an increased inclination for Home Rule among the Methodist population'.[174] This was supported by the assertion that even at the Committee of Privileges meeting in January, 'there were three gentlemen who distinctly spoke in favour of Home Rule' and he cited letters he had received from Methodists across Ireland supporting the bill.[175] He claimed, however, that the 'loyal minority' would attempt to suppress these views through 'boycotting', a tactic they condemned when employed by Nationalists.[176] This was a theme to which he returned eight days later, during questions to the Chief Secretary, when he requested an investigation into reported attacks on the Rev. George Hammond in Belfast. Hammond was known to support Home Rule and had a letter published in the *Methodist Times* on 25 February, which criticised the '"Flag and Drum" rule of Ulster Christianity'.[177] Jordan suggested that in response to this letter Hammond had been personally boycotted and his chapel had been attacked with 'large stones have been thrown at the doors' during a service.[178] John Morley responded by stating that the police could find no evidence that public worship had been disrupted or the minister boycotted, although he noted that Hammond had 'been censured by the Methodist body' for his remarks.[179] Jordan also attempted to shatter the perception that Protestantism was united in opposition to Home Rule, citing in addition to Irish examples the pro-Home Rule stance of the 'most influential English Methodist journal' the *Methodist Times*, implying that the views expressed there were representative of British Methodism, despite the fact that the *Methodist Recorder* claimed a wider circulation.[180]

By contrast, the Conservative and Methodist member for Woolwich, Col. Edwin Hughes, challenged the view that Irish residents in England supported Home Rule, insisting that in opposing the proposal he fully represented the Irish of his

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[174] *Ibid.*, 659.
[175] *Ibid.* One of these members of the Committee of Privileges, the Rev. William Gorman, wrote to the *Freeman's Journal* to correct the impression that the vote had been unanimous, while another, the Rev. George Chambers, expressed his unease with the Committee commenting on a political matter. (*Freeman's Journal*, 19 January 1886; *Christian Advocate*, 29 January 1886; and *Methodist Times*, 4 February 1886.
[176] *Hansard 3*, cccv, 659, (10 May 1886).
[177] *Methodist Times*, 25 February 1886 and 4 May 1886.
[178] *Hansard 3*, cccv, 1284, (18 May 1886).
[179] *Ibid.*, 1285.
[180] *Ibid.*, 651, (10 May 1886) and advert for the *Methodist Recorder* in the *Christian Advocate*, 5 February 1886.

constituency. Reviewing the election campaign, he professed to have secured 220 Irish votes for the Conservatives prior to the National League's directive in late November. Furthermore, after the publication of the directive, at a meeting of Irish voters at a local Catholic Church, only two of those present demanded that he support Home Rule.[181] Hughes, therefore, considered himself bound to support the Union as he believed this was the will of a majority of the Irish in Britain. He believed that the first concern of the House should be upholding law and order, and any Home Rule provision would, in Imperial terms, be an 'admission of failure' and demonstrate the inherent weakness of the Empire.[182] On the opposing side of the argument, Henry Fowler, Liberal MP for Wolverhampton East and Secretary to the Treasury, and Methodist, spoke strongly in favour of the bill. Fowler believed that the Union had 'absolutely and signally failed in securing the objects at which Mr Pitt aimed', namely, bringing peace to Ireland and assuring her attachment to the United Kingdom.[183] In his opinion, the bill provided for the adequate protection of Irish Protestants who should have no fear of a Dublin administration and moreover should be reassured that the reservation of military command to Westminster would guarantee that the Dublin assembly would never be able to threaten the integrity of the Empire.

The final Methodist contribution to the parliamentary debates was by the Irish-born member for Leicester, Alexander McArthur, personal friend and patron of Hugh Price Hughes. McArthur's speech was interesting for its ambivalence. He expressed his regret that the National Party had done little to prevent the 'tyranny of "boycotting"' that 'disgraced the country, and civilization of the age'.[184] Nevertheless, he exhorted the House to 'to act justly and liberally towards Ireland', to carefully and dispassionately consider 'how far we can safely go towards meeting the wishes of the hon. member for the City of Cork [Parnell] and his supporters.'[185] He alluded to his past support for extended local government for Ireland, but suggested that 'this bill goes far beyond what may of us understand as Home Rule

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[181] *Hansard 3*, cccv, 1209, (17 May 1886).
[182] *Ibid.*, 1214, (17 May 1886).
[183] *Hansard 3*, cccvi, 513, (31 May 1886).
[184] *Ibid.*, 904, (3 June 1886).
[185] *Ibid.*, 905.

over local affairs, and would, ... as it stands, be unfair to England, Scotland and Wales, and ultimately injurious, if not ruinous, to the best interests of Ireland' by deterring capital investment. McArthur, therefore, declared that he had 'never before found himself in such an unpleasant position': he wished to deal fairly with Ireland, and desired to support the government, but had grave reservations concerning the implications of the bill, which had led him to consider voting against the second reading. However, in the light of Gladstone's suggestion on 27 May that the vote would be for the principle of Home Rule, rather than the details of the bill, and that further time would be allowed for considering and amending the proposals, McArthur announced that 'under all the circumstances of the case, I will now be justified in supporting the second reading'.[186] He made clear, however, that this support was conditional on the bill being 'reconstructed or altered in Committee as more fully to maintain the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament, the integrity of the Empire, and make better provision for what is termed the "the Loyal minority"'.[187] This analysis of the implications of the original bill reflected the concerns of the wider Methodist community; the key objective was to bring permanent peace and stability to Ireland, but only in the context of an united Empire. The leadership of Gladstone could inspire nonconformists to consider radical proposals, but it could not dispel their misgivings.

Following the second reading of the Government of Ireland bill, the *Christian Advocate* identified eleven Wesleyan Methodists, five (English) Primitive Methodists, and one member of the Methodist Free Church who had voted in favour of the proposals. Only four Wesleyans voted against Home Rule, while Cozen-Hardy from the Methodist Free Church abstained.[188] The overwhelming support of Methodist MPs for Home Rule has tended to obscure the range and subtlety of their arguments, and has given the impression that the denomination broadly supported Home Rule. McArthur's speech demonstrates, however, that there were advanced Liberal MPs that had serious misgivings about the bill's content but accepted Gladstone's assurances that a compromise could still be reached and therefore voted for the bill.

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[186] Crosby, *The Two Mr Gladstones*, p.208 and *Hansard 3*, cccvi, 906, (3 June 1886).
[187] *Hansard 3*, cccvi, 906, (3 June 1886).
[188] *Christian Advocate*, 11 June 1886.

This did not, however, indicate an ideological commitment to the principle of Irish self-government.

The defeat of the Home Rule bill in the House of Commons by 341 votes to 311 precipitated a general election in July 1886. The election was given little attention in the Methodist press as it coincided with the annual Conferences of Britain and Ireland, and all the journals had made their politics quite clear. Methodist candidates, however, received a mixed response from the electorate. W. S. Allen and J. H. Blades chose not to contest the election. Both were from the advanced wing of the Liberal Party and had rejected the Home Rule proposals. In total ten Wesleyan Methodists were elected, two of whom had not sat in the previous parliament. Of these, five represented the Liberal interest, three were Conservative, William Bickford–Smith stood as Liberal Unionist and Jordan was returned as a Nationalist. William Alexander McArthur (son of Alexander McArthur, MP) initially appeared to have captured the East Yorkshire constituency of Buckrose for the Home Rulers, but the result was overturned as the result of an investigation into illegal practices, and the seat was subsequently awarded to his Unionist opponent by a margin of eleven votes.[189] At the election, the combined Unionists won a total of 393 seats: 317 of which were Conservative, and 77 Liberal Unionist. The election was less kind to Home Rulers. The Gladstonian Liberals were reduced to 191 seats, while the Irish Nationalists were more consistent and again returned 85 MPs. The popular vote, however, was more evenly split, with the Unionist coalition receiving 51.4 per cent of the vote, the Gladstonian Liberals 45 per cent and the Irish party 3.5 per cent.[190]

The Response of the Methodist Conference to the Crisis

Swiftly on the heels of the defeat of the second reading came the annual meeting of the Irish Conference in the penultimate week of June, where the issue of Home Rule was high on the agenda. The controversy that had been generated by the resolutions of the Committee of Privileges continued to rage. In the edition immediately prior to the Irish Conference, the *Methodist Times* issued an appeal that the 'Conference will pronounce no judgement whatever on the subject of Home

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[189] *The Times*, 13 December 1886.

[190] F. W. S. Craig (ed.), *British Parliamentary Election Results, 1885-1918*, (Aldershot, 1974).

Rule' asserting that Methodism should not be compromised by official comment on a political issue.[191] It was suggested that the 'Methodist Church must resolutely adopt the policy of neutrality', with the journal insisting that it would oppose a resolution supporting Home Rule on the same basis.[192] The *Methodist Times* contended that there were a multiplicity of organisations and platforms through which individual Methodists could express their opinions about Home Rule without involving the Church in the political struggle. Using a journal to promote a political opinion was appropriate; expecting the Conference to assert a position would be both ineffective and potentially damaging to the evangelical cause.

At the Conference itself, the controversial actions of the Committee of Privileges came under intense scrutiny. In addition to the January resolutions, the Committee had welcomed two new Lord Lieutenants to Ireland since the Conference of the previous year and had impressed upon them the commitment of Methodism to the Union.[193] Furthermore, in May, the Committee had petitioned parliament on behalf of the denomination. This appeal had been presented to the Commons by the Rt. Hon David R. Plunkett, and stated that the 'provisions of the bill are degrading to the inhabitants of Ireland as a whole' by depriving them of their representation at Westminster and thereby excluding them from participating in the running of the Empire. Moreover, the bill was decried by the Committee as 'utterly unjust to the loyal minority' by placing them under the rule of a disaffected and disloyal majority without the institution of adequate safeguards, a situation that was suggested would tend towards further civil strife in Ireland, rather than solving the current difficulties.[194] A minority of delegates at the Conference believed that by these actions the Committee of Privileges had exceeded their remit to act on behalf of the Conference between meetings. Two delegates, the Rev. William Gorman and Alexander Duncan (lay-preacher and correspondent of Jordan) adopted this position and proposed and seconded a resolution, stating 'this Conference does not deem it as fitly belonging to its functions to make any pronunciation as to the merits of the Government of Ireland Bill, or of any political proposition now before the public or

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[191] *Methodist Times*, 10 June 1886.
[192] *Ibid.*
[193] *ICM*, 1886.
[194] *Methodist Times*, 13 May 1886 and *ICM* 1886.

likely to be presented to the new Parliament'. This was rejected by the delegates, who instead voted by 137 votes to twenty-two, in favour of two resolutions that endorsed the actions of the Committee, adopted their report, and reaffirmed the commitment of Irish Methodism to the Empire.[195] Of the twenty-two who opposed the resolutions, it was suggested that less than ten of them favoured Home Rule, the others taking the position that the Connexion had no business commenting on such an issue, since whatever the outcome, the Church's mission must continue. The stance taken was thus somewhat less harsh on dissidents than that of the *Christian Advocate*, with the second resolution expressing the hope that 'in the progress of this exciting controversy nothing may be said or done by any members of the Methodist Church which shall be contrary to the spirit of Christian moderation or inconsistent with the maxim – "The friends of all and the enemies of none".[196] This use of this popular Methodist motto, appealing to the principles of their founder, reveals the level of concern felt about the divisions that were occurring within the Church over a political issue and suggests that the desire of the Conference was for individuals to prioritise Church unity over any political controversy.

The *Christian Advocate* was quick to herald the Conference resolutions as a victory for their editorial policy, suggesting that those who had questioned the actions of the Committee of Privileges earlier in the year 'have now learned how little they know of the mind of the Methodist Church'.[197] The journal believed in light of the Conference's deprecation of the Home Rule bill that:

> no one in future can advocate the Repeal Policy in the character of a Methodist. He may as a man or as a citizen, but not as a Methodist. By the highest authority, in an assembly of representative men for all parts of the country, and after fullest and freest discussion, it has been declared that Methodism in Ireland deprecates any attempt at the establishment of a separate legislature in Ireland. ... No man may afterwards advocate an opposite policy as a Methodist. The policy approved by Methodism is now declared authoritatively to be UNION. Such was and such is the

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[195] *Christian Advocate*, 29 June 1886 and *ICM*, 1886.
[196] *Ibid.*
[197] *Christian Advocate*, 2 July 1886. This axiom was later adopted by the Methodist Church in Ireland as its denominational motto. http://www.irishmethodist.org (accessed 01.05.07).

> mind of our Conference, and such, through the food providence of God may it ever continue to be.[198]

This stinging denunciation of Methodists with Nationalist sympathies, while reflecting the stance taken throughout the crisis, was not representative of the Conference resolutions. Despite the attempts of the *Advocate* to vilify the Home Rule bill and those who supported it, the Conference did not provide the justification for suggesting that Nationalists had forfeited their right to be identified as Methodists, or to refer to their faith when making a political judgement. It had never previously been the policy of Methodism to assess a person's commitment to the Church through an analysis of their political views.

The official correspondence between the two Conferences of 1886 reveals unease at the stance Irish Methodism had taken during the crisis.[199] The response of the British Conference to the appeal of Irish Methodism to endorse the resolutions passed in support of the Union was not to comply, but to suggest that their Irish brethren should concentrate on healing internal divisions caused by Home Rule and to reiterate Paul's advice to the Church in Ephesus that they should "'keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'". The British Conference recognised the 'natural diversity of opinion' that existed within their own gathering, but maintained that 'mutual forbearance and a general willingness to subordinate every other consideration to the advantage of that great spiritual mission which is committed to us' had eased their discussions and bred goodwill between representatives. British Methodism affirmed its sympathy for the Irish Church and its belief that through prayer and trust in God, the political situation would be resolved to the 'glory of His name, the good of His Church, and the safety and happiness of your country and ours'. Furthermore, there was recognition that despite the apparent divergence of political opinions between the two connexions, this should in no way affect the maintenance of the close ties between the organisations.

The moderate tone of the Irish Conference resolutions and the strictly non-partisan approach adopted by the British Conference demonstrate that the Methodist

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[198] *Ibid.*
[199] *WCM*, 1886 and *ICM*, 1886.

leadership had no desire that their position on Home Rule should come to define the Connexion. The Conference and Committee of Privileges existed primarily to administer ecclesiological affairs and decide doctrine, not to pronounce on political matters. Indeed, the press and external organisations were considered the most appropriate forums to discuss political affairs.[200] Although the Irish Conference determined that the Home Rule proposals constituted a threat to the security of Methodism in the country, there is no indication that they considered that dissidents were not entitled to their opinion or should be excluded from the Church and its offices. In contrast to this official stance, many Irish congregants appear to have desired dissidents to be treated in a more robust manner, an attitude reflected in the reporting of the *Christian Advocate,* which would have denied the designation Methodist to all with Nationalist sympathies.

Conclusion

The political crisis caused by Gladstone's commitment to Home Rule precipitated a corresponding crisis within British and Irish Methodism regarding the denomination's response. The debates concerning this occurred in three distinct spheres of Methodist involvement: the official bodies of Methodism, the Committee of Privileges and the annual Conference; the denominational journals and private publications of members; and through the contributions of Methodist MPs. Each of these three spheres presented a unique challenge for Methodists to represent their faith, without compromising the tradition that the denomination itself was aloof from party considerations. As David Bebbington has highlighted, nonconformists in the nineteenth century did not perceive a precise division between religion and politics, and believed that the state should promote the moral welfare of its citizens.[201] Home Rule thus presented a particular challenge; although not strictly a moral issue, it had the potential to detrimentally affect the life and work of Irish Protestants. Ultimately, Home Rule was such an emotive issue that Methodism struggled to produce a moderate response.

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[200] *Methodist Times,* 10 June 1886.
[201] Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience,* p.11.

The actions of the Irish Committee of Privileges and the Conference represented an abrupt departure from Methodist tradition. The governing bodies of Methodism in England and Ireland had increasingly adopted a more substantial political role in the previous two decades, as demonstrated by the debates concerning the 1870 Education Act and the campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. The introduction of the Government of Ireland bill, however, was the first occasion on which the official apparatus of the denomination made such a high-profile public appeal to the legislators on a constitutional issue that neither directly concerned the administration of their church, nor involved public ethics. This was a controversial decision that did not command unanimous support in Ireland, let alone in Britain. The British Conference declined to endorse the Irish resolutions, and preferred to avoid publicising any divisions within its ranks and retain an officially neutral status.[202]

The journals produced the most heated exchanges during the period from the publication of the 'Hawarden Kite' in December 1885 to the defeat of Gladstone's administration in July 1886. The exchanges between the *Christian Advocate* and the *Methodist Times* revealed the fault lines between the Methodist communities in Ireland and Britain. For the Irish Methodists represented by the *Christian Advocate*, it was unthinkable that Protestants could believe that Home Rule for Ireland was consistent with the missionary endeavour in the country, and those who did, such as Jordan, were unworthy aberrations. The declaration of the *Methodist Times* in favour of the scheme was thus profoundly shocking, especially when it was claimed that the newspaper represented the majority of British Methodist opinion.[203] The decision of the *Christian Advocate* to frame its arguments in the language of 'Loyalism' and 'Protestantism' are particularly striking, appearing to indicate a united opposition to the proposals. The *Advocate* had previously demonstrated little interest in ecumenism, prioritising coverage of Methodist evangelistic efforts at home and abroad. Loyalty to the British 'Protestant' Constitution had, however, traditionally been at the centre of the Methodist political outlook, and this was reinforced by an intense distrust of Catholicism in Ireland. While it is clear, therefore, that Irish Protestants were united in suspicion of Catholicism, this did not equate to solidarity

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[202] *WCM*, 1886.
[203] *Hansard 3*, cccv, 660, (10 May 1886).

on other matters. The Irish Church Act had reduced tensions between the Church of Ireland and the other denominations, but significant theological differences still divided the Protestant Churches; particularly the conflict between Arminian and Calvinist soteriology. Moreover, the *Advocate* makes no appeal to fellow Irish Protestants to instigate a joint campaign against the Home Rule proposals, but rather focuses its attention in persuading British Methodism to support the Union, and when this proved ineffective, condemning their stance. There is, thus, no indication at this stage of the Home Rule debate that the *Christian Advocate* was advocating a pan-Protestant political alliance.

The revelations of the 'Hawarden Kite' were profoundly shocking for Irish Methodists, who had never previously considered that a British statesman could seriously contemplate the dissolution of the Union. Moreover, their fears concerning their future and the future of the Empire were not allayed by publication of the bill in April 1886. The exclusion of the Irish representatives from Westminster was interpreted to mean that Ireland would lose influence over Imperial affairs and undermine Ireland's role at the heart of the Empire. Although Jackson argued that prior to the Boer War Irish Unionists had no coherent ideology of Empire on the political stage, acceptance and affection for the Imperial project among the population is harder to measure.[204] The annual correspondence between the Irish and British Conferences demonstrates the value Irish Methodists placed on their role in the Empire, both as a vanguard in the advance of evangelicalism and as a source of missionaries for overseas, while cherishing their intimacy with the metropolis.[205] The removal of Irish MPs from Westminster emphasised to Irish Methodists that they were no longer considered to be an integral section of the British people, which ran directly contrary to their own understanding of their community identity. Moreover, the political tactic they had adopted concerning the 1870 Education Act had been designed to persuade the government to regard Irish and British Methodism as a single entity and to legislate jointly for England and

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[204] Alvin Jackson, 'Irish Unionists and the Empire, 1880-1920: classes and masses', in Keith Jeffrey (ed.), *'An Irish Empire'? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire,* (Manchester, 1996), pp123-148. Bernard Porter has attempted to measure the cultural impact of the Empire in Britain, although few of his conclusions are directly transferable to the Irish context. (Bernard Porter, *The absent-minded imperialists: empire, society and culture in Britain,* (Oxford, 2004)).

[205] See for example see *WCM, 1868, 1871, 1881, 1883.*

Ireland. This reveals an adherence among Irish Methodists to the conception of the Union adopted by Protestants at its instigation, whereby they exchanged their position as a threatened cultural minority in Ireland, for absorption into the larger Protestant majority of the United Kingdom, guaranteed by the British Constitution. The breakdown of this understanding of the Union in British politics in the post-famine era, was thus perceived to fundamentally menace the position of Irish Protestants in society, to which the removal of their representatives from Westminster attested.

When confronted by the Home Rule proposals, rather than attempting to forge an alliance with fellow Protestant countrymen, Irish Methodists first approached their co-religionists in England for sympathy and support. The realisation that assistance was not immediately forthcoming, and that a proportion of English Methodists actively favoured the Nationalist cause, was a profound shock, as was the failure of the British Conference to endorse the resolutions opposing Home Rule. It was, and remained, inconceivable to Irish congregations that support for Home Rule could be considered compatible with the principles and practice of Methodism. While there thus continued to be broad agreement across Methodism in Britain and Ireland concerning purely theological and ecclesiastical matters, there was a significant divergence of attitude towards political affairs. Although the English journal, the *Methodist Recorder,* emerged as a supporter of Unionism after the publication of the 1886 bill, this cannot obscure the fundamentally different manner in which Methodists in Britain and Ireland approached the Irish question.

Criticism of Gladstone was a recurrent feature of the Irish Methodist response to the prospect of Home Rule legislation. Unlike their brethren in England, the loyalty of Irish Methodists to the 'Grand Old Man' was somewhat more conditional and their respect for him fell rapidly after his public conversion to Home Rule.[206] In addition, Irish nonconformist attachment to Gladstone had never been as entrenched as it was in England. Whereas English nonconformists perceived Gladstone as acting upon his religious principles and had rallied behind his campaigns for Irish disestablishment and on behalf of Bulgarian Christians, Irish Protestants

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[206] Hempton, "'For God and Ulster'", p.238.

were suspicious of his High Church tendencies and clearly recalled his *volte-face* concerning the Maynooth grant in 1845.[207] For Irish nonconformists even the issue of disestablishment had failed to raise any great passion. Indeed, where English evangelicals perceived moral probity and reliability in Gladstone, Irish Protestants observed persistent inconsistency and betrayal.[208] Taking this into account, any residual loyalty Irish Protestants felt for the statesman was subsumed by the gravity of the issue before them in 1885-6, a diametrically opposed position to that taken by many of their English brethren, who, whatever their misgivings about the prudence of a Home Rule bill, were prepared to assign fair and conscientious motives to the much-respected politician. Thus, although the *Methodist Recorder* was unable to 'share the confidence' in his programme for Ireland, they were still able to 'respect Mr Gladstone's courage' in putting the matter before Parliament.[209] This sharply contrasted with the *Christian Advocate,* which considered the Liberal leader's conduct to have been deceitful during the 1885 General Election, as he had not given the electorate the opportunity to consider the nature of the momentous change proposed.

The publication of the 'Hawarden Kite' in December 1885 effectively marked the beginning of the first Home Rule crisis. Methodists on both sides of the Irish Sea were quick to react to this new Liberal Party policy through the religious press with characteristic, and uncompromising vigour, with the *Christian Advocate* and the *Methodist Times* adopting diametrically opposed positions on the Irish question. The publication of the Home Rule bill on 8 April 1886 did little to ease the ill-feeling between these two publications, which continued to clash on the issue on constitutional reform until the end of the century. This was symptomatic of the divergence between Irish Methodism and their co-religionists in England regarding the appropriate route for social and political reform.

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[207] Bebbington, 'Gladstone and the Nonconformists', p.372 and Megahey, '"Irish Protestants feel this betrayal keenly ..."', pp165-6.
[208] *Hansard 3,* cciii, 1484, (13 April 1886).
[209] *Methodist Recorder,* 5 February 1886.

Chapter Four:
Methodism and the Second Home Rule Crisis

Introduction

In the wake of the defeat of Gladstone at the polls in 1886, Home Rule slipped from the immediate political agenda of the Unionist coalition headed by Salisbury. Having convincingly rejected Home Rule at the election, the British public appeared opposed to significant constitutional change, preferring the administration to focus upon domestic business such as factory reform. The Conservative-Liberal Unionist alliance held a significant majority of 116 in the House of Commons (although this declined to 66 in 1892 after a series of by-election defeats).[1] Consequently, there was no incentive for the Conservative leader to explore a political accommodation with the Irish Nationalists, who were again forced to rely on their understanding with the aging Liberal leader. Nevertheless, Parnell remained in the ascendant, presiding over the Plan of Campaign in Ireland and successfully defending his reputation during the Special Commission in the late 1880s.[2] This continued Parnellite dominance was, however, shortly to collapse under the strain of the O'Shea divorce case. This episode sealed the fate of the Irish leader and divided his party, prejudicing the discussion of the Irish question long after his own tragic death. Thus, the political collapse of Parnell and the introduction of the second Home Rule bill are inextricably linked, with one setting the political conditions of the other.

Methodism and the Fall of Parnell

The scandal that engulfed the Irish Nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell in the winter of 1890-91 formed the prelude to the second Home Rule crisis of 1892. The disclosure of his adulterous behaviour with the wife of one of his own MPs, including the alleged use of multiple pseudonyms and humiliating escapes from Captain O'Shea, fed the public appetite for titillating gossip. British nonconformity, led by the Methodist leader Hugh Price Hughes, was widely recognised by contemporaries as acting decisively to determine the outcome of the crisis.[3] The rapid fall from grace

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[1] Alan O'Day, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921,* (Manchester, 1998), p.152.
[2] Alvin Jackson, *Home Rule: an Irish History, 1800-2000,* (London, 2003), pp80-8.
[3] E. S. Beesley, *Mind your own business: some plain words to the Gladstonians about Mr Parnell,* (London, 1890, pp4-5 and R. B. O'Brien, *The Life of Charles Stewart Parnell,* (London, 1910), p.489.

of the 'uncrowned king of Ireland' shocked the political nation in Britain and Ireland and ruptured the Irish National Party. The ramifications of Parnell's indiscretion, and refusal to retire gracefully, lasted well beyond his own lifetime and detrimentally influenced the debate of the second Home Rule bill.

The elements of romantic tragedy that accompanied the fall of the Irish leader, who was at the apex of his political influence, have fascinated contemporaries and historians alike.[4] Most pertinent to this study, however, is the assessment of the crisis by Christopher Oldstone-Moore, who reveals the role played by the *Methodist Times* in stirring the 'nonconformist conscience' against Parnell, precipitating his final defeat.[5] Oldstone-Moore has convincingly argued that the campaign of Hugh Price Hughes in the *Methodist Times* ignited the public debate in England concerning moral standards in political life. Highlighting the moral aspects of the case to a religious constituency already concerned with 'social purity', Hughes successfully aligned British nonconformist opinion behind his campaign against the Irish leader. This culminated in a threat that nonconformists would withdraw their support from the Liberal Party and its campaign for Irish Home Rule if the alliance with Parnell were not terminated. This set in motion the chain of events during which Gladstone informed the Irish Parliamentary Party that he would resign, and all hope of Home Rule would thus be lost, unless they elected a new leader.

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[4] A majority of texts focus on the man himself, his apparently desperate attempts to maintain his grip on power and the effect that this had on Nationalism in Ireland. C. C. O'Brien and F. S. L. Lyons both analyse Parnell's relationship with the party and sudden decline of his leadership from a position of autocracy and apparent invulnerability to increasingly desperate attempts to revitalise popular support for his person. Callanan offers a detailed exploration of the mechanics of the Nationalist split, emphasising the rapid progression of events during the initial crisis and Parnell's last campaign. He stresses the external pressures placed on Irish MPs from the Irish bishops, to repudiate their allegiance to Parnell and the damage inflicted on the Irish leader by fellow Nationalist T. M. Healy. Emmet Larkin illuminates the position of the Catholic Church in Ireland during the crisis. He highlights the difficulties faced by the hierarchy who feared losing their political influence if they condemned a man still supported by their flocks, while wishing to fulfil their duty as moral arbiters (C. C. O'Brien, *Parnell and his Party, 1880-90,* (Oxford, 1957); F. S. L. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell,* (London, 1977); Frank Callanan, *The Parnell Split, 1890-91,* (Cork, 1992); and Emmet Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church in Ireland and the Fall of Parnell, 1888-1891,* (Liverpool, 1979)).

[5] Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes: Founder of a New Methodism, Conscience of a New Nonconformity,* (Cardiff, 1999) and *idem,* 'The fall of Parnell: Hugh Price Hughes and the nonconformist conscience', *Éire-Ireland,* 30:4 (1996), pp94-110.

Methodists, in common with a majority of English nonconformists, believed that public figures should be distinguished by their moral character.[6] In 1885, nonconformists had been appalled at the conduct of Sir Charles Dilke, and his apparent inability to categorically clear his name of charges of misconduct during the Crawford divorce case. The ensuing press campaign, dominated by W. T. Stead, who was then at the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and supported by the fledgling *Methodist Times*, had proceeded to force Dilke from office.[7] The citation of Parnell as co-respondent by Captain O'Shea in his divorce case thus appeared to Methodists to be an analogous situation, which could only be resolved by Parnell resigning his leadership of the Irish Parliamentary Party and retiring from public life. The reaction of the *Methodist Times* to the court hearing of the 15-17 November 1890 was immediate and damning of the Irish leader. On the 20 November, the journal declared that 'Of course Mr Parnell must go', before apologising to its readers that circumstances required it to make such an obvious statement.[8] The newspaper maintained that its previous support for Home Rule vindicated 'our right to speak as friends of the Irish people' and that its criticisms of Parnell were in no way born of anti-Irish feeling. Moreover, Hughes considered that given Parnell was a member of the House of Commons of Great Britain and Ireland, he had as much right to comment on the situation as any Irishman. The *Methodist Times* thus condemned the suggestions of the *Pall Mall Gazette* (now edited by Edward Cook) and that of the well-known positivist, Prof. Edward Spencer Beesly,[9] that 'Parnell is not our leader, not our countryman' and therefore the British were 'not responsible' for dealing with him, it should be left to the Irish alone to decide his fate.[10] By contrast, the *Methodist Times* insisted that:

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[6] D. W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics, 1870-1914*, (London, 1982), p.11.

[7] *Methodist Times*, 18 February 1886 and 17 June 1886; Bebbington, *Nonconformist Conscience*, p.45; Simon Goldsworthy, 'English Nonconformity and the pioneering of the modern newspaper campaign: including the strange case of W. T. Stead and the Bulgarian horrors', *Journalism Studies*, 7:3 (2006) p.396; and Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes*, pp152-3.

[8] *Methodist Times*, 20 November 1890.

[9] Edward Spencer Beesly, historian and writer. Professor of Modern History at University College, London, 1860-93, he chaired the first meeting of the International Working Men's Association in 1864 and edited the *Positivist Review*, 1893-1901. See G. K. Peatling, *British opinion and Irish self-government, 1865-1925: from Liberal Unionism to Liberal Commonwealth*, (Dublin, 2001), pp25-6 and p.289.

[10] Beesly, *Mind your own business*, pp3-5.

> if the Irish race deliberately select as their representative an adulterer of Mr Parnell's type they are as incapable of self-government as their bitterest enemies have asserted. So obscene a race as in those circumstances they would prove themselves to be would obviously be unfit for anything except a military despotism.[11]

This vicious admonition set the tone of the coverage that journal gave to the crisis. While the *Christian Advocate* in Belfast quoted Hughes's statements with glee, they caused much anger in Nationalist circles where they were perceived as demonstrating anti-Irish sentiment.[12] The stinging riposte of the *Freeman's Journal* read, 'if the Irish people abandoned Mr Parnell to follow the Reverend Hugh Price Hughes, a military despotism would be 10,000 times too good for them'.[13] Hughes's statements essentially represented an ultimatum to the Irish people that they must choose between the continued leadership of Parnell and the support of British nonconformists for the Nationalist cause. The support of British nonconformity for Home Rule was perceived to be necessary for the continued success of the Gladstonian Liberals and thus the passage of a Home Rule bill. Irish Nationalists were awake to this threat to withdraw support for Home Rule: in a letter of 20 November, to the Archbishop of Dublin, William Walsh, Michael Davitt cited 'the language of the *Methodist Reformer* [sic] of today – the organ of the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes – [that] voices the determination of those who are Gladstone's backbone in the Liberal and Home Rule party' to depose Parnell or cease to support Home Rule.[14] Since the new session of Parliament commenced on the 25 November, Davitt indicated to Walsh that they had a mere four days to decide whether to support or oppose Parnell's position as the Chairman of the Irish Party.

Hughes renewed his criticisms of Parnell the following Saturday, 22 November, following the rally at the Leinster Hall in support of the Irish leader. Hughes continued to oppose the suggestion that the leadership of Parnell was an issue for the Irish people alone, instead maintaining that since the Nationalist leader sat at Westminster the matter could not be exclusively reserved to the Irish people. Hughes cited the sacrifices in credibility he had made for the Irish concerning Home

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[11] *Methodist Times*, 20 November 1890.
[12] *Christian Advocate*, 28 November 1890 and *Freeman's Journal*, 24 November 1890.
[13] *Freeman's Journal*, 21 November 1890.
[14] Cited in Larkin, *The Fall of Parnell*, p.212.

Rule and his support for Parnell over the Pigott forgeries, he again claimed the 'right to speak as the friend of the Irish people'.[15] Hughes argued that while he did 'not underestimate the immense and unique services' that Parnell had rendered to the Irish people, there 'ought to be two limits to their gratitude. It ought not to exceed their patriotism and it ought not to exceed their faith in God'.[16] It was inconceivable to Hughes that a man who was immoral in his personal life was fit to lead a party or a nation, declaring that 'what is morally wrong can never be politically right'.[17] Moreover, Parnell's moral defectiveness was compounded by his failure to immediately resign. A swift retirement would have averted the prolonged and damaging criticism from the nonconformist press, and may have allowed Parnell to re-enter political life at a later date.

The beginning of the new parliamentary session hastened the political climax of the crisis. Aware of the increasing opposition among nonconformists, Gladstone met with Justin McCarthy on 24 November to indicate that while he still supported Home Rule, should Parnell remain as leader, the electoral success of the Liberal Party would be put in jeopardy, and furthermore his retention of the Liberal leadership would be rendered 'almost a nullity'.[18] McCarthy was thus charged with representing the views of Gladstone to his own party leader, and appears to have indicated to Parnell that the Liberal leader would 'still fight our cause'.[19] Consequently, when the Irish Party met in Committee Room 15 on 25 November, to elect their sessional chairman, Parnell received significant support from his colleagues. Accounts of the meeting note only one dissenting voice: that of the Methodist, Jeremiah Jordan, an 'obscure and habitually unassertive member of the party'.[20] Donal Sullivan, writing to his nephew Tim Healy, recalled that Jordan 'did his work creditably and *most feelingly*' in calling for Parnell to retire, if only temporarily, but that the suggestion was 'received in silence'.[21] Jordan was close to Hugh Price Hughes and the politically influential McArthur family, and may have been

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[15] *Methodist Times*, 27 November 1890.
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] *The Times*, 26 November 1890.
[19] Eugene Doyle, *Justin McCarthy*, (Dublin, 1996), p.37.
[20] Callanan, *The Parnell Split*, p.14 and Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell*, p.497.
[21] T. M. Healy, *Letters and leaders of my day*, (London, 1928), i, pp322-3.

warned of the increasingly intractable opposition to Parnell among British nonconformists. However, his attitude in Committee Room 15 was in contrast to his response to the criticisms levelled at the Irish leader by the *Methodist Times*. Published on 27 November in the wake of Parnell's re-election, an article by Jordan suggested that the journal had been 'unduly severe' in its criticism of the Irish Parliamentary Party and had failed to comprehend the extent of the 'natural homage' that was felt towards Parnell.[22] Hughes, however, dismissed these criticisms, maintaining that he had alluded to an hypothetical situation and referred to the 'proverbial chastity of the Irish people', believing that they would not accept a notorious adulterer as leader. Nevertheless, the *Methodist Times* declared that by re-electing Parnell as leader of the party, the Irish MPs had 'placed Parnellism outside the pale of Christian civilisation' and expressed the hope that Jordan and all the 'respectable members' of the party would rally around Michael Davitt: the only prominent Nationalist to have publicly called for Parnell's resignation.[23] The *Methodist Times* suggested that the choice presented to the Irish people was to either sacrifice Parnell as leader or abandon all hope of Home Rule for a generation.[24]

Hughes apparently had little to gain politically by compelling Parnell to resign, however, he had built his own career as a leading Methodist minister on successive campaigns for social purity and morality in public life.[25] Consequently, although Hughes was committed to the principle of Home Rule for Ireland, he could not continue to support a man whose conduct flouted moral standards. In this Hughes was apparently supported by a significant number of both his co-religionists and other nonconformists in England who previously espoused Home Rule. Writing to *The Times*, 'a Wesleyan Minister' coined the phrase 'nonconformist conscience' to describe and commend the concerted effort of Hughes and his allies to remove Parnell from power.[26] This was, however, adopted as a derogatory term by the national press to imply that nonconformists were selective about the areas of

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[22] *Methodist Times*, 27 November 1890.
[23] *Ibid.*; *Freeman's Journal*, 21 November 1890; Callanan, *The Parnell Split*, p.12.
[24] *Methodist Times*, 27 November 1890.
[25] Hughes was a senior member of the Methodist Conference's Committee for Social Purity and had been the prime motivator of the 'Forward Movement' within British Methodism and the establishment of the London Mission, (*WCM, 1891*); Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes;* and Dorothy Price Hughes, *Hugh Price Hughes*, (London, 1904).
[26] *The Times*, 28 November 1890.

morality about which they protested. One correspondent suggested that 'the inconsistency of the "conscience" is glaring', and verged on the hypocritical.[27]

The *Christian Advocate* also believed that the outrage of the *Methodist Times* concerning Parnell's actions was inconsistent with its earlier stance. While the *Advocate* claimed to be delighted by 'such a noble stand for social purity' made by the *Methodist Times,* it suggested that it should be combined with a permanent change in the political outlook of the journal. Indeed, the *Advocate* maintained that a failure to do so would indicate that Hughes was in fact 'more influenced by anxiety for the success of a political party than desire for the spread of social purity'. The Belfast newspaper considered Hughes's barrage against Parnell a vindication of its opposition to the Nationalist party. Highlighting Hughes's intemperate condemnation of the Irish as proving themselves 'incapable of self-government', the *Advocate* argued that the Irish people had for many years 'blindly' followed Nationalist leaders without regard for their personal morality. Nevertheless, despite hailing the *Methodist Times's* coverage of the crisis as a victory for its long-held principles, the *Advocate* continued to appear sceptical of the motivation for Hughes's *volte-face*, and implied that it might yet be demonstrable hypocrisy. One correspondent, Thomas Moran of Enniskillen, suggested that it was inconsistent of Hughes to condemn Parnell for breaking the seventh commandment regarding adultery, when it was common knowledge across Ireland that he had frequently incited and applauded the breaking of commandments six and eight (those forbidding murder and theft).[28] This caused much anger among Irish Methodists, who suggested that their English brethren were selective in their use of scripture and ignorant of the tactics of the Nationalist movement in Ireland.

Events moved rapidly in the week between the publication of the Methodist journals and, despite the cool reception from their Irish brethren, the *Methodist Times* continued its campaign against the Irish leader. Responding to Gladstone's letter of the 25 November, Parnell published his 'Manifesto to the Irish People' in the national press on the 29 November. Speaking as 'the leader of the Irish nation', Parnell

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[27] *The Times,* 8 January 1891.
[28] *Christian Advocate,* 28 November 1890.

condemned the reaction of the British Liberal and religious press and repudiated the Liberal alliance.[29] In an unprecedented breach of confidence, Parnell gave an account of the meetings he had held with Gladstone at Hawarden the previous December regarding Liberal proposals for a new Home Rule bill. This particular aspect of the document prompted the Irish Catholic Archbishops Walsh of Dublin, and Croke of Cashel to publicly decry Parnell's continued leadership of the Nationalist party.[30] Archbishop Walsh, speaking on behalf of the Irish hierarchy, clearly condemned Parnell's action in strong, measured terms, stating that:

> We had better withdraw from Parliamentary action and give up the cause of Ireland as lost if we have no other possible leader than one who has shown that after accepting the confidence of an English statesman, he has no scruple in taking a desperate effort to scramble out of a difficulty by abusing that confidence by betraying it. Things have come to a lamentable pass.[31]

Hughes's reaction to the manifesto was to denounce both the document and its author in the strongest terms. The manifesto was described as 'one of the most unscrupulous documents ever published ... saturated with falsehood from beginning to end'. Parnell's conduct was depicted as 'totally inconsistent' constituting an 'unprecedented breach of confidence', verging on 'wickedess' as it sought to undermine support for Gladstone's administration in Ireland. The coverage of the *Methodist Times* was thus uncompromising in regard to what it believed to be the root cause of the crisis: Parnell's adultery. Hughes did, however, express his 'deepest sympathy' for the members of the Irish Parliamentary Party who he perceived as 'striving now to undo the terrible mistake of which they were guilty when they re-elected Mr Parnell'. Hughes nevertheless maintained that even if they had expected Parnell to resign immediately, MPs should have taken the moral stand immediately, rather than relying on the honourable conduct of an acknowledged adulterer.[32]

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[29] *Freeman's Journal* and *The Times*, 29 November 1890.
[30] *Freeman's Journal*, 1 December 1890.
[31] *The Times*, 1 December 1890.
[32] *Methodist Times*, 4 December 1890.

The manifesto also prompted the *Methodist Recorder* to enter the fray against Parnell. Never an enthusiastic supporter of the Irish leader, the *Recorder* expounded its views on the most appropriate relationship between politics and morality, noting that politicians were not the best arbiters of that relationship because they were 'corrupted by party'.[33] Accepting Hughes's axiom 'what is morally wrong cannot be politically right', this more conservative journal pressed for it to apply not only to political methods but also to political aims. The *Recorder* asserted that in pressing for the 'obedience to the law of Divine Righteousness' in public life it had the support of Christians across the United Kingdom, a body of opinion it believed to be 'gathering force year by year'. The newspaper was content to note Parnell's 'shameful record' in the House of Commons, snidely suggesting that this would 'at least shield Mr Parnell from any charge of inconsistency'. Despite taking a less radical political line than its sister publication, the *Methodist Recorder* nevertheless looked for 'a yet more frank and firm pronouncement on moral grounds from the men of Methodism whether within the House of Commons or out of it'. The *Recorder* also confirmed their stance on the crisis by commending the actions of Jeremiah Jordan within the Irish Parliamentary Party 'who alone first raised his voice in protest' against Parnell, choosing to take a 'high and purely moral ground' in opposition to his party leader, while lamenting that Ireland was again riven by faction.[34]

The fate of the Irish leader decided, the focus of the Methodist press shifted to a discussion of the role that British nonconformity had played in the resolution of the crisis. The *Methodist Times* adopted a particularly self-congratulatory tone, quoting the opinion of the December edition of the *Review of Reviews,* edited by W. T. Stead, that 'MR PRICE HUGHES in the METHODIST TIMES was the first to express the feeling of national indignation which was provoked by the bravado of the Parnellite Party'. Hughes asserted that 'we shall always be equally prompt and emphatic in the advocacy of Social Purity' whatever the financial cost of such actions.[35] The *Methodist Recorder* was also anxious to take a share of the credit for the fall of Parnell, praising the Christian conscience that 'protests against all ungodliness whichever the Ten

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[33] *Methodist Recorder,* 4 December 1890.
[34] *Ibid.,* 11 December 1890.
[35] *Methodist Times,* 1 January 1891.

Commandments may be violated'.[36] Their pleasure at the influence that nonconformity was able to exert over the affair was, however, tempered by an article by Sir William McArthur who, echoing the criticisms of the *Christian Advocate,* questioned why 'Hugh Price Hughes and company have been oblivious of Nationalist breaches of the Sixth, Eighth and Ninth Commandments [concerning murder, theft and bearing false witness], but condemn the Seventh?' Nonetheless, British Methodism was united in both deploring immorality in public life and satisfied that religious nonconformity had played a decisive role in the national crisis. This was confirmed at the annual Conference of 1891, in which the governing body declared:

> its adhesion to the principle that the responsible representatives of the nation ought to be men of unstained character, and earnestly protests against the intrusion into public life men who have been proved in open Court to be guilty of flagrant immorality.[37]

This unusual comment on political affairs from the Conference serves to underline the impact that the Parnell crisis had on British Methodism's perception of itself as a major political player; the moral conscience of the nation.

In Ireland, however, the *Advocate,* once the peak of the crisis had passed, showed little interest in the moral posturing of its English brethren. They deemed British nonconformity to have acted in an hypocritical manner, having previously supported the Nationalist leader. They decried the fact that British nonconformists had failed to 'set conditions of behaviour' on Nationalism, despite their 'open and criminal breach' of the Fourth Commandment (remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy).[38] The episode, thus, did little to improve relations between the Methodists of Ireland and Britain. Although both communities continued to believe in applying morality to politics, their understanding of the issues surrounding Home Rule led them to widely divergent conclusions. The phrase 'nonconformist conscience' became common currency in Britain to describe the moral and religious influence that the non-episcopal churches had on the Liberal Party from the fall of Parnell to the beginning of the First World War, but had no resonance in the Irish context.

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[36] *Methodist Recorder,* 8 January 1891.
[37] *WCM, 1891.*
[38] *Christian Advocate,* 26 December 1891 and Deut. 5:12, King James Version.

Home Rule 1892-3: the forgotten crisis

While the question of Irish Home Rule had mostly disappeared from the British political agenda in the aftermath of the defeat of Gladstone's Liberal Party in 1886, this was not the case in Ireland, where, despite the Unionist victory, it continued to be the most significant political issue. The historiography, however, is strangely quiet regarding the second Home Rule crisis. In many cases Gladstone's introduction of the Government of Ireland bill in February 1893 is overshadowed by the political crisis surrounding the fall of Parnell two years previously. Moreover, this second attempt by Gladstone to introduce a Government of Ireland bill broadly followed the pattern of the first. Consequently, the second crisis is often perceived as merely a 'repetition of 1886' with little to offer in the way of historical novelty and without the high drama of the third crisis.[39] The principal exceptions to this are the seminal thematic studies of Irish Home Rule by Alan O'Day and Alvin Jackson.[40] In both these cases, the second Home Rule episode is treated as primarily a 'parliamentary device'. The focus is upon the strategies and tactics of the parliamentary parties, in particular the weakness of the Nationalist presence at Westminster in the wake of the Parnellite split, and continuing internecine conflict.[41] These accounts tend, therefore, to pass over the extra-parliamentary agitation that had been escalating throughout the intervening five years since the introduction of the first Home Rule bill, and that peaked during the election campaign of 1892. A significant exception to this pattern is Gordon Lucy's examination of the Ulster Convention of 1892.[42] Lucy attempts to place the Convention within the context of local politics, and claims that the proceedings were essentially of a democratic nature, with Unionist organisations all sending their own representatives.[43] While this is an appealing analysis of events, Lucy fails to fully substantiate this claim, as he clearly describes the organisers of the event as members of the Belfast Reform Club, and local MPs.[44] While Lucy's examination of the Ulster Convention illuminates the impact of the demonstration on popular memory, and its role in the creation of a specifically Ulster Unionist identity, it does little to elucidate wider context of the second Home Rule bill.

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[39] Alan O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p.152.
[40] O'Day, *Irish Home Rule* and Jackson, *Home Rule*, (London, 2003).
[41] O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p.53 and pp154-8 and Jackson, *Home Rule*, pp93-4.
[42] Gordon Lucy, *The Great Convention: The Ulster Unionist Convention of 1892*, (Belfast, 1995).
[43] *Ibid.*, p.1.
[44] *Ibid.*, p.7.

The remainder of this chapter will explore in detail the extra-parliamentary activities of Methodists during the period of the general election campaign in the summer 1892 through to the defeat of the Government of Ireland bill in the House of Lords in September 1893. The analysis presented here will focus on two particular periods within this timeframe. The first of these is a two week period, 17 – 30 June 1892, during the general election campaign that encompassed the Unionist conventions in Belfast and Dublin, the debate about Home Rule at the annual Irish Methodist Conference and the publication of an anti-Home Rule petition from Irish Methodist ministers addressed to their English brethren. The election campaign is key to understanding Methodist attitudes during this second crisis: the assertive and pro-active response of Irish Methodism to the renewed threat, and the relative lack of engagement with Home Rule among British Methodists. The second period that will be addressed in detail is from the introduction of the Home Rule bill to the House of Commons on 13 February 1893, through to its final defeat in the Lords in September. The reaction of Methodism to the new proposals will be analysed, particularly the presentation of the debates in the denominational newspapers.

In sharp contrast to the shock of the 'Hawarden Kite' in December 1885, it was commonly understood in 1892 that if re-elected, Gladstone would re-introduce his proposals for Irish self-government. Consequently, those on both sides of the debate had extensive opportunities to publicly and fully rehearse their arguments in the preceding years. Irish Methodists were particularly concerned about the role of Catholics in public life. In 1891 the Conference petitioned parliament with reference to the Religious Disabilities Removal Act, claiming that to allow a Catholic to be appointed to the post of Lord Lieutenant would 'subvert the Protestant Constitution'.[45] Specifically regarding Home Rule, three documents were issued in the five years preceding Gladstone's return to power that provided an Irish Methodist perspective on events: an appeal of 'Irish non-episcopal ministers' presented to Salisbury in November 1888; a pamphlet issued in February 1889 by

[45] *WCM, 1891.*

the Rev. William Crawford[46] stating the arguments for Home Rule; and a riposte by the Rev. Thomas Pearson entitled, *Irish Methodism and Home Rule*.[47]

In 1887, a survey conducted by the Liberal candidate for East Lindsay and Methodist Robert W. Perks,[48] of approximately 1,000 of his fellow lay representatives to the British Conference, revealed that 69 per cent of them opposed the Conservative Irish policy.[49] Given that the pressing issue regarding Ireland in 1887 was a Coercion Bill, this figure does not necessarily translate directly into support for Home Rule, but it gives a clear indication as to where the sympathies of British Methodism lay. By contrast, in Ireland, a preponderance of Protestants of all denominations had opposed Home Rule in 1886, and continued to do so. A significant number of British nonconformists did, however, oppose Home Rule. Riled by Perks's survey, eleven Unionist nonconformists founded the Nonconformist Unionist Association (NUA) in January 1888, chaired by prominent Methodist layman, Sir George Hayter Chubb.[50] The organisation was not affiliated to any specific Church, but was a political group designed to represent British nonconformist opponents of Home Rule. The inaugural meeting in London was a relatively modest gathering, with only

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[46] Headmaster of Wesley College Dublin 1889-1910, the Rev. William Crawford MA was the first superintendent of the Dublin City Mission founded in 1893. He was one the few prominent Methodist ministers to support Home Rule and was a leading member of Protestant Home Rule Association until his death in April 1914. This political stance did not, however, prevent his achieving prominence within the Church and he was elected Vice-President of the Conference in 1900 and 1907.

[47] William Crawford, 'Irish Methodism and Home Rule', *Methodist Times*, 21 February 1889 and Thomas Pearson, *Irish Methodism and Home Rule*, (n.p., n.d.).

[48] Thomas William Perks, solicitor, civil engineer and politician. Son of the Rev. George Thomas Perks, who had been one of the founders of the *Methodist Recorder*. T. W. Perks attended Conference as a lay representative from 1878, was active on several connexional committees and was elected as lay Vice-President of the first British United Methodist Conference in 1932. As the Liberal MP for Louth 1892-1910, he considered himself the 'MP for Nonconformity', in close collaboration with Hugh Price Hughes and leader of the pro-Rosebery Imperial faction in Parliament. A supporter of Home Rule throughout the 1880s and 1890s, by 1912 Perks favoured the maintenance of the Union.

[49] *The Times*, 3 June 1887. Robert W. Perks was subsequently elected for the East Lindsay constituency in 1892 until his retirement in 1910, having been conferred a Baronetcy in 1908. During his time as an MP he worked closely with Hugh Price Hughes and supported the Liberal policy of Home Rule. By the time of the third Home Rule crisis in 1912 he found himself more inclined to Unionism. A representative at the British Conference from the first admission of laity in 1878, he was the first Vice-President of Conference after the unification of British Methodism in 1932.

[50] Born in 1848, Chubb was the brother of a Wesleyan minister and one of the first laymen to be admitted to the Conference in 1878. Partner and director of Chubb & Son's Lock and Safe Company for 74 years, he served on the board of the *Methodist Recorder*. He also served on several connexional committee and was a governor of the Leys school. A Conservative and opponent of Home Rule, Chubb was knighted in 1885, raised to the baronetcy in 1890, and made Baron 1927 (Bebbington, *Nonconformist conscience*, pp93-4).

60 attending, however, it successfully achieved its aim of demonstrating divisions within nonconformity regarding Home Rule.

The most prominent political protest orchestrated by the NUA was a petition from Irish non-episcopal ministers presented to Salisbury and Hartington at a meeting of the association on 14 November 1888.[51] The unprecedented ecumenical petition was signed by 864 out of 999 ministers of the Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregationalist and Baptist Churches of Ireland, and was presented by representatives of the churches, with Rev. Dr Henry Evans (editor of the *Christian Advocate*, 1885-8) as the Methodist delegate.[52] Recognising that the address had not been signed by all ministers, the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church stated that those who had refused to append their names, had done so because they 'declined to take any part in political movements of a party character'.[53] He declared that those who supported Home Rule, 'did not form more than one per cent of their ministry', and furthermore, the 'practical unanimity of their 600 ministers was fairly representative of their laity'. The short address asserted that the opinions of those ministers living in Ireland were 'entitled to far more weight' than of those ministers living in England and Wales who supported Home Rule. The suggestion that 'any guarantee, moral or material, could be devised which would safeguard the rights of minorities' was summarily dismissed. The address acknowledged that although in the 'past large sections of the Irish people have suffered many wrongs', any legislation required to address them, could be passed by the Westminster Parliament. Finally, the signatories 'claimed the aid' of their co-religionists in Great Britain to assist them in resisting Home Rule, which they believed would 'deprive us of our rights of citizenship in this great Empire'.[54] This address lacked much of the hysteria that the issue had aroused at the peak of the crisis in 1886. Despite the measured tone, at a meeting of Liberals in Birmingham Gladstone treated the document with contempt, quoting from the *Daily Telegraph*, which had printed a facsimile of the petition.[55] Gladstone suggested to his audience, which included a number of prominent

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[51] *The Times*, 15 November 1888.
[52] Thomas Macknight, *Ulster as it is or twenty-eight years as an Irish editor*, ii, (London, 1896), p.233. Macknight had been editor of the Liberal Unionist *Northern Whig* newspaper.
[53] *The Times*, 15 November 1888.
[54] *Ibid.*
[55] *The Times*, 8 November 1888.

nonconformists, that their Irish brethren believed they should 'not to be considered as competent' judges of the Irish situation. To emphasise his point about the inconsistencies of Irish Protestantism, he quoted from a petition presented to the Crown in 1797 to demonstrate how nonconformist values had been corrupted towards ascendancy and bigotry in Ireland in the intervening 90 years.

The next significant Methodist contribution to the debate was a pamphlet issued in February 1889 by the Rev. William Crawford, a leading Irish Methodist Home Ruler, stating the positive case for a Dublin assembly. Crawford objected to the presence on a political platform during the Goven by-election of a 'Methodist minister of strong Orange principles', whose personal objections to Home Rule 'are supposed to be that of his co-religionists'.[56] He claimed that this was not in fact the case, and that 'a growing minority of ministers and laymen' utterly reject those opinions, believing them to 'breathe a spirit of religious animosity'. This imbalance in the representation of Irish Methodist attitudes, was, Crawford claimed, because those who favoured Home Rule adhered to the 'honourable understanding and custom, amounting to a rule, that Methodist ministers and officials shall keep aloof from an active share in political contests'. Crawford asserted that the question of Home Rule had been 'misrepresented, persistently, and often successfully, as a religious one'. Instead he urged them to recall how they had been 'flouted by an arrogant ecclesiasticism' from within the Church of Ireland, but to remember that among Catholics, Methodist preachers 'have been free to traverse the length and breadth of the land'. He suggested that instead of resorting to 'pitiful appeals to the sympathy of powerful friends', Irish Methodists should have more faith in God and 'generous confidence in their fellow-countrymen'.

Crawford's colleague, the Rev. Thomas Pearson, completely rejected the basis of Crawford's publication. Citing the latter's assertion that Methodists should have 'generous confidence in our fellow-countrymen', Pearson stated that this was not the issue, rather could there be confidence in 'toleration on the part of Rome'?[57] His pamphlet addressed in detail Wylie's analysis of the Vatican decrees, '*Which*

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[56] William Crawford, 'Irish Methodism and Home Rule', *Methodist Times*, 21 February 1889.
[57] Pearson, *Irish Methodism and Home Rule*, p.4.

Sovereign: Queen Victoria or the Pope?', published in abridged form in 1888.[58] Rather than challenging specific Home Rule proposals, Pearson argued that the Pope was not solely a religious leader, but claimed temporal power that encompassed 'everything – religion, education and civil authority'.[59] Maintaining that 'Irish Romanists have no grievance' that needed addressing, Pearson asserted that the legacy of Home Rule would be to place the country 'under the despotism of a foreign ecclesiastic'.[60] Contrary to Crawford's assertion that there were an increasing number of Methodists supporting Home Rule, Irish Methodism was presented as being unanimously opposed to Home Rule, with Pearson concluding with the rhetorical question 'How could true Liberals, true Christians, or true Methodists, be in favour of such a government'?[61] These two publications demonstrate that the fault-lines within Irish Methodism that emerged during 1886 had ossified in the intervening period. Despite Crawford's protestations that there was a growing minority within Methodism that supported Home Rule, there appears to be little evidence that this was indeed the case. Moreover, Crawford's assertion that ministerial supporters of Home Rule were more politically reticent than their Unionist counterparts, is clearly contradicted by his pamphlet publication and its verbatim report in the *Methodist Times.*

"Why are the Methodists of Ireland opposed to Home Rule"?[62]

By the beginning of 1892, it was clear that the Salisbury government would be unable to continue for much longer.[63] Anticipating a general election, in the months of March and April, the *Christian Advocate* ran a series of articles setting out the reasons for Irish Methodist opposition to Home Rule. Written by the Rev. William Nicholas,[64] the articles were initially published in the *New York Christian Advocate* in

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[58] J A. Wylie, *Which sovereign: Queen Victoria or the Pope?,* Abridged ed., (London, 1888).
[59] Pearson, *Irish Methodism and Home Rule,* p.3.
[60] *Ibid.*
[61] *Ibid.,* p.4.
[62] William Nicholas, *Why are the Methodists of Ireland opposed to Home Rule,* (Belfast, 1893).
[63] O'Day, *Irish Home Rule,* p.153.
[64] Born in 1838 of English parents in Wexford, William Nicholas was a noted theological professor and an impressive speaker, being invited by the Evangelical Alliance to deliver papers at three international conferences. He became the sixth President of Methodist College, Belfast, 1899-1908 and delivered the annual Methodist Fernley Lecture on *Christianity and Socialism* in 1893, for which the *Methodist Times* branded him an extreme individualist. Nicholas was a members of the Senate of the Royal University of Ireland and on its dissolution received an honorary LLD. He was elected Vice-President of the Irish Conference in 1894 and 1904. He campaigned vigorously against Home Rule

an attempt to inform Protestants in American of the concerns held by their co-religionists in Ireland.[65] New York was strongly associated with Irish Nationalism in America, having been the state where the Fenian Brotherhood had been founded and from where the incursions into Canada were launched.[66] While Irish Methodism had retained strong ties to the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, the decision of Nicholas to publish his condemnation of Home Rule for the New York audience suggests that there was considerable concern that Irish Protestant opposition Home Rule was being overlooked in American political debate.

Nicholas commenced by explaining that 'the Methodists of Ireland ... are not eager politicians' but that the issue of Home Rule transcended traditional political boundaries to impinge on religious affairs.[67] He then proceeded to argue that Home Rule was an issue of such a magnitude that it had precipitated the highly unusual step of 'district meeting after district meeting' passing resolutions 'deprecating' the proposals. Moreover, the representative body of Irish Methodism in Conference, both lay and ministerial, had supported these district meeting resolutions in both 1887 and 1888. Nicholas emphasised that Methodism was united in its opposition to Home Rule on the grounds of liberty. He maintained that Methodism had never been a part of the Protestant Ascendancy in Ireland and in opposing Home Rule Methodists did 'not desire or ask for any peculiar privileges for themselves'. He claimed that the denomination had in the past always stood on the side of political liberty for the nation. Nicholas further explained that Home Rule could not be equated to a demand for increased political liberty since Ireland had more parliamentary representatives per head of population than any other region of the United Kingdom, boasting one MP per 46,000 persons compared to one for every 57,000 in Scotland and a mere one MP per 59,000 in England. While the minister recognised that the majority of Ireland's population apparently favoured Home Rule, he argued that Unionist votes 'ought to be weighed as well as counted', emphasising

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from 1885 until his death in September 1912, becoming increasingly identified with the Ulster Unionist cause.

[65] These articles were also republished in pamphlet form in the following year. See William Nicholas, *Why are the Methodists of Ireland opposed to Home Rule*, (Belfast, 1893).

[66] R. V. Comerford, *The Fenians in context: Irish politics and society, 1848-82*, (Dublin, 1998), pp51-3 and p.132 and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 11 June 1870.

[67] *Christian Advocate*, 11 March 1892.

the capital wealth of the Unionist population and suggesting that the views of the economically successful in Ireland should have more influence in determining policy.

In the second article, Nicholas focussed on the practical politics that surrounded Home Rule. He commenced by praising the record of the recent Chief Secretary, Arthur Balfour, who he considered to be the best minister for Ireland since Forster.[68] Balfour was commended for his investment in Ireland, which in Nicholas's opinion removed the need for Home Rule by increasing the prosperity of the island. Nicholas claimed that this increased prosperity would be threatened by the political agitation that he believed would accompany a new Home Rule bill.[69] He claimed that with all the Protestants of Ireland united in opposing the move, the bill could not be carried through Parliament without the 'most exciting and angry contest'. Nicholas supposed the result of this would be that 'business of every kind in Ireland would well nigh be destroyed' as the threat of prolonged disruption would remove economic security and encourage the withdrawal of capital from the country.

Nicholas also emphasised the ambiguity of the term 'Home Rule', noting that 'Home Rule means one thing in some places and an entirely different thing in others'. Readers were exhorted not to allow themselves to fall into 'human error' or become subject to the 'deception' that Home Rule had a clear, fixed and reasonable definition. Gladstone was particularly criticised for his 'wisdom' (Nicholas suggests using another word, but opts for the 'more courteous') in refusing to define the terms of his Home Rule bill and allowing the public to examine the plans. Nicholas ascribes this reticence on behalf of the Liberal leader to his understanding that if he broke his 'ominous silence', his party would be 'shattered to fragments', and thus scupper any chances he had of regaining power. Dismissing the suggestion that Irish Methodists should state 'what measure of Home Rule they will agree to', Nicholas

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[68] William Edward Forster, Liberal MP for Bradford from 1861 until his death in 1886. Forster was responsible for the Education Act of 1870, and was Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1880-82. His time as Chief Secretary was dominated by increasing land agitation in Ireland, orchestrated by Parnell and the Land League. To combat this Forster continued the Tory policy of coercion in the country, suspending *habeus corpus* in the autumn of 1880, and ordering the arrest of Parnell in October 1881, following the 'no rent manifesto' issued by the Irish leader. He was also the principal architect of the 1881 Irish Land Act, which enshrined the '3 Fs' (fair rent, fixity of tenure, freedom of sale) in law. Forster's strong actions, particularly in confronting the Land League, won him the support of many Irish Protestants as is demonstrated here by Nicholas.

[69] *Christian Advocate*, 25 March 1892.

instead proposed two other questions that he believed to be more pertinent: firstly, 'what measure will satisfy the Nationalists of Ireland?' and when that had been answered, 'ought the Government of the United Kingdom to grant such a measure?' Nicholas perceived that the issue of Home Rule should be considered in the wider context of the welfare of the whole United Kingdom, not solely the interests of a specific part of the Empire.

Referring to the recent by-election defeat of Liberal-Unionism in their previous stronghold of Rosendale, the victorious Liberal candidate J. H. Maden was described as 'honest' in being prepared to set out his understanding of Home Rule as the creation of a Dublin parliament subordinate to Westminster. Unsurprisingly, however, despite Maden's Wesleyan affiliation, Nicholas considered his moderate proposals for Home Rule to be flawed and unworkable. Maden suggested that any Irish legislature should have strictly limited powers, dealing primarily with the island's material infrastructure, with contentious issues such as religious endowments, education and the land question reserved to the Imperial Parliament.[70] Nicholas, however, maintained that this system would be entirely unworkable since when the assembly inevitably chose to legislate on prohibited matters, there would be no Imperial recourse short of military action able to compel the Irish parliament to abide by its terms of operation, and this would be a step that Britain would not be prepared to take. The inevitability of any Irish legislature demanding increased autonomy constituted the foundation of Nicholas's argument, since he believed that 'under an independent Ireland it is certain that there would be very violent party contest, rising on any burning question to the very verge of civil war', to the extent that in the long-term civil war would be 'certain'. Nicholas's conviction that civil war would be inevitable under an independent legislature thus led him to the conclusion that no measure of Home Rule should be granted to the country, as even a limited grant would move the country inexorably in the direction of full autonomy.

The third and final of Nicholas's articles summarised the position of Ireland's Methodist population. He reiterated the argument that although Methodism had always been apolitical, it had nevertheless supported the cause of civil and religious

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[70] *The Times*, 25 January 1892.

liberty in every historical dispute.[71] This was contrasted to the record of the Roman Catholic Church, citing in particular their perceived illiberal stance on the education question in Lower Canada (Quebec), a question that was also perennially problematic in Ireland. Perhaps curiously, given his American audience, Nicholas chose to emphasise Irish Methodists' commitment to 'the greatest Empire on earth'. He claimed that a grant of Home Rule to Ireland would commence the destruction of the Empire, as colonies such as India would see the weakness of the British government and demand their own independence. Moreover, it was assumed that any Irish legislature would be intensely hostile to the Imperial parliament, thus further accelerating the complete dissolution of the Empire. Switching to an analogy likely to appeal to his New England audience, Nicholas compared the Irish situation to the conflict between the northern and southern states in the US Civil War, in which the loyal Protestants of Ireland were placed in the role of the northern states attempting to prevent the break-up of the Union and quell rebellion. Nicholas thus called for Ireland to be ruled 'with firmness, justice and generosity', which he maintained could be achieved through extended local government provision under the Imperial Parliament, leading to a land that would be 'contented, loyal and prosperous'.

The first task for Nicholas in his articles was to demonstrate the implacable opposition of Irish Protestants to Irish independence, notwithstanding the reports his audience may have heard both about the overwhelming support for Home Rule within Ireland and the espousal of the Nationalist cause by many British nonconformists. Moreover, it was important to stress that as a body the Methodist Church was resolutely apolitical in outlook, merely desiring a continuance of political and religious liberty free from Vatican dictates. Having demonstrated the Irish Methodist commitment to the Union, Nicholas then proceeded to rehearse the basic case against Home Rule first used in 1886: that Home Rule would deprive the Irish people of their rights as citizens of the British Empire; and that the commercial interests of the country would be irreparably harmed by the institution of an independent legislature in Dublin. Given that the primary audience for this series of articles resided in New York, a state with a strong republican tradition, it seems

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[71] *Christian Advocate*, 1 April 1892.

somewhat surprising that he chose to place so much emphasis on the unity of the British Empire. This line of argument does not appear to be one that would naturally appeal to the American audience, even when compared to their recent civil war, especially considering that another local newspaper, the *Irish World and American Industrial Liberator,* was a firm supporter of Home Rule and frequently published articles written by Irish-born and Presbyterian cleric Robert Ellis Thompson in favour of Irish independence and with a strong anti-English tone.[72] Nevertheless, the use of the Imperial case in the face of an unsympathetic audience demonstrates the importance that Irish Methodists placed on this argument.

The publication of these articles in the *Christian Advocate* provoked an immediate response from the London-based *Methodist Times.* Hughes commended the journal for facilitating a discussion of Home Rule 'calmly, quietly and kindly', indicating that a more congenial atmosphere to the debate compared to the previous crisis prevailed. Nevertheless, a direct riposte to the articles by Nicholas was quickly forthcoming under the heading of 'Why are most English Methodists Home Rulers?'[73] Developing the evidence presented by Robert Perks's survey of Wesleyan Methodist laymen, the *Methodist Times'* article asserted that 80 per cent of Wesleyans and 90 per cent of other Methodists supported the Liberal leader, noting that the Conservative Party had not a single Methodist candidate.[74] Hughes claimed that there were three reasons for this level of support for Home Rule: firstly, that Home Rule 'is the necessary application of the Golden Rule of the Gospel', to treat others, as you would be treated yourself.[75] Secondly, that in their estimation, rather than Home Rule facilitating Rome Rule, it would be the antidote to that problem. Finally, that advocates of Home Rule for Ireland were motivated by 'their intense patriotism' and the desire to 'purify the name of Great Britain from the stain which its cruel treatment of Ireland has so long inflicted upon it'. These reasons were summarily dismissed by the *Christian Advocate:* it claimed that the first proposed treating the 'thief and murderer' in the same way as a law-abiding citizen; the second they

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[72] *Irish World and American Industrial Liberator,* 7 May 1892, 21 May 1892, 4 June 1892, 25 June 1892, 17 June 1893, and 7 April 1894.
[73] *Methodist Times,* 30 June 1892.
[74] *The Times,* 3 June 1887 and *Methodist Times,* 30 June 1892.
[75] *Methodist Times,* 30 June 1892.

claimed that the *Methodists Times* could provide no evidence for at all; as for the third, while they expressed some sympathy for the sentiment, they nevertheless considered that previous injustices would not compare with the treatment of Protestants that could be anticipated under a Dublin administration.[76]

Despite the continuing interest of the *Methodist Times* in the issue of Home Rule, even Hughes did not believe it to be the pre-eminent issue of the election. The attention of both of the English Methodist journals was directed towards social reform: temperance, control of the opium trade, gambling, amelioration of working conditions and the status of women within marriage.[77] The *Methodist Recorder* even refused to enter the debate on Home Rule, declining to re-print the series of articles by Nicholas on the objections of Irish Methodists to Home Rule.[78] The only exception the journal was prepared to make was for the views of the highly regarded William Arthur, reporting his speech to the Irish Conference and subsequently publishing an article in which he addressed the question of civil war in Ireland should Home Rule be enacted.[79] Responding to the suggestion made in the *Methodist Recorder* that the predictions of civil war in the wake of Home Rule 'might be dismissed as a nightmare', Arthur insisted that it was indeed correct to fear such a conflict, an opinion that he had held since 1886.[80] He argued that Home Rule threatened to see a 'whole kingdom disenfranchised and reduced to a local vote', a situation that would be strenuously resisted if it was proposed to apply to England. Therefore, he felt confident in stating in response to questions from the *Recorder's* correspondent 'Scotchman', 'Will the Ulster men fight?', an unequivocal 'Yes' and referred readers to a statement by the former Methodist President, Alexander McAuley, that the people ought to resist Home Rule 'in the name of reformed religion'.[81] For Arthur, the dangers of Home Rule could not be overstated, and consequently, Irish Protestants would resist to the utmost any attempt to impose it upon them. While not a dominant theme of the first and second Home Rule episodes, a number of Irish Unionist MPs alluded to the likelihood of armed

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[76] *Christian Advocate*, 8 July 1892.
[77] *Methodist Times*, 30 June 1892 and *Methodist Recorder*, 14 July 1892.
[78] *Christian Advocate*, 22 April 1892.
[79] *Methodist Recorder*, 30 June 1892 and 7 July 1892.
[80] *Ibid.*, 7 July 1892.
[81] *Ibid.*

resistance to Home Rule, should the bill pass into law. Perhaps the most bellicose of these had been the Orangeman William Johnston, MP for South Belfast from 1885-1902, who warned the House of Commons in April 1886 that in Ulster resistance would be offered 'at the point of a bayonet'.[82]

The Ulster Unionist Convention

The Ulster Convention, held on 17 June 1892, was one of the most significant events of the second Home Rule crisis. Attended by 11,879 delegates from across Ulster, the Convention and following rally was to be the 'voice of Ulster' to the British public, and demonstrate the unity of Ulster in protesting against Home Rule.[83] A special pavilion was erected in Belfast for the proceedings, as there was no building large enough for the anticipated crowds. The balconies of the construction were draped with banners hailing great Unionist politicians: Beaconsfield, Balfour, Bright, Chamberlain, Devonshire and Salisbury.[84] The primary aim of the event was to 'let the British people publicly and formally know' that Ulster Unionists would protest against any measure that would loosen the ties between Ireland and the Imperial Legislature.[85] Indeed, the event successfully attracted significant attention from the secular and religious press across the United Kingdom, although perhaps curiously, given the prominence of clergy on the platform, neither of the English Methodist journals gave the Convention significant coverage. The Convention did, however, occur the same week as the Irish Conference, and the London journals' Irish reports focussed on that meeting. By contrast, *The Times* devoted two pages of coverage to the event. Of the fourteen reported speeches in the London newspaper, four were by clerics of the major Protestant denominations (Church of Ireland, Presbyterian, Methodist and Independent) providing the event with a strong religious ethos. Four Methodists were called upon to speak compared to five Presbyterians who had the same honour, which is impressive for the former given the relative size of the two denominations.[86] The Convention also served a secondary purpose of providing a controlled outlet for anti-Home Rule sentiments of all classes across Ulster, working

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,[82] Alvin Jackson, *The Ulster Party: Irish Unionists in the House of Commons, 1884-1911* (Oxford, 1989), pp124-5.
[83] *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, 17 June 1892; *The Times*, 18 June 1892 and Jackson, *The Ulster Party*, p.322.
[84] Macknight, *Ulster as it is*, ii, p.295 and *The Times*, 18 June 1892.
[85] Macknight, *Ulster as it is*, ii, p.290.
[86] David McConnell, 'The Protestant churches', p.130.

men being specifically included in proceedings for the first time.[87] Indeed, once it became apparent that large numbers of the public, as well as delegates, would flock to the proceedings, arrangements were made for an open-air rally where the crowds would be addressed by 'prominent public men', allowing the educated classes to retain control over events and avert violent demonstrations.[88] The rally in the Botanic Gardens following the Convention attracted an estimated 200,000 individuals, transported into Belfast by specially charted trains, and was one of the largest gatherings the town had ever seen.[89]

The Convention commenced by electing the Duke of Abercorn to preside over the proceedings, who immediately requested that the Church of Ireland Primate, Dr Knox, and the ex-Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, Dr Brown, lead the people in prayer, bestowing a pious overtone on proceedings.[90] Abercorn welcomed to the 'grand demonstration, vast in its extent, solemn in its nature', the delegates from across the province, his 'kith and kin, and originally ... from the same stock as himself'.[91] The delegates were hailed as representing 'every rank, every class, every Protestant creed in Ulster', landlords, tenants, artisans, industrialists and labourers. The role of the Protestant churches in protesting against Home Rule was further emphasised, the delegates were described as having been:

> sent here by the members of the Church that was once established; by the men who have held fast to the Presbyterian faith that was bequeathed to them by their Scottish ancestors; by the descendants of English Puritans who in their own land suffered for conscience' sake; by the son of those who gave Wesley his earliest congregation, and whose creed is still known by his honoured name.[92]

Having saluted the steadfastness of the delegates and the communities they represented, Abercorn exhorted them to remember the 'less fortunate' residents of Ireland unable to join them. In particular, he stipulated that they 'must not think you have a monopoly of loyalty in Ulster', but that there were 'thousands of Loyalists –

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[87] *Christian Advocate*, 3 June 1892.
[88] Macknight, *Ulster as it is*, ii, p.295.
[89] *Ibid.*, 301-2.
[90] *The Times*, 18 July 1892 and Macknight, *Ulster as it is*, ii, p.299
[91] *The Times*, 18 July 1892.
[92] *Ibid.*

Roman Catholic and Protestant – who live in the other three provinces of this country'.

Abercorn claimed that the opponents of Unionism had entirely misunderstood the character of the Ulsterman, presenting them as cowards and blusterers. He asserted that this was clearly not the case, for if so, Protestantism would never have survived the first century on the island: the men of Ulster were prepared to fight to prevent the 'loss of civil and religious liberty'. It was, however, a 'simple travestying [sic]' of the facts to suggest that any of the Unionist leaders were inciting civil war, Salisbury, indeed, was credited with being 'gifted with the singular faculty' of being able to 'look far into the future' in his predictions of incipient strife in Ireland. Abercorn felt confident, therefore, in asserting that the predictions of civil war were 'no threat, but a warning' of the likely course of future events should the Government of Ireland bill pass into law.[93]

The issues identified by Abercorn were reflected in the other speeches and resolutions of the Convention. Lucy identifies six principal themes present in the speeches given from the platform at the Convention: unity in defence of the Union; equal citizenship; the threat to Ulster's wealth and prosperity; fear of clerical domination; the spectre of the Land League; passive resistance to Home Rule; and the limits of Parliamentary Sovereignty.[94] These themes were reflected in the two resolutions.[95] The first, moved by Sir W. Q. Stewart, reiterated the 'devoted loyalty of Ulster Unionists to the Crown and Constitution of the United Kingdom' and their determination to protest against 'the passage measure that would rob us of our inheritance in the Imperial Parliament'. The resolution explicitly condemned the actions of the Land League, the Plan of Campaign, their tactic of boycotting and 'clerical denomination', and stated that 'they would take no part in the election or proceedings' of any parliament that was controlled by men who had been previously involved in those activities, but would be forced to totally 'repudiate' its authority. It concluded with an appeal to their Nationalist fellow-countrymen to 'abandon a demand which hopelessly divides Irishmen and unite with us under the Imperial

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[93] *The Times*, 18 June 1892.
[94] Lucy, *The Great Convention*, pp26-39.
[95] *Ibid.*

Legislature in developing the resources and furthering the interests of our common country'. The second resolution, moved by the Rev. Dr Lynd of the Presbyterian Church was in support of 'brother Unionists inhabiting the other provinces of Ireland', pledging to make 'common cause' with them in opposing Home Rule. The convention ended similarly to how it had begun, with the ex-Moderator of the Presbyterian Church pronouncing the benediction over the assembly.

Methodists were well represented at the Convention, with four prominent individuals being called upon to speak from the main platform and another two addressing the crowd at the Botanic Gardens and presiding at the working men's platform respectively.[96] These included two clergy, the Rev. Dr McCutcheon, Principal of Methodist College, Belfast and former Vice-President of the Conference in 1890 and the Rev. Wesley Guard, a member of the Legal Hundred and the future Vice-President of 1893. McCutcheon rose in support of the first resolution. He emphasised his apolitical status as a Methodist minister, maintaining that he spoke 'not as a politician, but as a loyal British subject'.[97] He argued that his Unionist stance was not 'to claim ascendancy for ourselves over any of our fellow-subjects' but to contend for those 'rights and liberties that are our common birthright'.[98] He thus could justify his appearance on a political platform (albeit not of a specific political party) not only by the 'warmest sympathies of my heart' but also 'with the full approval of my conscience'.[99] McCutcheon, in a surprising departure from the Methodist tradition of loyalty to duly established authority, then proceeded to state that in the event of the creation of a Dublin parliament 'we refuse to recognise or to regard its authority'. He stated that whatever the consequences of that refusal might be, they would be accepted. Emphasising one of the foremost themes of the second Home Rule episode, McCutcheon appealed to the shared heritage of all Protestant groups. He stressed that the Unionist position was one of conscience, and when confronted by the need to take a stand they should follow the example of Luther in declaring: 'I refuse to retract, I cannot do otherwise: may God help me' and this

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[96] *Christian Advocate*, 21 June 1892.
[97] *The Times*, 18 June 1892.
[98] *Christian Advocate*, 21 June 1892 and *The Times*, 18 June 1892.
[99] *Christian Advocate*, 21 June 1892.

should henceforth be the refrain of the Unionist people.[100] This appeal to the principles of Martin Luther is particularly significant, as Luther was one of the few reformation theologians that all of the Protestant denominations in Ireland revered and from whom all derived aspects of their contemporary theology. Thus, McCutcheon subtly emphasised the commonality of Irish Protestantism, which transcended their denominational differences, as well as stressing that his argument was based on religious principles.

The next Methodist onto the main platform was working man T. F. Shillington,[101] who bravely asserted his loyalty to Gladstone in all issues apart from that of Home Rule, believing that the Liberal Party was most steadfast in 'the sincere desire to secure the prosperity of Ireland'.[102] In contrast to the traditional rallying cry of the Orange Order, Shillington declared he had 'no sympathy with the "No Popery" cry', maintaining that there was no place in politics for clergy of any Church, Catholic or Protestant. With regard to his own denomination, he accepted the challenge of the *Methodist Times* for politicians to find a 'pacific compromise' to the issue, suggesting that Unionists could be satisfied with a 'good Local Government Act' yet they would continue to 'reject *in toto*' the proposed scheme for Home Rule. Frank Johnston followed Shillington onto the stage, declaring himself to represent the 'industrial classes of Ulster' through his occupation of coachbuilder. He repeated the protestations of loyalty to the crown, before turning his attention to the anticipated economic consequences of Home Rule. He credited the Protestant settlers of Ulster with transforming the 'bleakest and most barren' province of Ireland into the 'most fertile and prosperous' aided during the nineteenth century by the Union with Great Britain.[103]

The final Methodist to take to the main stage of the Convention was Robert Greer, JP and President of the Londonderry Unionist Association, who spoke about the danger facing Unionists living in the other provinces. He exhorted the crowd to 'not

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[100] *Ibid.*, 21 June 1892 and *The Times*, 18 June 1892.
[101] Not to be confused with Thomas Shillington, unsuccessful Liberal candidate in the North Armagh division at the 1885 general election and ardent Home Ruler.
[102] *Christian Advocate*, 21 June 1892.
[103] *The Times*, 18 June 1892.

only resist the slavery of Home Rule in Ulster', but to support 'brother Unionists throughout the other provinces'. Noting that while all those gathered in Belfast feared the impact of Home Rule in their own areas, Greer emphasised that for those outside Ulster 'their perils are greater, and their heroism will therefore be the greater in joining us' to resist Home Rule.[104] He again appealed to the common Protestant heritage of the delegates, appealing to the memory of the Rev. Dr Henry Cooke,[105] who:

> soaring above all party distinction, relied upon Protestant unity, and maintenance of the Union, based upon scriptural principles of legislation, knit together by bonds of brotherly kindness and charity, as links to bind Ulstermen of all classes and creeds in standing together as one man for civil and religious liberty.[106]

With this behind them, Greer maintained that they would 'refuse to dream of defeat' but would 'stand and conquer'.

Following the mass convention and rally in Belfast, a similar convention was held in Dublin for Unionists of the other three provinces, and again Methodists were well represented on the platform. Frank Johnston, who had spoken on behalf of Ulster industry, was also chosen to join the Ulster delegation to address the Dublin Unionist Convention on the 23 June 1892. He was joined on the platform by fellow-Methodists Mr J. Forbes Maguire from Cork and the Rev. Dr Henry Evans. Johnston, rose to extend the 'profound sympathy' and 'fixed determination to make common cause' with the Unionists of Leinster, Munster and Connaught in resisting the imposition of a Home Rule parliament.[107] The next Methodist to speak, Maguire, emphasised that Unionists in Cork felt as strongly as those in the north of the country. In an incredibly alliterative phrase he claimed that the 'correct designation of Home Rule and its movers' was 'Disgustingly Despotic, Disgracefully Dishonest, and Diabolically Destructive'. Evans, reiterating themes he had explored during the

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[104] *Christian Advocate*, 21 June 1892.
[105] Rev. Dr Henry Cooke (1788-1868), a leading Presbyterian minister who championed Trinitarian orthodoxy against the Arian theology that emerged in the Church in the 1820s, demanding that ministers subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith. This subscription controversy resulted in the secession of Henry Montgomery and other Unitarians in 1829, and a reaffirmation of orthodoxy controversially supporting the Established Church, in contrast to the prevailing feeling among Presbyterians.
[106] *The Times*, 18 June 1892.
[107] *Christian Advocate*, 28 June 1892.

first Home Rule crisis, focussed on the role of Ireland in the Empire. He asserted that granting Home Rule to Ireland 'will be the beginning of troubles and misfortunes to the Empire at large', which he could not believe would be to anyone's advantage. Evans also commended Ulster Unionists for their 'unselfishness' in offering their support to their brethren in the south and west, declaring that 'henceforth we stand or fall together, in one citizenship, under one constitution, one Legislature, one Sceptre'.[108]

The two conventions achieved their aim of bringing their concerns to the attention of the British public. The *Christian Advocate* directly appealed that English Methodists recognise 'the dignified, sensible and practical spirit displayed' by Unionists at the Ulster Convention, in contrast to the 'tall talk and wild fire' that characterised Nationalist rallies. The journal concluded, therefore, that the charge levelled at Unionists by British Liberals of 'intolerance, a desire for Protestant ascendancy and extreme views' was entirely unjust.[109] This tactic of staging rallies to demonstrate the strength of public opinion was employed on a far larger scale during the second Home Rule crisis. They were carefully staged productions, engaging with the whole spectrum of Unionist supporters, from all classes, religious and political affiliations. They provided a controlled outlet for expressions of Protestant solidarity, without permitting proceedings to descend into sectarian intimidation, which the Unionist leaders deplored from their Nationalist opponents. The involvement of Methodist ministers, along with those of other Protestant clergy, and Irish aristocracy, helped lend the proceedings a sense of respectability, divorced from the violent reputation of the Orange Order that might easily be dismissed by British Liberals.

The Methodist Conference 1892

In the midst of the general election campaign came the Irish Methodist Conference, with the first Saturday of the meeting by chance coinciding with the Ulster Convention. Given the imminence of the election and the fact that the Conference was being held in Belfast, it was inevitable that Home Rule would find its way onto the agenda, especially given the precedent of the 1886 Conference, during which anti-Home Rule resolutions were passed. Conference delegates petitioned to be

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[108] *Ibid.*
[109] *Ibid.*, 21 June 1892.

allowed to attend the rally in the Botanic Gardens, and were permitted to do so.[110] Indeed, surprisingly, the Conference was suspended to allow the Methodist representatives to attend the rally *en masse*.[111] This remarkable departure from Methodist tradition indicates the strength of feeling among delegates, firstly that individuals deemed it appropriate to petition Conference to suspend proceedings for an afternoon for a political cause, and secondly, that Conference officials acquiesced.

The actual Conference debate regarding Home Rule took place on the Thursday following the Convention. The debate was opened by the Rev. Dr McMullen who commenced by addressing the concerns of those delegates who believed that the Conference had a 'duty ... to be silent' on political questions.[112] This inexorably raised the difficulty of what exactly constituted a 'political question'? McMullen maintained that on any given subject (in this case Home Rule), the fact that 'certain persons advocated it ... and others opposed it' was 'not a sufficient reason for relegating it to the domain of party politics', but might, in fact, indicate the contrary. Appealing to Irish Methodist history, McMullen cited that 'for the last ninety years the Conference had affirmed again and again, that the legislative Union was a great icon and blessing to this country' and moreover that any efforts to try and dismantle it would be the 'work of an enemy'. In an attempt to make the resolutions more palatable to dissenters, McMullen insisted that they had been 'couched in a Christian spirit', were 'moderate' in tone and 'not the language of mere political partisanship'. Nor would they mark a transformation in the Methodist tradition of never being 'baptized ... as Conservatives or Liberals' and bind the Conference to a specific political party. The party of political power was of no consequence when debating this issue; Methodists were determined to resist any attempts to dissolve the legislative Union. Indeed, McMullen insisted that Methodists were 'bound by their past history, and by their moral and religious convictions' to resist Home Rule 'by every means in their power'.

The most notable of the other contributions in favour of the resolutions was offered by the Rev. William Arthur. No longer a member of the Irish Conference, Arthur

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[110] *Ibid.*, 3 June 1892.
[111] *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, 17 June 1892.
[112] *Christian Advocate*, 21 June 1892.

attended as member of the British Conference delegation. A noted political activist regarding the questions of temperance and education, during the first Home Rule crisis Arthur had sailed close to the wind in opposition, narrowly avoiding formal censure for his actions from the British Conference.[113] Arthur was thus well aware of Methodist sensitivities regarding the interaction of religion and politics, particularly over this most controversial of issues. He was thus well placed to illuminate to delegates how to differentiate between issues on which it was appropriate for Methodism to offer an official comment, and those on which it was not. He argued that 'No man can in all cases distinguish questions that are merely political in the sense of affecting only political interests, from questions which involved morals and religion'.[114] In a speech that epitomised the nonconformist belief that morality should be at the heart of ruling the nation, he continued:

> every moral act effects the State, for the very foundations of the State consist in the morality of its citizens, and every political question has its moral side. Every man must for himself distinguish between questions in which the interests involved are so predominantly temporal that he may hold them purely political, and the questions in which moral or religious interests are also involved.

For Arthur, and a majority of Irish Methodists, Home Rule constituted a matter which could not be considered 'predominantly temporal' but one in which the 'moral and religious interests' were clearly to the fore. Significantly, this contribution from Arthur persuaded the *Methodist Recorder* to break its silence on the issue of Home Rule, printing an extensive report of his speech and appealing to British Methodists to evince a 'genuine sympathy' for their Irish brethren even though they may believe 'that their suffering springs from mistaken apprehension'.[115]

Heading the opposition to the resolution was, as in 1886, Rev. William Gorman, the incoming Vice-President of the Conference. Gorman stated that 'since 1886 his conviction had deepened that it was no part of a Christian Conference to take part in political questions', but should 'wait upon God' for the resolution. The Methodist people, however, should 'throw themselves into them [political questions] heartily'

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[113] See Chapter Three: Methodism and the First Home Rule Crisis, pp103-105.
[114] *Christian Advocate*, 21 June 1892.
[115] *Methodist Recorder*, 30 June 1892.

through the representative structure of government, and non-denominational political organisations. Despite appearances, this was not a contradictory position. Gorman was asserting the traditional Methodist stance that it was the duty of individuals as good citizens to play an active role in public life through the electoral system, but that the Church as an institution should not publicly endorse any specific political argument, restricting itself to delivering religious and moral guidance. The work of the Church was to 'be the light of the world and the salt of the earth' and should not be distracted by political controversy that would only induce strife among the people. Gorman then proceeded to clarify his own position in rejecting the Home Rule proposals, as his previous failure to do so had opened him to accusations of Nationalist sympathies. This demonstrates that, although Gorman clearly believed that it was unseemly for a Methodist minister to comment directly on political matters, he felt obliged to declare his opposition to Home Rule.

This position was not popular with the *Christian Advocate,* who while able to gloat that 'not a single word was said in favour of Home Rule', nevertheless claimed that Gorman had entirely overlooked the detrimental effects that Home Rule would have on the evangelistic effort in Ireland.[116] Moreover, the journal contended that Home Rule was of a similar political nature as 'Education, Temperance, the Opium Trade' all of which were recognised by Methodists as 'matters that greatly affect the interests of the Redeemer's Kingdom'. Such was the criticism levelled at Gorman for his insistence that official organs of Methodism should remain apolitical, he was obliged to write to the *Advocate* to again clarify his position, stating that people had misunderstood his stance. He insisted that 'while I differ from the majority on the point of Church participation in politics, I have (and have ever been) heartily Unionist', giving some indication of the level of vitriol that supposed dissenters received at the hands of their opponents.[117]

The Conference resolutions themselves followed much the same form as those of 1886. The first reiterated the determination of the Conference 'to keep entirely aloof from the spirit and aims and methods of political partisanship', while

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[116] *Christian Advocate,* 21 June 1892.
[117] *Ibid.,* 1 July 1892.

concurrently affirming the right of the Conference to publicly address questions that might effect 'order and good government' in Ireland or the 'educational or religious interests of the community'.[118] The second addressed itself specifically to Home Rule, declaring that the Conference felt constrained to restate its 'deliberate and solemn conviction' of 1886 that there was 'nothing in the history and necessities of this country which requires the establishment of a separate legislature'. The third, and entirely new, resolution expressed the concern of Methodists that the Union was the only guarantee of religious liberty in Ireland, and thus the Conference felt 'bound to protest against any proposal to substitute for this guarantee one of vastly inferior value' as laid out in any new bill. This echoes the fear embodied in the phrase 'Home Rule means Rome Rule' that given an independent assembly the Catholic Church would inevitably gain ascendancy and act to limit the free practice of evangelical religion. It also demonstrated the complete lack of trust that Irish Methodists, seemingly shared by all Protestants, had in Gladstone's ability to frame the bill so as to prohibit the creation of a religious Establishment and effectively limit the new legislature's power. This concern that a Dublin assembly would seize for itself unlimited power to legislate for all aspects of Irish life appears to have markedly increased since the first crisis, during which trepidation about the degree of power to be afford to Dublin under Home Rule was only fleetingly mentioned.

Unsurprisingly, the resolutions were approved by an over-whelming majority, with 193 delegates, or 95 per cent, voting for the motion, with only eleven favouring the amendment proposed by William Gorman that the Conference should make no comment on political matters.[119] Interestingly, the number of representatives who believed that the official organs of the church should remain silent on political issues had declined since the Conference of 1886, where twenty-two people had supported the motion amending the resolutions.[120] The *Christian Advocate* interpreted this to indicate that members of the Conference who 'a few years ago, were in favour of Irish legislative independence' had executed a *volte-face* and in supporting the resolutions 'have openly avowed their decision to oppose any such measure [of

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[118] *ICM*, 1892.
[119] *Christian Advocate*, 28 June 1892.
[120] *Ibid.*, 29 June 1886.

Home Rule]'.[121] Moreover, as in 1886, it was suggested that only a very small majority of those favouring church neutrality in any way favoured Home Rule, only three of eleven in 1892, compared to ten out of twenty-two on the previous occasion.[122] While there is no corroborating evidence of these assertions by the journal, the voting figures certainly appear to indicate that the intervening years had hardened attitudes against Home Rule and those perceived as political dissenters, and that there was an increased sense of impending crisis. The pastoral address emanating from the Conference strongly advised Methodists across Ireland take heed of the 'grave crisis' through which the country was passing, and 'carry your Christian principles to the polling-booth'.[123] While this does not equate to recommending that Methodists vote for a Unionist candidate, the Conference once again had been imbued with the idea that true Protestant sensibilities would most naturally lead individuals to resist Home Rule.

'A Grave Crisis': The appeal of Irish Methodist Ministers to the English Brethren[124]

In a move similar to that made by a coalition of non-episcopal ministers in 1888, at the end of June 1892 the Methodist ministers of Ireland issued an appeal to their British brethren.[125] Apparently instigated by five senior ministers, headed by the English-based William Arthur, the pamphlet took the form of a brief letter, followed by a series of six resolutions. The pamphlet concluded with an impressive list of the ministerial signatories to the resolutions, a total of 214 out of a potential 254, or 84 per cent of those eligible, headed by the names of the newly-elected Vice-President and Secretary of the Conference, William Gorman and James Donnelly. The prominent signature of Gorman, attended by his official position of Vice-President is particularly intriguing given his sustained opposition to official comments on the question of Home Rule at both the Conferences of 1886 and 1892.

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[121] *Ibid.*, 28 June 1892.
[122] *Ibid.*
[123] *ICM*, 1892.
[124] *Christian Advocate*, 24 June 1892.
[125] *A Grave Crisis: Appeal to the Methodists of Great Britain from the Ministers of the Methodist Church in Ireland*, (n.p., 1892) and *Christian Advocate*, 24 June 1892.

The document commenced by stating the conviction of the signatories that they considered that Home Rule was 'above all a Religious Question, and deprecate it being made a Question of mere Party Politics'. The six resolutions covered well-worn ground. The first detailed the 'distrust and alarm' felt by Irish Methodists, similar to that of 1886 and which Gladstone's new proposals had done little to address.[126] Citing the controversy that was emerging in the Meath election with the publication of a pastoral letter by the Bishop urging support for the anti-Parnellites,[127] the second resolution stated that Home Rule would herald an era of 'Clerical Domination' and destroy the 'Religious Equality' that been possible under the Union.[128] A change to the system of government that had 'existed for 93 years [sic]' was thus a 'perilous experiment'. This third resolution emphasised that the Union had provided 'every law-abiding and orderly citizen in the community' with 'his just rights', a situation that could not be guaranteed under a new administration. Moving away from the directly religious areas of concern, the fourth resolution asserted that an independent Dublin legislature would imperil the commercial interests of Ireland, and indeed that 'already the very shadow of Home Rule has created such a feeling of distrust that Securities have depreciated, and Capital had begun to flow out of this country'. The penultimate resolution consisted of a simple assertion that by virtue of their residency, Irishmen were better able to assess what was in the interests of the country than their English counterparts, and their opinion was that legislative Union was 'essential to the well-being of Ireland'. The concluding resolution suggested that any Government of Ireland Act 'would not be final'. This was not only 'the avowed intention of certain Nationalists', but clearly indicated by the continual amendment of the previous ameliorating legislation 'that was supposed to be final'.[129] The threat of Home Rule was not, therefore, in the clauses included, but in that there would be no way of enforcing the limits placed on the new assembly. This left Unionists fearing that their civil and religious rights would be slowly eroded.

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[126] *A Grave Crisis*, p.1.
[127] The Catholic hierarchy were outraged by Parnell's moral lapse, and vigorously campaigned against Parnellite candidates at the polls, denouncing him 'from the altar' and referring to him as 'Mr Parnell Antichrist', (*The Times*, 2 February 1891).
[128] *A Grave Crisis*, p.2.
[129] *Ibid.*

The week of the publication of *A Grave Crisis* also saw the previous petition of Irish non-episcopal ministers from 1888 return to the fore of the debate. On the 18 June at the home of the noted supporter of Home Rule, Rev. Guinness Rogers, Gladstone gave a lengthy speech to a group of influential British nonconformists, including Methodists, Alexander McArthur, MP for Leicester, R. W. Perks, parliamentary candidate for East Lindsay, and the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes. Gladstone commenced by saying that he had seen 'in the newspapers something about 990 Protestant ministers who are anti-Home Rulers in Ireland', but noted that he doubted that such a number existed if one excluded ministers of the Church of Ireland. Moreover, he suggested that even if such a number did exist, they could not be considered representative of Protestantism in Ireland, or even of Presbyterianism. He further maintained that although a petition had been presented to Salisbury that was assumed to contain the names of these men, their signatures 'have never been produced'.[130] Gladstone asserted that Irish Protestants were acting in a 'sectarian' manner, wishing to retain their 'ascendancy' over their countrymen. He alleged that Protestants were employed throughout Ireland by elected corporations without reference to their creed, whereas the Belfast Corporation only employed a mere two Catholics, yet the men of that town were apparently the most concerned about the future under Home Rule.

This speech revealed the extent of Gladstone's misconceptions about the Unionist cause in Ireland, and the attitudes of the vast majority of Irish Protestants, refusing to give credence to even the most strongly worded and unambiguous evidence presented to him. Not surprisingly, therefore, Gladstone's speech was met with outrage in the *Christian Advocate,* which asserted that he was misguided to presume that their were not 990 non-episcopal ministers opposed to Home Rule, suggesting instead that the figure was 'at least' 1,079.[131] The journal identified the eleven Methodist ministers as having signed the petition, of which one was the current Vice-President, six were former Vice-Presidents and two would subsequently be elected Vice-President.[132] The *Advocate* thus felt secure in suggesting that they were representative of their ministerial colleagues, and more widely of the denomination

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[130] *The Times,* 20 June 1892.
[131] *Christian Advocate,* 24 June 1892.
[132] *Ibid.,* 14 June 1892.

in opposing Home Rule. The periodical vigorously denied that Irish Protestants were in any sense intolerant of Catholics, while nevertheless maintaining that 'Romanism is essentially everywhere and in all ages intolerant' and all that was desired by Protestants was the 'just, equitable, and firm administration of the laws'. Regarding the employment practices of the Belfast Corporation, the *Advocate* maintained that the fact that a majority of workers were Protestant was mere coincidence and they were employed 'simply because they are the best qualified for their respective offices'. For the *Advocate,* however, these 'misrepresentations' of Unionists were 'dwarfed in comparison' to Gladstone's statement that 'the Nonconformists of Ireland had not yet expressed themselves fully on the subject of Home Rule'. That the prospective next Prime Minister could make this statement on the same day as the Ulster Unionist Convention appeared completely disingenuous. Quite apart from the Convention, the irate editorial demanded to know how the politician regarded the resolutions of the Irish Methodist Conference, Presbyterian General Assembly and Baptist Conventions against Home Rule. The journal suggested that if Gladstone could not accept these as representing Irish nonconformity, he would not acknowledge any petitions as representing the Protestant people.

Methodist Electoral Campaigning

Integral to the strategy of Irish Methodism during the 1892 election campaign was the appearance of Irish ministers canvassing for the Unionist opponents of pro-Home Rule Methodist candidates in British constituencies. A tactic used throughout the series of by-elections in the 1880s, it had been strongly criticised by one of the insulted candidates William Alexander McArthur[133] as being 'fatal to the peace of the Church'.[134] In its assessment the *Methodist Times* condemned the practice of 'Methodist ministers perambulating England in the Tory interest', correctly noting that if English ministers were to travel to Ireland to campaign in favour of Home Rule they would be strongly censured by their Irish brethren. Curiously, however, there appeared to be little discussion about these innovative tactics within Ireland itself.

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[133] W. A. McArthur, son of the Irish-born Liberal MP Alexander McArthur, had marginally failed to capture the seat of Buckrose, Yorkshire in 1886. He was elected for the constituency of St Austell, Cornwall in 1892.

[134] *Methodist Times,* 1 November 1888.

In the wake of the election, however, the *Christian Advocate* felt compelled to publish a series of articles defending the British campaigning. Written by the canvassers themselves, although significantly without revealing their actual identity, they sought to justify their activities by placing them within the context of Methodism's traditional values. One, asserting that he was 'not a politician', presented two reasons for travelling to England. Firstly, he maintained there 'was no other way in which we could so effectively influence English public opinion as by going and talking to the electorate face to face' and secondly, that he 'did not think Home Rule so much a political as a religious issue'.[135] The merits of the first argument are clear, but do not really address whether the action was appropriate for a minister of a church that claimed to have a 'no politics' rule. The second appears to be little more than a simple rationalisation of a practice that was a new departure for Methodist officials. Similarly, another explained his actions by claiming that he 'only spoke on the religious aspect' against a Wesleyan candidate in Camborne, Cornwall because he had fallen into 'bad company'.[136] A third excused his canvassing by stating that although he spoke at several meetings of Methodists, he did not specifically oppose a Wesleyan candidate.[137] A further justification offered was that when British Methodists were challenged to explain their commitment to Home Rule 'very few could say'. The rationales offered included a conviction that the problems in Ireland were blocking domestic reform, that Britain needed to compensate for past 'misrule' and a belief that Irish Protestants were intolerant; all of which were denied by the Irishman.[138]

While speakers may have had some success in specific constituencies, the canvassing campaign appears to have had little overall impact on British Methodism; with all of the Wesleyans elected in 1892 Gladstonian Liberals in favour of Home Rule. No Methodists were returned in Ireland. Jeremiah Jordan failed to secure election in his native Fermanagh, only to be returned the following year in South Meath, however, Thomas Little, elected for Whitehaven, was a native of Kilkenny and W. A. McArthur at St Austell had clear Irish connections. The *Christian Advocate* declared

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[135] *Christian Advocate*, 12 August 1892.
[136] *Ibid.*, 2 September 1892.
[137] *Ibid.*, 16 September 1892.
[138] *Ibid.*, 12 August 1892.

that it was 'perfectly outstanding ... that English Methodists should have such a superficial knowledge of Irish history' to grant their overwhelming support to supporters of Home Rule avowing that 'this ignorance is not to their credit'.[139] Nevertheless, dsespite the apparently limited success of the Methodist electoral campaign, it marked a significant divergence from Methodist tradition. It is surprising, therefore, given the controversy in 1886 when Methodist ministers appeared to support a particular party-political platform, that there was not more protest when Irish Methodist ministers travelled to Britain to support specific candidates in 1892.

The slender majority of 355 Liberals and Home Rulers compared to 315 Unionists persuaded Gladstone to delay the introduction of a Government of Ireland bill until the new parliamentary session in 1893.[140] The delay in introducing a bill resulted in the issue of Home Rule disappearing from the pages of the British Methodist journals. By contrast the *Christian Advocate* continued its campaign against Home Rule throughout the autumn of 1892 and again increased coverage at the beginning of the new parliamentary session in January 1893. The year commenced in Belfast with a Unionist demonstration in the Ulster Hall, to reaffirm the resolutions of the June convention.[141] Methodism was again represented by the Rev. Wesley Guard, who in deference to the traditional political neutrality of Methodism proclaimed that he was not speaking in any 'official capacity as a spokesman for the Methodist people', although he nevertheless felt free 'to say that I believe that none of them will dissent' for his support of Unionism. He was scathing of Gladstone, describing him as 'eloquent but discounted' and Home Rule as his 'routine offering to Ireland'. The proposed bill was likened to a 'horse full of Trojans' bringing 'sorrow' to the island in the guise of peace. Guard reasserted that Irish Unionists did not desire ascendancy as their opponents claimed, but merely 'the right to attend to our own affairs under the aegis that is the Union Jack'. Unionists were right, therefore, to 'claim their inheritance in the British Empire purchased by blood', their people having served the Empire in all capacities. Few new arguments were presented at the

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[139] *Ibid.*, 15 July 1892.
[140] O'Day, *Home Rule*, p.155.
[141] *Christian Advocate*, 20 January 1893.

meeting, but the demonstration served to highlight the resolve of Unionists to oppose Home Rule.

Introduction of the bill into the House of Commons

Following the general election, the Methodist Church in Ireland reverted to a tactic used in March 1886, and produced an address to welcome the new Lord Lieutenant, the Marquess of Crewe, to Ireland. This hit an unexpected obstacle when the petition was refused. During the previous crisis the Committee of Privileges had taken the opportunity when welcoming two new Viceroys to Ireland to impress upon them the opposition of Methodism to Home Rule. On this occasion however, the incumbent of Dublin Castle had refused to receive an address. This refusal was questioned in the House of Commons by Dunbar Barton,[142] who asserted that there existed 'no more orderly, loyal body of men in the kingdom' than the Methodists, and suggested that the Viceroy had received instruction from the government to refuse Loyalist appeals.[143] This implication of unfair Nationalist bias received no reply from the Prime Minister or the Irish Secretary who were anxious to complete the sitting and defer debate.[144] The *Christian Advocate* could not comprehend why the address had been refused, suggesting that the only valid reason would have been if the document contained disloyal sentiments.[145] This manifestly not being the case, it was considered a slight to the Methodist Church of Ireland, and an indication that the Prime Minister was unwilling to engage in reasonable debate with his opponents.

The decision of the Irish Committee of Privileges to enter the fray was quickly emulated by the *Methodist Times,* who felt no further need to continue with the reticence they had displayed during the election campaign. Gladstone's second Government of Ireland bill was introduced into the House of Commons on 13 February 1893, clearly modelled on that of 1886, with a number of emendations to counteract the criticisms to which the first bill had been subject. The major differences between this and the earlier bill were that the Irish legislature would be comprised of two distinct chambers, which would sit independently. The upper

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[142] Dunbar Plunkett Barton QC, elected Unionist MP for mid-Armagh in 1891 and previously private secretary to the Lord Lieutenant and afterwards to the Lord Chancellor, Lord Ashbourne.
[143] *Ibid.,* 3 February 1893 and *The Times,* 1 February 1893.
[144] *The Times,* 1 February 1893.
[145] *Christian Advocate,* 3 February 1893.

chamber would be known as the Legislative Council, and would consist of 48 members elected on a high property franchise and the lower chamber, titled the Legislative Assembly, would have 103 members elected on the existing franchise. A reduced number of 80 Irish MPs would be retained at Westminster, although they were to be barred from voting on matters confined to Great Britain or any of its constituent parts. The supremacy of the Imperial Parliament was clearly stated in the preamble. It was proposed that the Lord Lieutenant would hold office for six years and would retain his executive powers, but would be assisted by an Executive Committee of the Irish Privy Council and take instruction from London.[146]

The reactions of the *Methodist Times* and the *Christian Advocate* followed predicable paths, given their previously stated opinions. The *Methodist Times* hailed the bill as 'most conciliatory as well as comprehensive'. For Hughes, the retention of the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament, including Imperial veto, the maintenance of Irish MPs at Westminster and the establishment of the Legislative Council provided 'ample security for the rights of the minority' and was sufficient evidence that Gladstone and his ministers had 'done their utmost to meet reasonable objections.'[147] The *Methodist Times* consequently asserted that "no one will be able to oppose it [the bill] except those who object to Irish self-government under any conceivable circumstances', suggesting that Unionist opposition stemmed from 'dislike and fear of the Irish race'. The 'Irish race' was used as synonym for the Catholic population of Ireland, whereas Protestants were considered to be of Saxon origin. It was a term that Hughes had previously used when discussing the Parnell scandal, suggesting that the Irish would prove themselves 'so obscene a race' if they re-elected Parnell as leader. This belief that the population of Ireland was divided into two distinct races, was widely accepted by people of all political standpoints, and informed much of the debate surrounding Home Rule.

The *Methodist Times* declared that there was 'only two alternatives' facing the administration in Ireland, 'military despotism or constitutional government in the form of Home Rule', and English people who would never accept Irish Nationalism

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[146] *Bill to amend provision of the Government of Ireland,* PP 1893-4 (205).
[147] *Methodist Times,* 16 February 1893.

being crushed by military force. The newspaper, therefore, concluded with a characteristic appeal to the principles of faith, claiming that:

> as Christians we dare not deny to the Irish the national self-government which we ourselves enjoy, and which is essential to the healthy development of patriotism and of Christianity.[148]

Conversely, the *Christian Advocate* declared Gladstone's speech 'remarkable for its specious and misleading introduction ... and its pathetic appeal to bury the memory of bygone evils'.[149] While commending Gladstone for his 'marvellous ability' in prosecuting the legislation, the journal nevertheless announced that the bill demonstrated the 'utter futility of the attempt'. The newspaper argued that although the supremacy of the Imperial Parliament had been asserted, there was no indication how, in practice, this was 'to be maintained'. Reserving its other comments solely to the religious aspect of the legislation, the *Advocate* claimed that 'viewed in this light' they could not point to any 'objection raised against the Home Rule bill seven years ago that does not apply with still greater force today'. The journal did not believe that the proposed upper chamber gave an adequate level of protection to the loyal minority as it ceded power to the 'illiterate, intolerant and priest-ridden majority' particularly in the arenas of politics and justice. Moreover, the limited powers granted by the legislation would only be considered 'an instalment' for Nationalists, 'not a final settlement of the issue'. Therefore, the editor had no hesitation in echoing the Vice-President of the Conference in declaring the bill 'a mockery, a delusion and a snare'.[150]

The following week, an 'Appeal to British Methodists' was published in both the denominational journals. This address, following the pattern of previous appeals, reiterated that Irish Methodists did not consider Home Rule to be a 'question of party interests', for the church, 'as a Christian body', would have 'nothing whatsoever to do' with purely political issues.[151] It suggested that a 'considerable misconception' existed in the minds of British Methodists 'as to the views of the Irish

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[148] *Ibid.*
[149] *Christian Advocate*, 17 February 1893.
[150] *Ibid.*
[151] *Ibid.*, 24 February 1893.

brethren', possibly having been misled by a few prominent proponents of the measure. They appealed to the history of Catholicism in Europe, stating that the Roman Church 'aims at the extermination of every other form of Christian faith', and had adopted a particularly 'autocratic' form in Ireland. Thus, the innovations of the new bill, the Legislative Council and Viceregal veto, were dismissed as 'safeguards for old fires' but incapable of addressing the 'other forms of intolerance and persecution' that had become widespread in Ireland in previous years. The *Methodist Times,* while prepared to print the address in full, challenged the premise of the document, asserting that the belief that British Methodists were ill-informed of the arguments was a 'one of the most cherished delusions' of their Irish brethren. Hughes attested that the contrary was true: British Methodists were extremely well-informed by the *Methodist Times* and the *Methodist Recorder* of the reasons why their Irish co-religionists opposed Home Rule and thus they would not 'find a single new argument in the article'.[152] Blaming the Orange Order for creating 'imaginary bogeymen', the British riposte questioned how Irish Protestants would have fared in the time of Paul, suggesting that in attempting to secure political dominance they were 'forgetful' of the Holy Spirit, and would do better to follow the example proffered in the Epistles of perseverance in the face of persecution.

Having received little joy from their English co-religionists, Irish Methodists persevered with their campaign against Home Rule, participating in a 'Day of Prayer' organised by the Evangelical Alliance[153] on 17 March, and congregational petitions to be forwarded to the House of Commons. The basic text of the petition was prepared by the Committee of Privileges, sent to the Superintendent of each circuit to be distributed among members of the congregation to sign. The petition consisted of three declarations: reiterating the attachment of Irish Methodists to the 'Throne and Constitution' of the United Kingdom; emphasising the 'distrust and alarm' felt by Methodists concerning the establishment of a separate legislature, which they felt was uncalled for in recent history; asserting that the bill was 'entirely

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[152] *Methodist Times,* 23 February 1893.

[153] An interdenominational body founded in London in 1846 to defend Protestantism from the encroachment of Popery and Tractarianism and promote pure evangelical religion. The first meeting was attended by ministers from across the United Kingdom, and a few international delegates. The organisation expanded rapidly from its British roots to become an international organisation.

unfitted to accomplish the object at which it professes to aim' and would harm not only Ireland, but the 'whole of the United Kingdom'.[154]

After the second reading of the bill in the House of Commons on the 22 April, its passage of the bill was apparently secure, passing by 347 votes to 304. The *Methodist Times* noted with glee that all the Methodist MPs voted in favour of the bill and claimed that 'it will be a matter of boundless and devout gratitude' to future generations that in that 'epoch-making' decision 'every Methodist recorded his vote in favour of justice, freedom and brotherly love'.[155] Confident that the bill would now inevitably become law, the *Methodist Times* felt little need to comment on proceedings further. This was not the case within Irish Methodism, which as the bill dragged 'its slow wounded, but menacing length' through the committee process continued to protest against the measure.[156] The *Christian Advocate* maintained that 'Protestants have good reason to fear that laws oppressive to them will be enacted' under Home Rule and complained about the 'want of principle' that they believed characterised the parliamentary proceedings.[157] William Nicholas suggested that Gladstone only 'became a Home Ruler for parliamentary purposes' rather than because of any deeply held principles.[158] It was thus inevitable that resolutions were again brought before the annual Conference, that year held in Cork. These were exactly the same in form and substance as the previous year, and were, according to the *Advocate*, resolutely 'passed with quietness and unanimity'.[159]

The drama of the second Home Rule episode peaked at the beginning of September 1893 with the third reading of the bill in the House of Commons and its referral to the Lords. The *Methodist Times* greeted its passage through the lower chamber with delight, again announcing 'Home Rule is inevitable'.[160] With reference to his co-religionists, Hughes expressed the 'yearning hope' that with the passage of the bill 'the majority of Irish Methodists will realise at last they are being duped by party

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[154] *Christian Advocate*, 17 March 1893.
[155] *Methodist Times*, 27 April 1893.
[156] *Christian Advocate*, 2 June 1893.
[157] *Ibid.*, 19 May 1893.
[158] *Ibid.*, 26 May 1893.
[159] *Ibid.*, 14 July 1893.
[160] *Methodist Times*, 7 September 1893.

politicians'. This was apparently a completely misplaced desire given that Irish Methodists did not believe that it was them who were party pawns, but rather that Hughes himself was the cipher of the Liberals.[161] The *Christian Advocate* by contrast was less impressed with proceedings in the House, suggesting that the lack of debate over certain amendments was a 'novel and dangerous method of legislating'.[162] Furthermore, they insisted that Gladstone would have to call another general election before the House of Lords would be 'coerced' into accepting the bill. This situation in the rival journals was rapidly reversed when the House of Lords rejected the bill. The only consolation for the *Methodist Times* was that Lord Rosebery excelled in the debate, to their mind eclipsing the Conservative leader.[163] The *Advocate* was predictable in its jubilation, declaring that in this one 'patriotic act', the Lords had, 'in the popular mind, covered a multitude of former sins' and drawn attention 'to themselves as the safeguard of the Constitution'.[164] This recognition of the unsatisfactory nature of the upper chamber appears uncomfortably juxtaposed with the laudatory language for its actions.

Conclusion

In the years following the defeat of the first Government of Ireland bill the issue of Home Rule constantly lurked within the political arena. The alliances that had entered the 1886 election had become fixed on the political landscape, with all three major parties having lost their ability to manoeuvre. The cooperation between Liberal Unionists and Conservatives prevented Salisbury from entering any negotiations with the Irish Parliamentary Party, with which he had flirted in 1885. The Gladstonian Liberals had adopted Home Rule as their *raison d'être*, and given their 1886 electoral defeat were obliged to rely on Irish Nationalists for support. Party positions on Irish self-government thus became increasingly entrenched throughout the period 1885-92, with few attempts made to breach the political divide. Gladstone's stubborn refusal to countenance the very real fears of the Unionist population of Ireland, particularly in Ulster, inflamed the situation further. Many Unionists considered the Liberal leader to be ill-informed about the Irish situation, for example, anachronistically referring to 'nonconformists' in the country

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[161] *Christian Advocate*, 15 September 1893.
[162] *Ibid.*, 8 September 1893.
[163] *Methodist Times*, 14 September 1893.
[164] *Christian Advocate*, 22 September 1893.

that no longer had an established church.[165] His attempts to address the criticisms of the 1886 bill were thus met with contempt, perceived as unable to counteract the perceived Catholic desire to pursue the 'extermination of every other form of Christian faith' or the 'intolerance and persecution' incited by the Nationalist Party.[166]

While the strategy and arguments employed by Methodists during the second Home Rule episode were very similar to those of 1886, the tactics were significantly different, displaying a greater degree of organisation and coherence. Rather than having to react to shock revelations, both protagonists and antagonists had six years to prepare. As in 1886, therefore, rhetoric focussed upon the religious aspects of Home Rule, the maintenance of the Empire and the economic consequences of any legislation. The novel aspect of the Unionist strategy was to focus upon attempting to change public opinion, particularly in Great Britain, but also further afield. Irish Protestants had been able to take advantage of knowing the Liberal leader's plans, which was evident in the increased coordination among the various denominations, presenting joint petitions and ensuring that all the churches were well represented on the platform of the Ulster Convention. Within Irish Methodism, while the tactics of the previous crisis were re-used, such as passing resolutions at Conference and addressing the Lord Lieutenant, new methods were also adopted. These fresh methods benefited from the greater time to prepare, for example, issuing the petition *A Grave Crisis,* and prevailing on ministers to undertake speaking tours in Britain during the general election. Consistent with the wider Unionist campaign, these protestations had virtually no impact on affairs within Ireland itself, but were designed to appeal to public opinion in Great Britain, and were successful in the sense that many of them received significant coverage in the national press.

Perhaps the greatest advantage of these collaborative Unionist tactics was that it prevented the debates from being focussed on individual personalities, while still being able to exploit their skills in oration and prose. This avoided the situation that had arisen within Methodism in 1886, where specific individuals had been criticised

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[165] Macknight, *Ulster as it is,* pp302-3.
[166] *Christian Advocate,* 24 February 1893.

for breaching the 'no politics' tradition of Methodism. Unionists also clearly perceived the benefits of presenting a united front against the threat of Home Rule. While they did not expect to win the argument by a simple demonstration of the support they could command, a single campaign that could draw large numbers to its events visibly countered suggestions from Liberals and Nationalists that they were a small minority, insignificant in number. A united movement also facilitated the concentration of power in the hands of the 'respectable': industrialists, landowners and the clergy, while successfully absorbing popular Unionist fervour. This 'respectable' leadership assisted in shaping British public opinion, presenting a sober and considered opposition to the proposals, and diverting attention from the problematic, and frequently violent, demonstrations of the Orange Order.

Much of the British press, however, seemed relatively uninterested in the Home Rule issue. Even the *Methodist Times*, who having championed Home Rule during the first crisis, perhaps chastened by the fallout from the Parnell crisis, did not really engage with the issue of Home Rule during the 1892 general election, elevating instead other issues, such as the traffic in liquor and opium, the status of women, the amelioration of working conditions and gambling.[167] This, however, changed after the introduction of the bill, when the *Methodist Times* and *Christian Advocate* resumed their diametrically opposed positions and re-engaged in confrontation. The exchange of combative articles did little to advance the debate of the issues. Both sides were conversant with the opposing opinion, yet were equally unprepared to change their own views. Protestations by the *Christian Advocate* that their English co-religionists were poorly informed about the state of affairs in Ireland had little substance, while the *Methodist Times* was willing to re-print Irish Methodist appeals, secure in the knowledge that a majority of its readership supported Home Rule. The *Methodist Recorder*, which had been strongly opposed to Home Rule in 1886, barely commented on the issue the second time around because it was considered that to oppose Gladstone would be a 'disaster' for the newspaper and alienate its readership.[168] This stance was criticised by both the *Christian Advocate* and the *Methodist Times* as cowardice in refusing to defend the known Unionist sympathies of

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[167] *Methodist Times*, 30 June 1892.
[168] *Christian Advocate*, 26 August 1892.

its proprietor George Chubb.[169] It does, however, strongly indicate that such a large majority of English Wesleyans were supporters of Home Rule, that to express a dissenting opinion could seriously harm the journal's economic future; the exact reverse of the situation in Ireland, where to support Home Rule was considered a source of opprobrium by colleagues.

The political divergence between British and Irish Methodism that had become evident during the first Home Rule crisis had expanded further by the second. The entrenchment of views on opposing sides of the Irish Sea made communication on such issues increasingly difficult. Throughout the period between the two Home Rule bills the *Methodist Times* vigorously campaigned for political issues, most notably during the Parnell scandal, when the journal was instrumental in precipitating the Irish leader's downfall. This episode elicited a rare comment on political affairs from the British Conference, which otherwise adhered to the maxim of 'no politics' within the Church. Irish Methodists, however, were more eager to endorse political causes through official Church bodies, promoting ministers speaking on party political platforms, bringing the issue of Home Rule before the Conference and attempting to present an official address to the Lord Lieutenant. This position was defended by appealing to the extraordinarily perilous position in which they, as Irish Protestants, apparently found themselves. While denominational newspapers and individual literary contributions were, by 1892, standard conduits for the advance of specific religious arguments on political issues, the appearance of ministers speaking in support of a specific political party was a new, and controversial, development that appeared to contradict Methodist tradition. It does not appear as a tactic in the first Home Rule crisis and, significantly, it was not resumed during the third, making it an aberration in the history of Methodism and politics.

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[169] *Methodist Times*, 1 June 1893.

Chapter Five:
Methodism and the Third Home Rule Crisis

Introduction

The high drama of the third Home Rule crisis, and its lasting impact on the shape of Irish history, has naturally drawn the attention of many historians. Much of the work concentrates specifically on the Ulster dimension of the crisis, which dominated the political debate and the extra-parliamentary campaign. The polarisation of opinion, and the concentration of Unionism on its Ulster heartlands have consequently been reflected in historians' treatment of the crisis.[1] These have primarily traced the growth of Unionist resistance, and focused on the great set pieces of the campaign: the signing of the Ulster Covenant; the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force; and the importation of arms into Ulster.[2] More recently new departures in historical research have revealed the variety of people and organisations mobilised during the crisis and the complexity of the issues involved, including the role of women in the political agitation.[3] The motivations of those who led both the Nationalist and Unionist campaigns have also fascinated historians, resulting in illuminating biographies that explore the character and inspiration of the political leaders.[4]

A counterpoint to this approach has focussed on the parliamentary dimension of Home Rule, specifically the attitude of British Liberals to the Irish question in the

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[1] Paul Bew, *Ideology and the Irish question: Ulster Unionism and Irish nationalism, 1912-1916*, (Oxford, 1994) and Peter Collins (ed.), *Nationalism and Unionism: Conflict in Ireland 1885-1921*, (Belfast, 1996).

[2] Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism, Vol. 1, The Anglo-Irish and the new Ireland, 1885-1922*, (Dublin, 1972); *idem, Irish Unionism, Vol. 2, Ulster Unionism and the origins of Northern Ireland, 1886-1922*, (Dublin, 1973); A. T. Q. Stewart, *The Ulster Crisis: resistance to Home Rule, 1912-14*, (London, 1967); *idem, The narrow ground: aspects of Ulster, 1609-1969*, (London, 1977); and D. W. Miller, *Queen's Rebels: Ulster Loyalism in historical perspective*, (Dublin, 1978).

[3] Alan O'Day and D. G. Boyce (eds), *The Ulster Crisis*, (Basingstoke, 2006); Janice Holmes, and Diane Urquhart (eds), *Coming into the Light: the Work Politics and Religion of Women in Ulster, 1840-1940*, (Belfast, 1994); Diane Urquhart, 'In defence of Ulster and the Empire: The Ulster Women's Unionist Council, 1911-40', *Review: UCG Women's Studies Centre*, 4 (1996), pp31-40; and *idem* (ed.), *The minutes of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council and Executive Committee, 1911-1940*, (Dublin, 2001).

[4] H. M. Hyde, *Carson: the life of Sir Edward Carson, Lord Carson of Duncairn*, (London, 1953); A. T. Q. Stewart, *Edward Carson*, (Belfast, 1997); Geoffrey Lewis, *Carson: the man who divided Ireland*, (London, 2005); P. Bew, *John Redmond*, (Dublin, 1988); and J. P. Finnegan, *John Redmond and Irish unity, 1912-1918*, (New York, 2004).

post-Gladstonian era.[5] These texts emphasise the re-alignment of the Liberal coalition after the retirement of Gladstone in 1894 and its retreat from Irish Home Rule as the defining feature of the party.[6] Within England, labour issues were increasingly important in politics and a more comfortable rallying point for socially progressive MPs, eclipsing the controversial and divisive Irish question for many Liberals. This drift was confirmed by the emergence of 'New Liberalism' within the party, which emphasised the democratic project and social reform.[7] This also acted to dissolve the parliamentary alliance between the Opposition Liberal Party and Irish Nationalists since as their interests diverged, cooperation ceased to be expedient. This situation was reversed after the defeat of Lloyd George's 1909 'People's Budget' and the two inconclusive general elections of 1910, when the Nationalist alliance again offered parliamentary advantage and the deliverance of a long-delayed promise.[8]

The third Home Rule episode has exercised a similar attraction for historians of the Irish Protestant churches.[9] These have focussed upon the counties that became the Northern Ireland state and emphasise the essential unity among Ulster Protestants in opposition to Home Rule. This approach has unfortunately obscured the deeply problematic situation in which the Churches found themselves, primarily identified with Ulster Unionism, but in fact all-Ireland institutions. This was particularly true

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[5] Patrica Jalland, *The Liberals and Ireland: the Ulster question in British politics to 1914*, (Brighton, 1980); *idem*, 'United Kingdom devolution 1910-14: political panacea or tactical diversion?', *English Historical Review*, 94 (1979), pp757-785; G. K. Peatling, *British opinion and Irish self-government, 1865-1925: from unionism to liberal commonwealth*, (Dublin, 2001); *idem.*, 'New Liberalism, J. L. Hammond and the Irish problem, 1897-1949', *Historical Research*, 73 (2000), pp48-65; and Alan O'Day, *Irish Home Rule, 1867-1921*, (Manchester, 1998).

[6] H. W. McCready, 'Home Rule and the Liberal Party, 1899-1905', *IHS*, 13, (1962-3), pp316-348.

[7] Peatling, *British opinion and Irish self-government* and *idem.*, 'New Liberalism, J. L. Hammond and the Irish problem', pp48-65.

[8] Martin Pugh, *State and Society: A social and political history of Britain, 1870-1997*, (2nd ed., London, 1999) and Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-2000*, (2nd ed., London, 2004).

[9] Alan Megahey, *The Irish Protestant churches in the twentieth century*, (Basingstoke, 2000); *idem*, '"God will defend the right": the protestant churches and opposition to home rule', in D. G. Boyce and Alan O'Day (eds), *Defenders of the union: a survey of British and Irish unionism since 1801*, (London, 2001), pp159-175; *idem*, '"Irish Protestants feel this betrayal keenly..." Home Rule, Rome rule and nonconformity', in D. G. Boyce and Roger Swift (eds), *Problems and Perspectives in Irish history since 1800*, (Dublin, 2004), pp164-179; R. F. G. Holmes, '"Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right": the Protestant Churches and Ulster's resistance to Home Rule', *The Church and War: papers read at the twenty-first summer meeting and the twenty-second winter meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Studies in Church History, 20), (Oxford, 1983), pp321-335; and David McConnell, 'The Protestant Churches and the Origins of the Northern Ireland State', (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1998).

for the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church, for whom a significant proportion of their membership resided outside of Ulster.[10] The analysis presented here, will, therefore, explore the response of the Methodist Church to the 1912 Government of Ireland bill and assess whether it was indeed coterminous with the Ulster Unionist political campaign. This is especially interesting given the commonly held view that the controversy was imbued with a 'specifically religious or sectarian tone'.[11]

Liberals in the post-Gladstonian era

The political and religious milieu in which the third Home Rule crisis occurred was substantially different to that of the first two. In 1886 and 1893, Gladstone had been the motivating force behind Home Rule, conceiving the bills as the apex of his campaign of 'justice for Ireland'. The defeat of the second Home Rule bill and Gladstone's retirement from the Liberal leadership in 1894, left the Liberal Party in disarray and unwilling to pursue the controversial Irish policy that divided the party. The fissiparous nature of the Liberal Party in the final years of the nineteenth century kept them from power for a decade between 1895-1906. This was the product of deep ideological divisions within the party, which Gladstone had led as a coalition of progressive interests. Neither Rosebery nor Harcourt were able to effectively unite the party as various factions, Liberal Imperialists, Little Englanders and 'New Liberals', vied for supremacy. With regard to Ireland, a policy review was undertaken in 1899 by the Liberal Chief Whip, Herbert Gladstone, during which a 'clear consensus emerged' that although the party still supported Home Rule in principle, like Welsh disestablishment, it did 'not rank for the time being, as a practical question of politics'.[12] In particular, Home Rule, which Gladstone had laboured to make the defining feature of Liberalism, while remaining part of the Liberal manifesto, it was now considered to be a 'mill-stone', impeding their electoral

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[10] In 1911, 78 per cent of Methodists and 64 per cent of Anglicans resided in Ulster compared to 98 per cent of Presbyterians. (*Census Ire., 1911*).

[11] Bew, *Ideology and the Irish question*, p.29.

[12] Memo; H. Gladstone to Campbell-Bannerman, 8 December 1899, quoted in Jalland, *The Liberals and Ireland*, p.23 and McCready, 'Home Rule and the Liberal Party', pp319-22.

success.[13] The alliance between the Liberals and the Irish Nationalists was thus permitted to lapse by both sides, and the two increasingly diverged on important issues such as education and the Boer War.

Divisions continued to plague the Liberal Party throughout their years in opposition. Foreign policy was an arena in which these were particularly apparent. The 'New Liberals' were ideologically opposed to imperialism, which competed with their primary focus of social reform for 'government money, parliamentary time ... and popular attention'.[14] Moreover, they considered local self-government to be superior to the 'imperial tutelage of a subject people', whereby the incorporation of a society could only be maintained by creating 'reactionary, illiberal institutions'.[15] By contrast, the Liberal Imperialists, loosely led by Lord Rosebery, favoured 'forward' policies in Africa.[16] This internal conflict in the Liberal Party climaxed during the Boer War of 1899-1902. Most 'New Liberals' actively opposed the war, while Rosebery maintained that 'all sides had a duty to rally around the nation' and support the British campaign. This Liberal discord was capitalised upon by the Conservative administration. Salisbury called an early election in 1900, buoyed by success at Ladysmith and Mafeking, and inflicted an overwhelming defeat on the Liberals, portraying those who disagreed with the war as 'pro-Boers' and anti-patriotic.[17] At the so-called 'khaki' election the Liberals captured a mere 184 seats, and the disputes within the party and the lack of clear leadership were highlighted.[18]

The Boer War also proved problematic for other constituencies around the United Kingdom, particularly British nonconformity, who reflected the Liberal divisions. Under Gladstone, nonconformists had sympathised with his moral campaigns on behalf of Bulgarian Christians in 1876 and his criticisms of the imperial pretensions of Disraeli. Moreover, many evangelicals believed that the methods employed to expand the Empire breached Christian ethics and were to be avoided unless inaction

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[13] D. A. Hamer, *Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery: A Study in Leadership and Policy*, (London, 1972), pp110-20; D. G. Boyce, *The revolution in Ireland, 1879-1923*, (Basingstoke, 1988), p.9 and H. W. McCready, 'Home Rule and the Liberal Party', p.318.
[14] Peatling, *British opinion and Irish self-government*, p.58.
[15] *Ibid.*
[16] Pugh, *State and Society*, p.33.
[17] Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, pp19-2, p.444.
[18] *Ibid.*, p444.

would result in greater wrongs being committed.[19] In addition, in the later years of the nineteenth century evangelical missionaries had increasingly clashed with imperial authorities attempting to maintain peace between religious groups.[20] Many nonconformists thus did not believe that the Empire was a force of unadulterated good, and there was an active strain of anti-imperialism within nonconformity, especially amongst the Baptists.[21]

These misgivings were not, however, shared by many Wesleyan Methodists, who appeared to sympathise with Liberal Imperialism.[22] This did not necessarily translate into a direct support for aggressive military action, but rather attempted to justify British action to defend the Empire.[23] In the *Methodist Times*, Hughes stated that while a 'great majority' of Wesleyans 'positively loathe the very idea of war with the Boers' this needed to be balanced with recognition of 'duty to the British Empire'.[24] Moreover, Hughes described the Empire as 'a Providential institution, on the whole greatly to the advantage of weak and subject races', specifically accusing the Boers of perpetuating a slave system and promoting the liquor trade.[25] Thus Hughes again attempted to frame the arguments in moral tones, suggesting that the British Empire was acting in a manner consonant with Wesley's condemnation of the slave trade in 1774.[26] However, unlike previous crises when Hughes had successfully united nonconformity behind his moral crusades, he was unable to do this during the South African War. Former allies, such as W. T. Stead[27] and the Rev. S. E. Keeble, a regular columnist of the *Methodist Times*, campaigned vigorously against the war, the latter founding a short-lived journal, the *Methodist Weekly*, to promote both a

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[19] Bebbington, 'Atonement, Sin and Empire, p.22.
[20] Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire? British Protestant missionaries and overseas expansion, 1700-1914*, (Manchester, 2004), pp323-4.
[21] Greg Cuthertson, 'Pricking the "nonconformist conscience": religion against the South African War', in Donal Lowry (ed.), *The South African War reappraised*, (Manchester, 2000), pp169-187 and Jeffrey Cox, 'Were Victorian Nonconformists the Worst Imperialists of All?', *Victorian Studies*, 46:2 (2004), p.253.
[22] Cox, 'Were Victorian Nonconformists the Worst Imperialists of All?', p.253.
[23] Stephen Koss, 'Weselyanism and Empire', *Historical Journal*, 18:1 (1975), p.112.
[24] *Methodist Times*, 21 September 1899.
[25] *Ibid.*, 28 September 1899.
[26] Koss, 'Weselyanism and Empire', p.113.
[27] Stead, who had campaigned vigorously during the first two Home Rule episodes, was tragically lost to the Nationalist cause as he perished aboard the *Titanic*.

socialist and pacifist agenda.[28] The Boer War was an issue that split Methodist opinion, even Hughes's daughter and biographer disagreed with her father, a situation that was indicative of growing divisions within nonconformity.[29]

The Boer War also had significant ramifications within Ireland, where it served to re-inspire Irish Nationalism and instigated the reunification of the Irish party under John Redmond.[30] Foster convincingly argues that the fifteen-year period between the commencement of hostilities in South Africa and the declaration of war in Europe 'altered the conditions of Irish politics beyond recognition', and the two conflicts were largely responsible for the radicalisation of Irish politics and society.[31] The Boer War was the catalyst for much moderate Nationalist opinion to be moulded into an anti-imperial stance and provided advanced Nationalists with an opportunity to mobilise anti-government sentiment.[32] Whereas in England popular opinion decisively supported the British campaign, in Ireland pro-Boer sentiments were not considered to be traitorous and became widely held. These were stirred by the Nationalist press, particularly Arthur Griffith in the *United Irishman,* which admired the Boer military achievements. Advanced Nationalists campaigned against recruitment, raised relief funds through the Irish Transvaal Committee and founded the Irish Neutrality Association.[33] Most symbolically significant was the raising of two 'Irish Brigades' to fight for the Boers, commanded by Arthur Lynch and John MacBride.[34] These represented the commitment of advanced Irish Nationalists to fully support, by arms if necessary, national aspirations across the globe. This overt support of the Boers, however, alienated British public sympathy and that of many Liberals from the cause of Irish Home Rule. Moreover, it supplied Irish Unionists

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[28] Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Hugh Price Hughes: Founder of a new Methodism, conscience of a new nonconformity,* (Cardiff, 1999), p.313.
[29] D. P. Hughes, *The Life of Hugh Price Hughes,* (London, 1904), pp557-8.
[30] Elleke Boehmer, Empire, *the national and the postcolonial, 1890-1920,* (Oxford, 2005), p.25 and O'Day, *Irish Home Rule,* p.190.
[31] R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972,* (London, 1988), p.433.
[32] *Ibid.,* and Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000,* (London, 2004), p.33.
[33] The Irish Neutrality Association was an advanced Nationalist organisation founded by Arthur Griffith and James Connolly to argue that Irish involvement in the Boer War was not in the best interests of the Irish people.
[34] Charles Townshend, *Easter 1916: the Irish rebellion,* (London, 2005), p.10.

with a convenient weapon with which to attack their political opponents, suggesting that Nationalist anti-imperialism proved them unready for self-government.[35]

The South African conflict also had a significant impact on Irish Unionism. Loughlin argues that the existence of Nationalist pro-Boer sentiment amplified Unionist support for the conflict, resulting in the region being one area of the United Kingdom to most enthusiastically support the war.[36] In addition, the Boer War proved to be a watershed in Unionist perceptions of Empire. Prior to the South African campaign, imperial themes had been apparent in speeches and pamphlets opposing Home Rule, although Jackson suggests that this was primarily a rhetorical device used to appeal to British politicians.[37] But Irish Unionists were more intimately connected with the Boer conflict than any other previous imperial campaign. Ulster Unionist leaders, such as Edward Saunderson, perceived parallels between the situation of the loyal Uitlanders and that of Ulster Unionists; both surrounded by a hostile majority.[38] Moreover, many Ulstermen served in the Irish regiments engaged in the Transvaal, an experience that inspired some of the more militant expressions of Unionism during the third Home Rule crisis; for example, James Craig and F. H. Crawford[39] had both served in the British army during the conflict.[40] Thus, Jackson rightly argues that the Boer War was one of the principal 'turning points' in popularising imperialism in Ireland.[41]

The Boer War thus highlighted significant divisions between and within the British and Irish political parties. The Nationalist support for the Boers served to further alienate many within the Liberal Party and the British electorate, who believed that

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[35] J. S. Galbraith, 'The pamphlet campaign on the Boer War', *Journal of Modern History*, 24:2 (1952), p.118 and O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p.192.
[36] James Loughlin, *Ulster Unionism and British national identity since 1885*, (London, 1995), p.32.
[37] Alvin Jackson, 'Irish Unionists and the Empire, 1880-1920: classes and masses', in Keith Jeffery (ed), *'An Irish* Empire': *Aspects of Ireland and the British* Empire, (Manchester, 1996), p.125.
[38] *Ibid.*, p.126.
[39] Crawford is identified by Buckland and Stewart as a Methodist, having been educated at Methodist College, Belfast, and the University College School, London. As a young man he served as an apprentice at Harland and Wolff before joining the British Army. Returning to Ireland after serving abroad in 1893 he proposed kidnapping Gladstone as a resolution to the second Home Rule crisis. An ardent Unionist, Crawford notoriously signed the Ulster Covenant in blood in September 1912, founded the Ulster Volunteer Force in January 1913, and was the principal organiser of the Larne Gun running in April 1914.
[40] Jackson, 'Irish Unionists and the Empire', pp126-7.
[41] *Ibid.*, p.131.

the Irish brigades were acting in a treasonable manner by militarily engaging the British Army.[42] The South African War also highlighted the divisions within the Liberal Party itself, underscored by their ineffectual campaign during the 1900 general election. These Liberal divisions were also reflected among nonconformists, not only regarding imperial issues, but also areas of domestic reform, diluting their influence among leading Liberal politicians and making them less effective as a political pressure group. In the longer term, the establishment of self-government in the Boer provinces provided a convenient exemplar for New Liberals seeking a solution to the Irish question.[43]

Liberal Landslide of 1906

The Liberal Party returned to power with a landslide victory in 1906, winning 400 seats to the Conservatives mere 157. In addition, Irish Nationalists returned 83 members, and the Labour Party 30. The Liberals had particularly benefited from both the internal disagreements within the Conservative Party regarding Tariff Reform and the Gladstone-MacDonald pact, which had avoided splitting the progressive vote in closely contested constituencies.[44] Because the election campaign in Britain had been fought on the issue of Free Trade, and a large Liberal majority had been returned, there was no onus on the party to revisit the controversial and divisive issue of Home Rule until parliamentary affairs demanded: a situation that did not occur until the defeat of the 1909 'People's Budget' and the two subsequent general elections of 1910.

Relying on the established parliamentary convention that the House of Lords would not amend financial legislation passed by the Commons, the Chancellor Lloyd George planned his budget of 1909 as a 'Trojan horse', attaching social reforms previously rejected by the upper chamber to the bill.[45] This tactic backfired when the peers objected to the New Liberal agenda of redistributing wealth through progressive taxation, particularly the taxes on drink and land, and chose to assert their right to reject the bill, thereby precipitating a constitutional crisis. Irish

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[42] McCready, 'Home Rule and the Liberal Party', p.317.
[43] Peatling, *British opinion and Irish self-government*, p.69.
[44] Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, pp30-4.
[45] Pugh, *State and Society*, p.142.

Nationalists were placed in a quandary: drink questions were controversial within the movement, and much of the new landed Catholic class in Ireland was opposed to the land tax.[46] By contrast, Methodism on both sides of the Irish Sea objected to the action of the House of Lords. The *Christian Advocate* respected the right of the upper chamber to take such a course, but suggested that in this case it lacked political expediency.[47] Moreover, the Belfast journal argued that the Lords had been 'perusing similar tactics too often', specifically citing the rejection of the licensing bill of 1908. The *Methodist Times* was more strident its opposition to the actions of the upper chamber, asserting the 'Peers have declared for revolution', demonstrating the 'worst faults of the hereditary caste'.[48] Henceforth the journal would mount an unceasing campaign to end the 'destructive power of the House of Lords' and urged nonconformists to engage with the issue through organisations such as the Free Church Councils, but without bringing the issue into their individual Churches.[49] This was consistent with Hughes's previous stance of using his journal for campaigning, but avoiding taking distinctly political issues to the Conference.

The constitutional crisis precipitated a general election in January 1910, during the campaign for which the Liberal leader, Asquith, indicated that he would be prepared to reconsider the question of Home Rule for Ireland.[50] Forty Wesleyan Methodists stood for election, the overwhelming majority in the Liberal interest, including S. D. Kerr in North Fermanagh. Five represented Labour, three Unionists, one Nationalist (predictably Jeremiah Jordan)[51] and one Independent Protestant, Thomas Sloan in South Belfast. Of these 24 were elected, Sloan lost his Belfast seat, the other losses being among Liberals, including Kerr.[52] The overall result saw the

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[46] O'Day, *Irish Home Rule*, p.230.
[47] *Christian Advocate*, 3 December 1909.
[48] *Methodist Times*, 2 December 1909.
[49] Formed of representatives from local nonconformist chapels, Free Church councils had sprung up across England during the 1890s, organising joint activities such as missions, temperance demonstrations, lectures of nonconformist principles and school board election campaigns. Annually, representatives of the local councils assembled for the national congress. The rest of the year, the national organisation consisted of a board of sixty prominent nonconformists. Although not initially a political organisation, it rapidly became involved in political campaigning, and became the chief vehicle of nonconformist political opinion. Hugh Price Hughes was a prominent member of the national congress. Bebbington, *The nonconformist conscience*, p.61.
[50] *Methodist Times*, 16 December 1909.
[51] Jordan subsequently died in December 1911, thus taking no part in the third Home Rule crisis.
[52] *Methodist Times*, 13 January 1909.

Liberal Party sustaining substantial losses, returning 275 MPs to the Unionists 272, Labour 40, and the Irish Nationalists 82. Labour and the Nationalists thus held the balance of power in the House of Commons. Given the weight of popular support for progressive candidates in England, Redmond agreed to support the Budget in return for Asquith committing to resolving the House of Lords question, thereby removing the most significant obstacle to the passage of a Home Rule bill.[53] Asquith had been unable to secure the assent of Edward VII to use the royal prerogative to create new peers to out vote the old ones on the question of constitutional reform, without which he was powerless to force change. But the death of the King in May 1910 altered the political climate. When negotiations between the Liberal and Unionist Parties faltered on the issue of Home Rule, the second general election of the year was held. The *Christian Advocate* was deeply concerned about this development, describing the failure of the inter-party negotiations as 'a great crisis' believing that during the election Home Rule would be 'brought forward hidden under the Constitutional question' and thus in a more 'dangerous and insidious form than ever before'.[54] These fears appeared well-founded when the election result revealed that the Irish Nationalists still held the balance of power in the House of Commons and the new monarch, George V, agreed to back the new Liberal administration by creating as many peers as necessary to ensure constitutional reform.[55]

The general election of December 1910 thus formed the prelude to the third Home Rule crisis, re-igniting controversy on the issue. Methodism immediately reacted to the resurgence of Home Rule, with the *Methodist Times* undertaking to publish 'temperate' opinions expressed both for and against the legislation, which provoked a stream of correspondence to the newspaper.[56] The Dublin-based Rev. William Crawford, a known supporter of Home Rule, somewhat optimistically argued that among Irish Methodists the 'unreasoning panic of former years has subsided', and suggesting that among the 'younger generation ... self-government is anticipated with

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[53] Peatling, *British opinion and Irish self-government*, p.67.
[54] *Christian Advocate*, 9 December 1910.
[55] Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, p.65.
[56] *Methodist Times*, 12 January 1911.

pleasure and hope'.[57] He believed that the Birrell Land Act of 1909 had finally resolved the land issue and would ease the progress of a new Home Rule bill. Crawford did, however, note that Ulster could prove to be an obstacle to Home Rule, stating that there 'nothing is forgotten, nothing is learned'. Crawford's suggestion that Irish Methodists were reconciled to the prospect of Home Rule was angrily refuted by Belfast-resident minister George Wedgwood. Noting that his letter was 'the first time I have been drawn out of my political privacy', Wedgwood suggested that the *Methodist Times* was misleading its readership by printing pro-Home Rule opinions. While asserting that he was 'not an Orangeman' and had worked for over half his ministry in the south of the country, Wedgwood asserted that 'nine-tenths of Irish Methodist ministers and people are as strongly Unionist as they ever were'. Moreover, he claimed that in the advent of Home Rule passing into law, Methodism and all Protestantism 'will be wiped out of the south and west' of Ireland. The passage of the Parliament Act later in 1911 only served to strengthen Irish Methodist anxiety about the political future of their country. The *Advocate* articulated these concerns, stating 'what we fear most is that the passing of the [Parliament] Bill will mean the passing of an ill-digested, ill-advised Home Rule measure for this country'.[58]

'A solid and united phalanx': The Great Methodist Demonstration[59]

Methodism had undergone a period of rapid change since the previous Home Rule episode. In particular, a number of senior Methodists died in the early years of the twentieth century, including William Arthur in 1901, Hugh Price Hughes in 1902 and James Harrison Rigg in 1903, all of whom were former Presidents of the Methodist Conference and notable political protagonists during the late nineteenth century. Despite the death of Hughes, the newspaper behind which he had been the driving force continued strong into the new century. The new editor, the Rev. John Scott Lidgett,[60] had been chosen for his adherence to his mentor's causes of the 'Forward

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[57] *Ibid.*

[58] *Christian Advocate,* 18 August 1911.

[59] Committee of the Methodist Demonstration against Home Rule, *The Methodists of Ireland and Home Rule: Message to English Nonconformists. Being a reprint of the speech of the Chairman (Sir William Whitla, M.D., LL.D) at the evening meeting in the Ulster Hall, Belfast, March 1912,* (Belfast, 1912).

[60] Rev. Dr John Scott Lidgett (1854-1953). Born in Lewisham, he entered the ministry in 1876. His early years of service led him to notice the gulf between rich and poor, prompting him to establish

Movement' within Methodism and a progressive Liberal political agenda. Lidgett's favoured political arena was, however, that of local politics, firstly serving as a Poor Law Guardian in Bermondsey where he was minister, then expanding his horizons to education and local government administration, sitting on the London School Board as a member of the Progressive Party.[61] National political issues like Home Rule were not of particular interest to him. By 1908, however, he found himself closely aligned with the ideals of 'New Liberalism', which, as noted above, supported the People's Budget of 1909, encouraged reform of the House of Lords and favoured the political equality of women both within Methodism and more widely.[62]

The religious climate in Ireland was also considerably altered. Fears of Catholic encroachment were at their highest level since the Vatican decrees of 1870. The *Ne Temere* decree published by the Vatican in 1908 concerned marriages in which one of the partners was not Catholic, and regulated the raising of any children of such a marriage. The decree stated that the only valid form of marriage for Catholics was in front of a Catholic priest and all children should be brought up as Catholics. This caused concern among all Protestant denominations within Ireland, including Methodism, particularly in the wake of the case of the McCann marriage in 1910, which became a *cause célèbre* for both Catholics and Protestants.[63]

While the exact facts of the situation remain obscure, the Presbyterian minister of Mrs McCann in Belfast, claimed that in the wake of the decree, her husband's Catholic priest visited the couple to inform them that their marriage was invalid. Mrs McCann refused to be re-married in a Catholic ceremony, after which her husband allegedly started to mistreat her, culminating in him vanishing with their two children, leaving his wife destitute. Mrs McCann appealed to her Presbyterian minister, Rev. Corkey, for assistance, and he relentlessly publicised her

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the Bermondsey Settlement in 1892 to serve the local underprivileged community, he was warden there 1892-1949. During his career he held many Methodist and civic offices, including President of the Wesleyan Conference 1908, Superintendent of the South London Mission 1909-18 and 1942-3, first President of the United Methodist Conference in 1932, leader of the Progressive Party on the London Country Council, Vice-Chancellor of London University and chairman of the Central Council for Nursing. He was editor of the *Methodist Times* 1907-18.

[61] A. F. Turberfield, *John Scott Lidgett; archbishop of British Methodism?*, (London, 2003), pp85-7.

[62] *Ibid.*, p.121.

[63] Megahey, *Irish Protestant Churches*, pp25-6.

circumstances including through a lecture given at the Knox club in Edinburgh.[64] The case rapidly became notorious and served as a rallying cry for Protestant Unionists: in January 1912 the Ulster Women's Unionist Council responded to the situation by organising a petition against the decree, and within one month had collected the signatures of 104,301 women.[65] Reacting to this affair, the 1911 Methodist Conference resolved that the Vatican decree was 'in direct conflict with the Law of the United Kingdom, which it seeks to override'.[66] Methodists claimed that in refusing to recognise marriages not performed under Catholic auspices, the Vatican was providing a 'direct incentive to the repudiation of sacred moral obligations and to breaches of the marriage vow, and leads to cruelty and hardship'. The Conference therefore petitioned the Government 'to take such immediate steps as are necessary to secure its [the decree's] withdrawal from the British Dominions' as it was clearly the attempt of an external power to regulate within British territories.[67] The *Ne Temere* decree in the abstract, and its apparent application in the McCann case, served to heighten concerns about the political ambitions of the Catholic Church just as the spectre of Home Rule again raised its head.

The successful passage of the Parliament Act in August 1911 ensured that an Irish Home Rule bill would be introduced, and likely passed now that the power of the House of Lords had been diminished. Consequently, the Unionist campaign against Home Rule re-commenced. It was clear from its inception that the movement would focus particularly on Ulster, the home of a majority of the island's Protestants. This had been confirmed by the rally of the Orange Order and Unionist Clubs at Craigavon in September 1911, where Carson, addressing the assembled crowd, stated that 'We must be prepared, ... the morning Home Rule passes, ourselves to become responsible for the government of the Protestant Province of Ulster'. This stance was ratified by the Ulster Unionist Council on the following Monday.[68] While the issue of partition had not seriously been considered in the previous two crises,

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[64] William Corkey, *The McCann mixed marriage case*, (Edinburgh, 1911).
[65] Diane Urquhart, '"The female of the species is more deadlier than the male"? The Ulster Women's Unionist Council, 1911-40' in Holmes and Urquhart, *Coming into the Light*, p.98.
[66] *ICM*, 1911.
[67] *Ibid.*
[68] Lewis, *Carson*, p.80; Bew, *Ideology and the Irish question;* p.21; A. T. Q. Stewart, *Edward Carson*, p.73, Hyde, *Carson*, p.291; and Jalland, *Liberals and Ireland*, p.55.

special treatment for Ulster had been alluded to by Gladstone in the parliamentary debates, a situation that had not passed unnoticed by contemporary Unionist MPs.[69]

The first major Methodist contribution to this campaign was an evening demonstration at the Ulster Hall in Belfast on 14 March 1912, with a parallel afternoon 'Ladies' meeting' preceding the main event at the Exhibition Hall. The organisation of these events appears to have been partly a response to public pressure. The Presbyterian Church had organised a Belfast rally, also at the Ulster Hall, for 1 February 1912 that attracted an estimated 50,000 men from around the country, and was described by the *Methodist Times* as an 'imposing demonstration' to be 'treated with respect'.[70] This impressed on Irish Methodism the impact that single large protest events could have on the public consciousness in the rest of Great Britain as well as the necessity of having the Methodist name associated with such an event. Thus, correspondence in the *Christian Advocate* from the beginning of January 1912 cited the Presbyterian decision to organise an anti-Home Rule convention in February and demanded to know the Methodist response.[71] The answer to these calls came in the formation of a committee to organise a distinctly Methodist rally against Home Rule in Belfast.[72] The initial meeting was described as being conducted in a 'tolerant spirit' that ensured that the 'religious element [was] prominent throughout' and 'anything like coercion' was thoroughly repudiated.[73] The planning received extensive coverage in the *Advocate*, which listed ministerial attendances at the initial meeting, and all the members of the organising committee and executive. In contrast to most previous Methodist political initiatives, the executive committee commissioned with organising the demonstration was dominated by lay members. Although the working group was still chaired by a member of the clergy, in this case the Rev. George Wedgwood (previously Vice-President of Conference in 1905), overall only six of the 25 committee members were clergy. Moreover, the five Vice-chairmen and three treasurers that comprised the officers were all lay members. The clergy on the planning group comprised a couple of familiar names from

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[69] *Hansard*, 5th Series, liii, 1321, 9 June 1913.
[70] *Methodist Times*, 8 February 1912.
[71] *Christian Advocate*, 5 January 1912.
[72] *Ibid.*, 9 February 1912
[73] *Ibid.*

previous crises, including Wesley Guard, the 1911 Conference Vice-President (the third time he held this post) and William Nicholas, former Vice-President of the Conference in 1894 and 1904 and President of Methodist College from 1899-1908. These were joined by three less familiar names: Thomas Knox, Edward Hazleton, and Richard Cole.[74]

Methodists were not, however, unanimous in their support of the demonstration, with various correspondents to the *Christian Advocate* insisting that 'the Church, in its official capacity cannot hold any demonstration of this kind' and that Methodist leaders would be wise to 'steer clear of politics at the present moment'.[75] A Dublin correspondent suggested that the 'spirit of Northern professing [Protestant] Christians seems to be devoid of love, but generates hatred and tyranny' and thus the Belfast demonstration would provided a 'serious hindrance to the progress of the kingdom of Jesus Christ throughout the West and South'.[76] Far more correspondence, however, protesting against perceived criticisms of the event appeared in the columns of the *Advocate*. Many claimed that warnings about the results of the demonstration were entirely 'specious' and not to act would deprive the vast majority of Methodists who opposed Home Rule on religious grounds with an opportunity to express their views.[77] Responding to the concerns of 'A Dublin Methodist', a correspondent of the *Advocate,* J. B. McCutcheon criticised the 'Home Rulers in Dublin Methodism' as being 'indignant that the real voice, the Unionist voice, of Irish Methodism should be heard'. Moreover, he suggested that the pro-Nationalist lobby within Methodism only objected so vigorously to the proposed demonstration because they had been 'disappointed of the capital they had intended to make out of our silence' and had been exposed as 'misrepresenting their Church'.[78] Another of those to vigorously support the demonstration was William Nicholas, who maintained that the protest was consistent with the actions of the Conferences of 1885 and 1893 when Irish Methodists had allied themselves with Unionism through the anti-Home Rule resolutions. Fears concerning the *Ne Temere*

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[74] *Ibid.*
[75] *Christian Advocate,* 2 February and 9 February 1912.
[76] *Ibid.,* 16 February 1912.
[77] *Ibid.,* 2 February and 9 February 1912.
[78] *Ibid.,* 16 February 1912.

decree and the recent *motu proprio Quantavis diligentia*[79] loomed large in Nicholas's arguments. He claimed that whereas Leo XIII was 'a diplomatist', Pius X was 'an outspoken obscurantist' who claimed jurisdiction over 'baptised children by whosoever baptised', and was set against the modernisation of Europe.[80] Thus, in Nicholas's view, it was preposterous to suggest that Irish Protestants should hand over their 'religious liberties to a Parliament that must be, directly or indirectly, dominated by him [Pius X]'.

In contrast to the antagonistic correspondence in the *Advocate* by supporters and opponents of the demonstration, the rhetoric produced by the organising committee was notable for its moderation. It was emphasised that although they opposed Home Rule, in no way did they pretend 'that we speak for the whole church', although they expected their actions to indicate to the public the majority opinion within Methodism.[81] The executive maintained that the protest would not be combative in tone, and that they would adhere to the Methodist motto of 'the friends of all and the enemies of none'. Moreover, the committee emphasised that delegates from across Ireland were welcome to attend; the event was not to be limited to Ulster residents.[82] In addition to the men's demonstration, for the first time, a parallel event for women was planned for the afternoon at the Exhibition Hall, since they 'no longer can be blind' to political issues. The rhetoric of the organisers of the women's protest adopted more confrontational language than their male counterparts, castigating Methodist Nationalists as 'rank[ing] with the foes of our King, our Religion, and our Country'. This language and iconography was popular within women's unionism, and called upon all true Methodist women to remember 'we are fighting for our Church, our Home, our King, and our Country', casting the issue as impinging upon the traditionally domestic sphere of female influence.[83]

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[79] The papal decree *Quantavis diligentia* reasserted the Vatican understanding that clerics should not be tried in civil courts but only in ecclesiastical tribunals, and threatened with excommunication anyone who summoned a member of the clergy to civil trial. However, it was authoritatively stated that this only applied in countries in which this clergy privilege had not already ceased, (*The Times*, 27 December 1911).

[80] *Christian Advocate.*, 9 February 1912.

[81] *Ibid.*

[82] *Ibid.*, 16 February 1912.

[83] *Ibid.*, 2 February 1912; Urquhart, '"The female of the species is more deadlier than the male"?, p.96.

The demonstration was the largest single Methodist event of the third Home Rule crisis, comprising five distinct rallies held at the Ulster, Exhibition and People's Halls, of which the afternoon meeting at the Exhibition Hall was open to ladies, the rest 'being confined to men'.[84] This demonstrates the popularity of the events, with *The Times* estimating that approximately 8,000 people attended, although the *Methodist Times* suggested that the true figure was around 4,000.[85] Much care was taken to ensure that the meetings were 'confined to Methodists alone' through a stringent ticketing system, so that the rallies could be seen to demonstrate the true, unadulterated voice of the Methodist Church in Ireland and insulate the organisers from accusations that numbers had been augmented by Unionists of other denominations.[86] Letters of sympathy from those unable to attend were received, notably from the Rev. William Perkins, former President of the Conference in 1910, the Rev. Dr Evans, now stationed in Dublin, Sir George Hayter Chubb of the Nonconformist Unionist Association and Sir Robert Perks, who sat as Liberal MP in favour of Home Rule from 1892-1910. In a break from previous practice at Methodist sponsored rallies, and presumably in deference to the unofficial nature of proceedings, a layman presided at all of the five rallies.

Sir William Whitla[87] presided at the principal evening demonstration at the Ulster Hall and his commencement address summarised and encapsulated the principle Methodist arguments against Home Rule. Whitla reminded his audience of the severity of the proposed legislation that would 'deprive us of our birthright as citizens of British Empire'.[88] He emphasised that the meetings had been convened not in support of a specific political party but because those present stood:

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[84] *The Times*, 15 March 1912 and *Christian Advocate*, 8 March 1912.
[85] *The Times*, 15 March 1912 and *Methodist Times*, 21 March 1912.
[86] *The Times*, 15 March 1912.
[87] Sir William Whitla, MD LLD was from a Methodist family from Co. Monaghan. Distinguished within the medical profession, he had studied first pharmacy and later medicine at Queen's College, Belfast, where he accepted a Chair of Pharmacology in 1890. He served at the Belfast Royal Hospital between 1882-1918 and Chairman of the British Medical Association in 1909. He also authored a number of medical textbooks. Whitla was Knighted in 1902, and later appointed physician to King George V. He was the first MP for Queen's University Belfast from 1918-22.
[88] Methodist Demonstration against Home Rule, *The Methodists of Ireland and Home Rule.*

> all solidly united as one man in the deliberate conviction that Home Rule means disaster and ruin to our native land, and irreparable injury to our Church and to the civil and religious liberty which we have enjoyed under the impartial freedom of the British flag.[89]

The meeting therefore transcended mere party politics, and was concerned with the rights and liberties of the Irish population. Whitla portrayed British rule as providing 'impartial freedom' to all religious groups, historic grievances having been rectified by previous governments and all manner of creeds living harmoniously within the Empire.[90] By contrast, recent Papal declarations appeared designed to interfere with the working of the established legal system within the country, prevent mixed education, disrupt marriages and shield the Catholic clergy from prosecution.

Whitla maintained that proceedings should remain aloof from 'personal feelings' but nevertheless felt it necessary to state that he had 'never stood upon a political platform' prior to this occasion, nor had he been active in support of a specific political party. He therefore felt able to counter any charges of political partisanship, and note that it was British Methodists that 'find themselves unable to consider this vital question of Home Rule apart from the atmosphere of party strife'.[91] He contended that this was not the case within Irish Methodism, where many members 'feel keenly the danger' of politics impinging on the 'life and mission' of the Church, and had previously avoided making any political statements.[92] Nevertheless, the meeting was not without precedent, and the Conference resolutions opposing Home Rule in 1886 and 1892 bore witness to this. But this third Home Rule crisis was perceived to be a far graver situation than the previous two, since the 'alteration of Constitution which suspended the veto of the Upper House' now made protest 'imperative'.[93]

The issue of Home Rule was consequently perceived by Whitla as 'mainly a religious one' in opposition to which 'the Protestantism of Ireland stands as a solid and united

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[89] *Ibid.*, p.3.
[90] *Ibid.*, p.5.
[91] *Ibid.*, p.3.
[92] *Ibid.*, p.4.
[93] *Ibid.*, p.4.

phalanx'.[94] In this resistance, Whitla argued that they were joined by 'intelligent Catholic opinion' and Protestants supporting Home Rule could be dismissed as an 'infinitesimally small proportion' of the total.[95] The accusation that Protestant opposition to Home Rule was rooted in wishing to retain their 'Protestant ascendancy' was dismissed. The judiciary was cited as an example of a profession that might be expected to be dominated by Protestants, should the ascendancy still exist, and Whitla was pleased to note that five of the six most senior Irish judges were in fact Catholic, thereby disproving the 'bogey' of ascendancy. Moreover, it was stated that only the position of Lord Lieutenant retained any religious restrictions on who could hold the post.[96] Notwithstanding this apparent equality of opportunity, it was emphasised that there were 'two distinct Irelands in the island, diametrically opposed to each other, and irreconcilably separate in sentiment as well as in religion'.[97] Whitla suggested that the argument for Home Rule was principally one of sentiment, and being such, if the government responded to Nationalist sentiment it should listen equally to the sentiments of Unionists.[98]

Whitla further maintained that the divisions between the two communities in Ireland were encouraged by the Catholic Church, particularly through its educational policies, which in his view had sabotaged mixed education in the country. Unlike many of his co-religionists, Whitla believed the Nationalist leaders, in their overwhelming desire to achieve Home Rule, to be 'sincere' in their promises of safeguards for the Protestant minority. Furthermore, he stated that in 'personally tolerating a difference of religion' in one's neighbours, the Ulster Protestants 'may learn from our Catholic fellow-countrymen' who permitted Methodists to live in 'peace and security' in the South and West of Ireland.[99] This did not, however, provide total reassurance, as Whitla recalled the campaigns of the '[Land] League and other Nationalist organisations' and the 'remorseless tyranny' of 'persecution' they employed for 'political or agrarian purposes'. It was 'the men behind the leaders', those who orchestrated the violent agrarian campaigns, that Whitla averred

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[94] *Ibid.*, pp4-5.
[95] *Ibid.*, p.4.
[96] *Ibid.*, pp6-7.
[97] *Ibid.*, p.8.
[98] *Ibid.*, p.7.
[99] *Ibid.*, p.9.

'we cannot trust'.[100] He also posed the rhetorical question of why, if the Nationalist leaders 'possess restraining power ... do they not exercise it now' to prevent the tyranny and cruelty inflicted on the population of some counties by local Nationalists; the assumption being that they had no such influence.

Whitla then returned to the question presented by William Arthur in 1886, 'Why should the loyal be deserted and the disloyal set over them?'[101] He concluded that the only possible explanation for the 'base betrayal' of Irish Protestants by their brethren was that 'England had become thoroughly sick of the struggle'. The latter intended Home Rule to release Westminster 'to meet the urgent and exacting demands of her own legislation, undisturbed and unretarded by the administration of Irish affairs'.[102] Irish Protestants were thus to be sacrificed to allow domestic British legislation to pass more easily through Parliament by avoiding the obstructionist tactics of Irish Nationalists. This, he believed, was a mere 'chimera', and not at all the probable outcome of such legislation. Appealing directly to English Methodists, he requested that they consider the probability that rather than providing the solution to the Irish problem, 'once the Bill should become law you will wake up the next morning to realise that never till then you had a real Irish difficulty'.[103] This, he claimed, was not a 'threat', but a foretelling of what would happen. It would take the form of a total paralysis of all parliamentary business 'every year until something happens' during which the 'chaotic difficulty ... will be perpetually overshadowing all political progress in Westminster'.[104] Although careful that his words could not be interpreted as support for physical resistance, Whitla nevertheless contended that Home Rule would bring in its wake 'agitations, petition and counter petitions from every religious sect in Ireland, and from *the different factions of the Irish Party* [sic] for every real or imaginary grievance' which would keep both islands unsettled for years.[105] Indeed, Whitla specifically appealed for the assembled crowds to 'banish for

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[100] *Ibid.*, p.10.
[101] *Ibid.* For a discussion of the original pamphlet by William Arthur see Chapter Two, pp103-5.
[102] *Ibid.*, p.11.
[103] *Ibid.*
[104] *Ibid.*, pp11-12.
[105] *Ibid.*, p.12.

the moment absolutely ... the idea of the possibility of either active or even passive resistance, civil war, bloodshed or physical strife'.[106]

Whitla saved his most crushing condemnation for the nonconformists of Great Britain, who he accused of knowingly abandoning their Irish brethren. Asserting that the 'Imperial instincts of the English nation' had been 'wiped out' by party political strife, he urged British nonconformists to consider 'the condition of affairs in Ireland should England become engaged in the death-grip of a foreign foe'. Under Home Rule, the country would be under the control of a 'disloyal and seditious majority', composed of those who had 'cheered the Boers on every disaster to the British arms' and would therefore, by implication, not only refuse to aid Great Britain in war, but actively seek her destruction.[107] Reiterating the rallying call of Irish Protestants throughout the Home Rule crises, 'Home Rule means Rome Rule', Whitla claimed that in refusing to apply the lessons of recent history, particularly the situation in Quebec[108] and the impact of the last two Vatican decrees, the English were refusing the Irish Protestants 'the civil and religious liberty' that they themselves would never surrender. He then cited a 'most callous and short-sighted' letter to *The Times*, written by a nonconformist minister and well-known anti-Catholic controversialist, Rev. Dr Robert Horton, as epitomising the 'cold-hearted and cynical' manner of some British nonconformists, who 'know only to well what a Catholic Parliament may mean', but nevertheless, 'feel compelled by political principal to support Home Rule'.[109] This political principal was founded on 'justice' and representative government, which Horton believed Irish Nationalists deserved despite the implications it had for Irish Protestants. This political stance was condemned by Whitla as being 'based upon the doctrine of the divine right of majorities ... ignoring the protection of minorities', an antithesis to the 'justice' he purported to support.[110] Horton further proposed that should Home Rule be found

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[106] *Ibid.*, p.11.
[107] *Ibid.*, p.12.
[108] Similarly to Ireland, Quebec had a large Catholic population and the Church hierarchy had been particularly active in attempting to gain control of the education system. William Nicholas also refers to the Canadian situation in his series of articles 'Why are the Methodists of Ireland opposed to Home Rule' in the *Christian Advocate*, 1 April 1892.
[109] Methodist Demonstration against Home Rule, *The Methodists of Ireland and Home Rule*, p.13; *The Times*, 10 February 1912; and Bebbington, *The nonconformist conscience*, p.104.
[110] Methodist Demonstration against Home Rule, *The Methodists of Ireland and Home Rule*, p.14.

to be intolerable, he hoped that 'a certain shifting of population will take place' whereby the Irish Catholic population of England would return to Ireland and Irish Protestants would find a home in Great Britain.[111] Whitla condemned this 'ideal of expatriation', replying that not a single man among 'the Methodists of Ireland' would ever 'desert his post'.[112] Whitla believed Protestants across Ireland were united in this determination to 'spend the remainder of our lives in our native land'.[113] To him, although many Irish Protestants claimed English or Scots heritage, Ireland was nevertheless their home, one that they would not desert to the rule of a Catholic majority. Whitla, therefore, concluded by stating that although they were meeting as Methodists 'we do not for a moment forget that we are also Irishmen and lovers of our country' and on those grounds refused to consider any proposed political scheme that they perceived to bring harm to the residents of Ireland 'even if baited with the lure of a separate Ulster parliament'.[114] He thus declared a determination that Methodists would not be pressured into abandoning their southern members, nor would they be appeased by some form of Ulster exclusion.

Appearing with William Whitla on the platform was the Rev. George Wedgwood and the Rev. T. W. Davidson. Wedgwood claimed that nothing but 'a deep sense of duty' would have permitted him to speak on a political platform, and he rejected accusations of political partisanship.[115] He stated that those assembled represented at least '95 per cent of the Methodist people', and he believed that '1,200 Home Rule Methodists' could not be found in the country, a figure that would represent two per cent of the Methodist population of 62,000.[116] The criticism of the rally by Home Rule Methodists on the grounds that it demonstrated the 'unspirituality' of Unionists and would 'destroy Methodism' were dismissed by Wedgwood as 'unworthy', asserting that strong political convictions did not amount to the bigotry of which they were accused. Moreover, he claimed that the strong stance being taken by

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[111] *The Times*, 10 February 1912.
[112] Methodist Demonstration against Home Rule, *The Methodists of Ireland and Home Rule*, p.13.
[113] *Ibid.*, p.15.
[114] *Ibid.*, p.16.
[115] *Christian Advocate*, 15 March 1912.
[116] The figure of 62,000 Methodists was taken from the 1911 Census of Ireland, which enumerated a total of 62,232 Methodists as opposed to the official Conference figure for 1911 of 29,361. Using the official figure to calculate the potential number of Methodist Home Rulers at a rate of two present gives a result of 587, which seems possible given the strength of congregations led by known Home Rule ministers, for example in Dublin.

Methodists on the issue was responsible for the growth of the Church in the preceding two years. This appears to be an unduly optimistic view of continued growth in Methodist membership. While the census figures clearly indicate that Methodism had expanded slightly in the decade preceding the third Home Rule crisis, with 62,382 affiliates in 1911 a slight increase from the 1901 figure of 62,006.[117] The official Conference membership data for the years 1910-12 demonstrates that Methodism was beginning to decline. Membership in 1910 was 29,357, with little change during the following year to a figure of 29,361 in 1911, and the 1912 data showing a decrease to 28,863 members.[118] With such slight changes in the number Methodists, it is difficult to distinguish that Methodist opposition to Home Rule had any significant impact of the number of members.

Wedgwood further asserted that the institution of a Dublin parliament would sabotage many of the social and political reforms for which Methodism campaigned: education, temperance and Sabbath observance. Home Rule, it was argued, would assist the brewing industry, as piously demonstrated by Redmond and Healy's support for the trade; schools would be given to Jesuits; and the 'sanctity of the Lord's day would practically disappear', becoming a day of sporting pursuit, not rest. Thus, Methodists could be confident in declaring that Home Rule was a 'policy which portends nothing of good'. Without the restraining power of the Imperial Parliament, the 'absolute and inexorable authority of the Vatican, to which every sincere Roman Catholic must bow', would encroach on every aspect of Irish life. Davidson continued this theme, suggesting that Catholics were obliged to vote as directed by their Bishops, and consequently, under Home Rule Ireland would become the 'most Papal state in Europe'. By contrast, he asserted that Methodists opposed all forms of ascendancy, both Protestant and Catholic, desired religious equality for all and protested against the expected erosion of civil liberties. Echoing Whitla, he deemed Methodist opposition to Home Rule was not that of party-political interest, rather they stood 'as patriots, as Protestants, as Imperialists, and as Irishmen, who have the best interests of our country at heart'.[119]

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[117] *Census Ire., 1901* and *1911*.
[118] *ICM, 1910-12*.
[119] *Christian Advocate*, 15 March 1912.

These sentiments were reflected in the two resolutions that were passed at the demonstrations. The first resolution consisted of five clauses. The first two stated the 'unchanged' nature of Methodist opinion that Home Rule was not necessary for the governance of Ireland and the Union should be maintained 'unimpaired and inviolate'.[120] These were simply re-stating the position taken by the annual Conference in 1886 and 1893. The other statements in the resolution, however, reflected the distinct circumstances of the third crisis. The third point emphasised that the 'conviction and alarm' of Methodists had increased in recent years because of the 'encroachments of the Papal power in the United Kingdom', specifically citing the *Ne Temere* decree and the *motu proprio*. Fourthly, the resolution declared that Methodists 'disavow[ed] as utterly alien' all feelings of 'ill-will and enmity' to any resident of Ireland. It stressed that Methodists did not desire, nor sympathise with, any form of religious ascendancy, preferring 'religious equality and freedom' for all. These resolutions reflect the increased alarm felt by Unionists during the third crisis that were exacerbated by the reduced power of the House of Lords and the recent Papal statements that they interpreted as an attempt to supersede civil laws with religious decrees. Nevertheless, Methodists were clear to distinguish between their mistrust of the Catholic authorities and their attitude towards their fellow-countrymen. Finally, the fifth part of the resolution asserted that as 'subjects of the King' they would be remiss in their duty if they failed to assert their beliefs and did not join the 'effort being made to expose the mistaken policy which is fraught with mischief'. This concluding statement reflects the Methodist understanding that citizens should be active in determining the future course of the nation in a direction consistent with their Christian principles. The second resolution requested that the organising Executive Committee 'continue to watch our interests' and pledged those present to 'provide the necessary funds for the diffusion of such literature as the Committee may deem advisable'. This committee became commonly referred to as the 'Continuation Committee' and subsequently co-ordinated the Methodist response to the prolonged crisis.

A demonstration of such magnitude naturally attracted a significant amount of press coverage. The *Christian Advocate* devoted an entire issue to the demonstration,

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[120] *Ibid.*

providing more coverage of this event than any other throughout the three-year crisis.[121] The Ulster Women's Unionist Council offered to buy and circulate a copy of this commemorative edition to every Methodist minister in Great Britain, but were informed by Joseph Reid, chairman of the Continuation Committee, that 2,000 copies had already been sent to England for this purpose.[122] The Women's Council did however, at the request of Reid, agree to distribute 2,000 copies of William Whitla's speech.[123] The coverage of the demonstration was also boosted by the interest of the Belfast local press, with the *Belfast Evening Telegraph,* the *Northern Whig* and the *Belfast News Letter* all printing comprehensive articles on the protest.[124] While the *Advocate* had expected the latter two publications to cover the event, the editor was more surprised about the *Belfast Evening Telegraph* article, which it considered less enthusiastic about Unionism. All three journals focussed on the stated neutrality of the Methodist Church, 'free from identification with any particular school of politics', and their relationship with British nonconformity.[125] They all also suggested that Methodism had 'suffered from misrepresentations' of their views in Britain and that henceforth, British nonconformists could no longer 'be in the smallest doubt' concerning the overwhelming opposition to Home Rule among Methodists.[126]

Despite these assertions that British nonconformity would no longer be able to ignore the will of their Irish brethren, the Belfast rally received relatively little attention in the London-based Methodist press. The *Methodist Times*, continuing its long-standing interest in Irish affairs, facilitated discussion of the demonstration.[127] This included a full list of the speakers, the estimated attendance and the resolutions passed at the meetings. Most of the coverage, however, focussed on those not represented at the rally. The *Methodist Times* emphasised that the demonstration was conducted on 'non-official lines' and that the vast majority of Irish Methodists

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[121] *Christian Advocate,* 15 March 1912.
[122] Urquhart, *The minutes of the Ulster Women's Unionist Council,* p.49 and p.51.
[123] *Ibid.,* pp55-6.
[124] *Belfast Evening Telegraph,* 15 March 1912; *Northern Whig,* 15 March 1912; and *Belfast News Letter,* 15 March 1912.
[125] *Ibid.*
[126] *Northern Whig,* 15 March 1912; *Belfast Evening Telegraph,* 15 March 1912; and *Belfast News Letter,* 15 March 1912.
[127] *Methodist Times,* 21 March 1912.

did not attend. Those absent from the proceedings included many well-known Methodists and most ministers. The journal also criticised Wedgwood's speech, claiming that he was 'belittling the importance of Irish Methodists who are opposed to him', accusing them of 'innuendo' and misinformation, a charge considered by the *Methodist Times* to be unfair given the personal integrity of Irish Methodist supporters of Home Rule such as the Rev. William Crawford and the Rt. Hon. Thomas Shillington.[128] Defending its own stance in favour of Home Rule, the *Methodist Times* further asserted that it supported a system of federalism within the Empire, or 'Home Rule all round', which would assure the 'effective supremacy of the British Parliament'. The newspaper contended that adequate 'safeguards of freedom' could be written into the bill, including an electoral system based on proportional representation so as to 'secure the full representation of minorities in the Irish Parliament'.

The other major English Methodist weekly journal, the *Methodist Recorder,* followed the pattern set in 1893 of non-engagement with Home Rule. Consequently, the only coverage of the events in Belfast was in a single large front-page advertisement on 21 March 1912, presumably placed by the demonstration's Continuation Committee and very brief editorial note consisting of the place, time and speakers.[129] The advertisement comprised of the two resolutions passed at the meetings and a list of the names of prominent ministers and laymen that took part in proceedings. That the Continuation Committee was required to pay to insert information concerning the protest demonstrates the determination of the *Recorder's* editorial board to avoid such a bitterly contested issue. For many Irish Methodists this was an unsatisfactory response to the event, which they had hoped would bring their concerns to the attention of their British brethren. This disappointment was reflected in a letter to the *Recorder* by Sir John Randles.[130] Randles protested that

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[128] *Ibid.,* and *Christian Advocate,* 15 March 1912. Thomas Shillington unsuccessfully stood for the Parliamentary seat of North Armagh in 1885. He chaired the Irish Protestant Home Rule Association before being made a member of the Privy Council in 1911.

[129] *Methodist Recorder,* 21 March 1912.

[130] Sir John S. Randles was a successful ironmaster and businessman. The son of the Marshall Randles DD, President of the British Methodist Conference of 1897, he was involved with many connexional committees. He served as a Conservative MP for the Cockermouth division of Cumberland 1900-10 and as a member for Manchester between 1912-22. Randles was a member of Cumberland County Council, a magistrate and was knighted in 1905.

the brief note of proceedings could 'hardly do justice' to the strength of Unionist feeling among Irish Methodists, and he had expected better of the *Recorder* than to mimic 'the contemptuous treatment of Irish Methodists' found in the *Methodist Times*.[131] He considered that at least the journal should have printed the 'admirable address' of Sir William Whitla, thus providing the readership with an eloquent presentation of Irish Methodist concerns. Randles argued that while he would 'resent any attempt to bring political controversy into our Church', the near unanimity of Irish Methodism ought not to be 'ignored ... or treated with contempt' by their British brethren. He averred that such a betrayal of Irish Methodism should lead British nonconformists to question whether they were truly 'the sons of men who loved liberty and religious freedom'. This strongly-worded letter received an equally vehement response, such that the editor of the *Recorder* 'did not think it desirable to print the controversial portions of the letters', and he thus declined to permit the debate to be continued in the columns of the journal.[132] In a similar vein, the *Methodist Recorder* refused to cover the debates surrounding the introduction of the bill into the House of Commons at all. The rally was, nevertheless, considered to have demonstrated the voice of Irish Methodism, united against Home Rule, to the whole population of the United Kingdom. The Continuation Committee, constituted at the meeting, sustained the Methodist protest throughout the remainder of the crisis, although never subsequently organising a demonstration of such significance.

The Introduction of the Home Rule Bill into the House of Commons

The inconsistent coverage of the demonstration against Home Rule in the Methodist press continued after the introduction of the Government of Ireland bill into the House of Commons. The *Christian Advocate* was remarkably restrained in its reaction to the introduction of the Home Rule bill, which is somewhat surprising given the extensive coverage that the newspaper had given to the Methodist demonstration a few weeks previously. Rather than printing a long editorial condemning the provisions proposed by the government, the *Advocate* restricted its coverage to a report of the speeches of the Prime Minister and Sir Edward Carson in

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[131] *Methodist Recorder*, 28 March 1912.
[132] *Ibid.*, 4 April 1912.

the House of Commons.[133] While it can be inferred that the editorial stance of the *Advocate* remained opposed to Home Rule, this muted response to the bill and failure to cover the subsequent parliamentary debates, clearly denotes a break from previous practice. This apparently curious refusal to campaign for the maintenance of the Union appears to indicate that the journal was reverting to a policy of political neutrality in the face of a highly controversial debate with entrenched positions on both sides. It is also indicative of the unease felt by many Methodists about the prospect of the exclusion of Ulster from the bill. This was specifically mentioned by Asquith as a possibility in his speech on 11 April 1912 and had been openly favoured by the Unionist leadership since the Craigavon rally of the previous year.[134] This was an unacceptable solution to many Methodists who identified as 'Irishmen' rather than specifically 'Ulstermen' and believed that the country should be treated as a single unit.[135] The organisers of the Methodist demonstration, for example, although choosing to hold the rally in Belfast, were careful to publicise the event as open to all resident on the island, not just the inhabitants of Ulster.[136] Unlike the Presbyterian Church, Methodism was not, and never had been, confined to the northern province, and it seems thus likely that the editor of the *Advocate* did not wish to risk alienating his southern readership by associating too closely with the Ulster Unionist action in parliament.

The only Methodist organ to engage with the passage of the bill was the *Methodist Times*. The Thursday following the first reading of the bill, the *Methodist Times* was pleased to announce that the bill had passed by a majority of 94, and particularly commended the speeches of Asquith and Birrell.[137] Defending their support of Home Rule, the journal asserted that they stood for 'federal and not separatist Home Rule' and that if the latter had ever been contemplated it was now 'hopelessly out of date'. The devolution from the centre of the Empire was considered to be 'in the order of progress' but they would 'resolutely oppose' any weakening of the 'effective supremacy' of the British parliament. Addressing the religious situation, the

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[133] *Christian Advocate*, 19 April 1912.
[134] *Hansard 5*, xxxvi, 1410, (11 April 1912); Lewis, *Carson*, p.80; Hyde, *Carson*, p.291; and Jalland, *The Liberals and Ireland*, p.55.
[135] *Christian Advocate*, 15 March 1912.
[136] *Ibid.*, 16 February 1912.
[137] *Methodist Times*, 18 April 1912.

Methodist Times recognised the 'devotion and ... difficulties' of their Irish brethren and offered a 'respectful hearing' to their representatives. Nevertheless, it was maintained that fears concerning Home Rule were unfounded and 'ample guarantees of religious and civil freedom' were included in the bill, and moreover, British nonconformists would withdraw their support if this was not so. Regarding the impact that the passage of the bill would have on Methodism, the journal urged that while there should be 'no limits on individual or collective action', the Church as a body should be 'kept completely clear of the controversy'. The Methodist demonstration, therefore, constituted an appropriate action, as it was 'unofficial' in nature. Irish Unionists should, however, be very careful to ensure that 'no pressure ... be exerted on Methodists to "toe the line"', as the issue was that of individual conscience. Moreover, to attempt to use either the annual Conference in Dublin or Liverpool for this purpose would be 'disastrous'. The article expressed the belief that Methodism would withstand whatever the future held, asserting that the 'Methodism of John Wesley is courageous and generous enough to adapt itself to all forms of government, and to be dependent on none'.

The *Methodist Times* continued to publish material relevant to the passage of the bill through parliament. This often focussed on correspondence received from Irish Methodists. Letters and speeches by the Rt. Hon. Thomas Shillington were a regular feature in the newspaper, commending the bill as a 'wisely devised and well-constructed plan' and criticising the Unionist opposition as the 'last gasp of the ascendancy party'.[138] Other notable laity supporting Home Rule in the columns of the journal included two Methodist JPs, Sir Robert Morgan and Mr. Richard Booth, both from Co. Dublin. Morgan strongly favoured the bill, stating that the measure was 'moderate, generous and conciliatory' and would significantly 'contribute to the peace and prosperity' of the country. Booth, by contrast, believed that Home Rule would be 'bound to bring acute social and religious strife' and disrupt commerce for 'doubtful gain'. The contributions of corresponding clergy were broadly in favour of the bill, with the Rev. William Crawford, the most prominent minister in favour of Home Rule, asserting that 'it is a good and great bill' for which Redmond should be commended, while the Rev. William Oliver of Roscrea stated that the proposed

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[138] *Ibid.*, and 3 October 1912.

safeguards 'ought to be nearly enough', but would not satisfy the 'Ulsterite' despite not being required by southern Protestants. The Rev. Thomas Corrigan in Belfast was, however, pessimistic that the bill could be successfully instituted as the two sides of the debate were too entrenched, and that Home Rule 'is now among the regrettable "might have beens" of our political history'.[139] The *Methodist Times*, as the only journal engaging with the debate, did thus attempt to present the range of arguments concerning Home Rule, although those in favour of the proposals were clearly over-represented in their columns. The coverage detailed above, was not, however, the primary focus of the newspaper in these weeks, with the editor preferring to focus on issues such as Welsh disestablishment and women's suffrage. Home Rule was no longer the single most important campaigning issue for the Liberals and, consequently, their nonconformist supporters. Home Rule constituted an important plank of the Liberal programme, but primarily as a commitment to be delivered before other reforming legislation could be introduced. The editor of *Methodist Times*, Lidgett, reflected this stance; supportive of the Irish proposals, but more interested in other aspects of the Liberal domestic programme. Home Rule was no longer the great issue of the age, as had been the case for Hughes.

Immediately following the defeat of the Agar-Robartes amendment,[140] the annual Irish Methodist Conference convened in Dublin in the penultimate week of June, where the issue of Home Rule inevitably appeared on the agenda. Prior to the annual meeting, the District Synods of Portadown, Clones and Belfast had all passed resolutions desiring the Conference to again express its opposition to Home Rule.[141] Despite this, however, and because of the highly charged atmosphere pervading the country it was agreed that a debate should not take place. A compromise was reached whereby the Rev. George Wedgwood proposed a resolution affirming the resolutions of 1886, 1892 and 1893 as the 'vast views of our people on these resolutions are still unaltered'. It was also resolved that the Committee of Privileges 'deems it unnecessary at present to make any further announcement on the subject and recommends the same course to the Conference'. Home Rule was thus

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[139] *Ibid.*, 18 April 1912.
[140] The Agar-Robartes amendment proposed that the four most Protestant and Unionist counties of the Ulster, Antrim, Armagh, Down and Londonderry, be excluded from the Home Rule bill.
[141] *Christian Advocate*, 21 June 1912.

considered too inflammatory to debate at the Conference, and risked endangering ill-will between the delegates, particularly those resident in the south of the country.

The Ulster Covenant

28 September 1912 was designated by the Unionist leaders, and advertised to the press, as being Ulster Day, marked by the signing of a Solemn League and Covenant in support of the Union. The text of the Covenant (and Declaration for women) drew its inspiration from the Scottish Covenant of 1580, and affirmed the belief that Home Rule would 'be disastrous to the well-being of Ulster'. It stated the commitment of signatories to 'stand by one another in defending for ourselves ... our cherished position of equal citizenship' and to 'refuse to recognise' the authority of a Dublin Parliament. Although the use of churches and chapels for the signing was prohibited, other properties owned by the Protestant denominations were used and many church leaders were prominent in their support of proceedings.

The plans for the day were publicised in the Irish Methodist press, appearing as a front-page advertisement on 23 August, accompanied by a relatively subdued editorial that stated the certainty that there would be 'large attendances' and expressed the desire 'that proceedings and decisions will be divinely directed'.[142] The day before Ulster Day, the *Christian Advocate* published a circular sent by the chairman of the Continuation Committee of the Methodist Demonstration, Rev. George Wedgwood, to all ministers, suggesting that Methodists follow the example of the other Protestant churches which had 'arranged for special religious services ... to intercede for Divine guidance and deliverance' during the crisis.[143] Wedgwood anticipated that Methodists would welcome the cooperation of evangelical churches in this matter and accompanied the letter with a guide Order of Service that could be used. This suggestion does not, however, appear to have been widely adopted, with the *Advocate* reporting only three ministers actively participating in Ulster Day services, all in Belfast: Wedgwood attending the service at the Ulster Hall; Wesley

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[142] *Ibid.*, 23 August 1912.
[143] *Ibid.*, 27 September 1912.

Guard preaching at the Ballynafeigh circuit; and Thomas W. Davidson presiding at Donegall Square church.[144]

Carson was the first to sign the Covenant at Belfast City Hall, accompanied by Lord Londonderry and representatives of the Protestant Churches, including the Rev. George Wedgwood, Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, as well as the Moderator of Presbyterian General Assembly, the Dean of Belfast Cathedral and the ex-chairman of the Congregational Union.[145] This constituted a very public display of support for the proceedings by the main Protestant denominations, indicating that these clerics understood the text of the Covenant to be compatible with their Christian faith. This would have undoubtedly allayed any concerns felt by congregants about abandoning southern Unionists or the implication of future armed resistance to a constitutionally instituted Dublin government.

Given the public support of the Covenant by the Methodist Vice-President it is illuminating to analyse the number of Methodist ministers who chose to follow Wedgwood's example and sign the document. In total, 144 out of 237 serving ministers (including supernumeraries) were resident within the nine counties of Ulster and thus entitled to sign the Covenant.[146] Of these, the signatures of 61 clergy are identifiable on the Covenant, a surprisingly low 42 per cent of those who were eligible. This is in sharp contrast to the exclusively Methodist petition, *A Grave Crisis* (1892), to which a much larger 84 per cent of serving ministers appended their names. Of the 214 ministers who were signatories of *A Grave Crisis,* 95 were still active in 1912. Of these, only 33 chose to append their names to the Ulster Covenant, 32 were resident outside of Ulster and consequently ineligible to sign, and 30 ministers were entitled to endorse the Covenant, but chose not to do so. Thus, of the 63 ministers resident in Ulster, only slightly over half signed the Covenant. This is a surprisingly low number, given that a vast majority of ministers at the Conferences of 1886, 1892 and 1893 supported resolutions opposing Home Rule.

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[144] *Ibid.,* 4 October 1912.
[145] http://www.proni.gov.uk/ulstercovenantsearch/ (accessed 02.08.07).
[146] *ICM, 1912.*

Other surprising omissions from the list of ministerial signatories include William Nicholas (author of *Why the Methodists of Ireland are opposed to Home Rule*, (1892)). Nicholas appears in the 1912 Irish Conference Minutes as an active minister, however, he died just before Ulster Day, in the week ending 27 September. Another missing signature was that of Wesley Guard, who had emerged as a vigorous opponent of Home Rule during the second crisis, on several occasions appearing on political platforms to affirm the resolutions of the Ulster Convention and speaking at the Methodist demonstration earlier in the year. Moreover, Guard as the Chairman of the Belfast district, ascended the pulpit at Ballynafeigh to preach against Home Rule at one of the services that accompanied the signing.[147] He there stated that they were facing a 'momentous crisis' of which 'they feared the consequences', quite clear statements opposing the institution of Home Rule. Guard did not publicise his reasons for not signing the Covenant when he clearly opposed Home Rule, however, it seems likely that he believed it was inappropriate for a Methodist minister to become involved with such a specifically political protest that appeared to endorse violence.

These curious omissions are, however, in some part balanced by some interesting inclusions on the Covenant. Most of the laity involved in the Methodist demonstration and Continuation Committee are impossible to trace, however, Sir William Whitla is clearly identifiable as having signed the Covenant at the City Hall in Belfast.[148] Five male signatories give their address as Methodist College, Belfast, three of whom signed the same sheet of the petition, suggesting that they were either staff or students at the institution. Fourteen ministers chose to specifically identify their profession on the document, of which nine appended either 'Rev' or 'Methodist minister' to their name, with a further five identifying their residence as the 'manse'. Two Methodist clergy, Richard Green and Edward White, also appear to have acted as Covenant agents. Both worked in the Enniskillen district, resident respectively in Fivemiletown and Aughnacloy, where the local Methodist Lecture Hall and a local school were employed for the signing. The Methodist Church in Sydenham in East Belfast and the Temperance Hall in the Armagh circuit were also

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[147] *Christian Advocate*, 4 October 1912.
[148] http://www.proni.gov.uk/ulstercovenantsearch/ (accessed 02.08.07).

used as venues on Ulster Day. It can, therefore, be assumed that in these circuits the ministers received the support of the majority of their congregations for their promotion of Ulster Day, certainly no complaints were publicly raised about their engagement in a specifically political issue. It is interesting to note that, with the exception of F. H. Scott Maguire of the Sandy Row circuit, the ministers who explicitly identify their occupation or permit the use of denominational buildings were resident in small communities in relatively rural areas, for example the Rev. William Bryans in the Donegal and Dunkineely circuit and the Rev. James Stewart resident in Limavady. This would suggest that congregational and community opinion was a significant influence on how individual ministers chose to act, as it would be considerably more difficult for ministers serving small communities to keep their political actions private where there would only be a single venue for the signing of the Covenant. Anonymous correspondents of the *Methodist Times* also alleged that in some cases wealthy members of the congregation threatened to leave if the minister was not pro-active in opposition to Home Rule.[149] While these claims are clearly unverifiable, both because the threats were informal and the accusers remained anonymous, they are consistent with the culture of small chapel communities and previous allegations of intimidation towards pro-Home Rule ministers in 1886.[150]

Although it is not clear why so few ministers opted to sign the Covenant, it seems likely that two factors in particular were considered: firstly, the implicit threat of armed resistance contained in the wording of the Covenant may have been considered by many clergy as inappropriate for a man of religion to support; secondly, the Methodist system of moving ministers between circuits every three years meant that, excluding supernumeraries, most clergy could expect to be appointed to a post outside of Ulster in the future course of their careers, and thus would not wish to be perceived as having abandoned their brethren in the south. Writing at the time of partition in 1920, Lieutenant-Colonel F. H. Crawford noted that 'some time previous' to September of 1912, Unionists had been obliged to retreat from attempting to keep the whole of Ireland within the Union, 'or we

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[149] *Methodist Times*, 21 March 1912.
[150] *Ibid.*, 4 May 1886. See Chapter Two, p.93.

should have lost all', and this belief was reflected in the text of the Covenant.[151] This deliberate retreat into Ulster was deeply problematic for an institution that purported to serve the whole of the island and jeopardised the public support that the Church could give to the Unionist cause.

The coverage given to the signing of the Covenant by the Methodist press was rather patchy. The *Methodist Times* was very critical of the Covenant, portraying proceedings as demonstrating an unreasonable 'Ulsteria'.[152] The events planned to accompany the signing were described as consisting of 'semi-military demonstrations' and 'violent speeches'. The editorial was particularly critical of ministerial involvement, deploring that 'pulpits are unhappily being invaded by a spirit of violence'. The sermon of the Rev. Dr McKean, former moderator of the Presbyterian Church at the Ulster Hall, was cited as depicting Home Rule as a 'war against Protestantism' and tending towards the 'disintegration of the Empire'.[153] The journal took particular exception to this, claiming that the cleric spoke 'in defiance of all the facts' and was in fact making a 'deliberate attempt to light once more the fires of religious intolerance'. This attitude was supported by an article by Thomas Shillington, who claimed that the Covenant was the 'last gasp of the ascendancy party'. The *Methodist Times* argued that Ulster Unionist intransigence set 'religious antagonism in the way of political progress and imperial federation; without doing anything to overcome the difficulty', thereby alienating English moderate opinion. In their view the Churches were culpable of 'allowing themselves to be dragged at the heels of a political movement', rather than concentrating on their evangelical mission.

The *Christian Advocate's* coverage was rather muted both before and after the event. In the weeks preceding the signing, while the newspaper published advertisements for proceedings and a circular letter to ministers from the Methodist Demonstration Continuation Committee, at no point did the editorials advocate that individual Methodists should participate.[154] The report of events focussed on the religious

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[151] F. H. Crawford, *Why I voted for the six counties,* (1920) in Patrick Buckland, *Irish Unionism, 1885-1923: a documentary history,* (Belfast, 1973), p.410.
[152] *Methodist Times,* 28 September 1912.
[153] *Ibid.,* 3 October 1912.
[154] *Christian Advocate,* 23 August 1912 and 27 September 1912.

aspect of the day, relaying the sermons of three prominent Methodist ministers.[155] Description of the mass demonstrations was confined to a statement recounting the 'remarkable scenes of popular enthusiasm', without, however, effusive descriptions of the quasi-military displays that accompanied Carson on his progress through Ulster. The *Advocate* understood the 'lesson which the day teaches' to be that the 'people of Ulster ... are in grim earnest, and are not bluffing'. While emphasising the gravity of the situation, the journal was careful not to inflame passions among its audience regarding Home Rule by specifically criticising those who did not support the action and not to appear to be supporting the implicit threat of violence contained within the text of the Covenant and the speeches of Unionist leaders.

This rather subdued coverage of Ulster Day was in sharp contrast to that of the contemporary Belfast weekly publication, and organ of the Presbyterian Church, *The Witness*. This journal vigorously supported the campaign against Home Rule; pouring scorn on those Protestants who believed that resorting to armed resistance was 'an unwise and unchristian attitude'.[156] Whereas the *Advocate* gave only limited coverage to the proceedings of Ulster Day, *The Witness* published comprehensive lists of where the Covenant could be signed and the content of anti-Home Rule sermons preached in Presbyterian churches.[157] The virtual absence of Presbyterians outside of Ulster (with 96 per cent resident in the northern province) meant that the plight of southern co-religionists was not a major issue. By comparison, both the Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church modelled themselves as national institutions. In 1911 over 20 per cent of Methodists in Ireland lived outside the nine counties of Ulster, mostly in small, scattered communities.[158] The Parliament Act and the electoral arithmetic bequeathed by the 1910 general election indicated that the passing of some form of Home Rule was inevitable, and these small Protestant communities would become particularly vulnerable to domination by their Catholic

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[155] *Ibid.*, 4 October 1912.
[156] *The Witness*, 12 and 19 July 1912 and R. F. G. Holmes, '"Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right": the Protestant Churches and Ulster's resistance to Home Rule', *The Church and War: papers read at the twenty-first summer meeting and the twenty-second winter meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (Studies in Church History, 20), (Oxford, 1983), p.321.
[157] *The Witness*, 20 and 27 September and 4 October 1912; Holmes, '"Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right"', p.330.
[158] *Census Ire., 1911*. For example the Sligo Methodist district comprised of eight circuits: Sligo, Manorhamilton, Mohill, Longford, Drumshambo and Boyle, Ballymote, Ballina and the Castlebar and Mayo mission, employing ten ministers. *ICM*, 1912.

neighbours. While some Ulster Protestants could justify the retreat into Ulster to save the 80 per cent of Protestants that lived in province, rather than 'all going down to disaster in the same boat', this was not universally accepted either during the third Home Rule crisis or during the debates concerning partition and the jettisoning of three Ulster counties.[159] The use of Protestant as a synonym for Ulster Unionist also attracted significant criticism from clergy resident in the other three provinces, who claimed that many Protestants in the south objected to being identified with northern resistance, when many in fact favoured the scheme.[160]

A "last and golden chance": the progress of the Home Rule bill through the Houses of Parliament[161]

As the bill progressed through Parliament, there was an escalation of political tension, fuelled by the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force in January 1913. While the overtly militaristic developments did not receive any significant coverage in the Methodist press, both the *Methodist Times* and the *Christian Advocate* did report on the progress of the bill and extra-parliamentary agitation. The *Methodist Times* focussed on the passage of the bill through Parliament, primarily commenting on the content of the proposals and on speeches made by political leaders. The *Christian Advocate,* by contrast, concentrated on extra-parliamentary agitation, predominantly, but not exclusively, that opposing Home Rule, although avoiding all comment on the militaristic expressions of this.

In the first two months of 1913, the *Advocate* appears to have attempted to reflect the diversity of opinion that existed amongst their readership. Representing the anti-Home Rule campaign, the *Advocate* printed significant extracts from the pamphlet *Nonconformists and Home Rule*, published by the Nonconformist Association.[162] This document was targeted at British Nonconformists, and contained short pieces of text written by leading British clerics exhorting their congregations not to abandon their Irish co-religionists and oppose Home Rule.

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[159] Crawford, *Why I voted for the six counties,* p.411.
[160] *Christian Advocate,* 31 January 1913 and R. B. McDowell, *The Church of Ireland, 1869-1969,* (London, 1975), p.104.
[161] *Methodist Times,* 23 January 1913.
[162] *Christian Advocate,* 10 January 1913.

Contributors included Sir George Hayter Chubb, who describing Home Rule as a 'curse', and desiring that 'civil war be averted', petitioned British Nonconformists to 'make it plain that they will not, for party political or other reasons desert their co-religionists in Ireland'. The former President of the Methodist Conference of 1898, Rev. Dr D. W. Watkinson, emphasised the situation of Protestants in Ireland as a 'hopeless minority' who would become subject to a Nationalist majority that had 'no wrongs to complain of, but who wish to carry out their "ideas", ideas hateful to the whole Protestant world'. Watkinson further argued that British nonconformity had acted to influence politics when its interests appeared endangered in less fundamental areas, for example protesting 'when sacerdotalism had threatened education' at the time of the 1902 Education Act, and asked, 'what will not the Irish Protestant be justified in doing when all is at stake?' This theme that the individual liberties guarantees by the British Constitution were at stake was pursued by a senior Baptist minister, the Rev. Arthur Mursell, who insisted that 'civil freedom in a Catholic state is a very different thing from civil freedom in a Protestant state', and consequently assurances of future religious freedom were rendered meaningless. The *Advocate* also covered the launch of Carson's Unionist Defence Fund in February 1913, publishing an appeal from the Unionist leader to contribute financially to the cause in the 'most critical year', and to 'secure a result worthy of Ulster', although the journal was careful not to discuss the military uses for which the money might be used.[163]

Throughout this third crisis the *Christian Advocate*, in contrast to its actions on the previous two occasions, published extensive coverage of Protestant Home Rulers, although not in an uncritical manner. The newly-constituted Irish Protest Committee, for example, placed an advertisement for its first meeting in the *Advocate* and subsequently a report of its resolutions. This organisation was formed 'to protest against the introduction of religious difference into party politics'.[164] It represented a number of Irish Protestants, mainly based in Dublin, who supported the Home Rule legislation, including Douglas Hyde and W. B. Yeats. Methodism was well represented among the thirty-six Vice-Presidents by the Rev. William Crawford,

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[163] *Ibid.*, 21 February 1913.
[164] *Ibid.*, 17 January 1913.

the Rev. George McCutcheon and the Rt. Hon. Thomas Shillington.[165] The *Advocate*, however, accompanied the initial advertisement with a letter from an opponent of the organisation, Mr R. D. Megaw, who insisted that the premise of the Committee, that freedom of religion would be possible under a Catholic government, was erroneous given Vatican decrees such as *Ne Temere*. Moreover, Megaw stated that the 'Roman Catholic Church ... can look after its own interest, and has no need of defenders', particularly those who 'regard with equal benevolence the good intentions of the ecclesiastics, the manipulations of the Hibernians, and the true Imperial patriotism of the United Irish League', thus indicating his low opinion of the Protestant Home Rulers.[166] Nevertheless, the *Advocate* gave a full report of the first meeting of the Irish Protest Committee, during which it was suggested that the 'Protestants of Ireland often received better treatment from their Roman Catholic fellow-countrymen than Roman Catholics receive from each other', and therefore would not have their religious freedom curtailed under a Dublin parliament. The Rev. William Crawford also proposed a resolution that 'this meeting strongly disapproves of the efforts to identify the Irish Protestant Churches with any political party and its transitory interests'. Crawford claimed to detect two types of Protestant in Ireland, those 'comprehensive, generous and patriotic' and representative of those living in the south of the country, and the 'narrow, bitter and sectarian' whom, he claimed, were prevalent in Ulster.[167] The *Advocate* objected strongly to a Methodist minister describing his co-religionists in such terms, and questioned if that was intended to be 'an illustration of what is meant by the non-introduction of religion into party politics?' If so, the editorial argued, his appeal would have little effect, since Home Rule 'is a religious question, and apart from religion it would never have been a question'. It thus attempted to expose the founding premises of the committee as misguided.[168]

The *Methodist Times*, by contrast, focussed on the passage of the Government of Ireland bill through parliament. This journal commenced the year of 1913 by condemning Carson's tactics in tabling an amendment to the bill that would exclude

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[165] *Ibid.*, 31 January 1913.
[166] *Ibid.*, 17 January 1913
[167] *Ibid.*, 31 January 1913.
[168] *Ibid.*

the nine counties of Ulster from Home Rule, five more than the Agar-Robartes' amendment that was defeated in June 1912. While admiring the 'obvious sincerity and earnestness' of the Unionist leader, the editorial adopted the position of the Prime Minister who had stated that the amendment meant 'the wrecking of the whole bill'.[169] The *Methodist Times* claimed that the 'proposal was not put forward as a means of gaining a settlement by consent' but rather by making such an unacceptable proposal used 'the Ulster problem to make Home Rule in any shape or form impossible'.[170] They juxtaposed this Unionist belligerence with the perceived desire of Nationalists to reach a 'settlement by consent'. This was a theme that the newspaper pursued in the following weeks, applauding Asquith's stance that the agitation in north-east Ulster must not be permitted 'to contradict every principle of democratic government'.[171] The journal noted that Redmond claimed the residents of Ulster as his fellow-countrymen, thereby suggesting that the Nationalists would not act against them. The *Methodist Times* was also predictably critical of Balfour's suggestion that Liberals and Nationalists laboured under a 'total misapprehension of the Ulster question'.[172] Whereas Redmond asserted that his arguments were based on the 'national principle' and Winston Churchill proposed a great scheme of federalisation for the United Kingdom, Balfour argued that the government's bill was founded on the principles of neither. The *Methodist Times* suggested rather that Balfour's claims were 'founded on a dilemma' regarding the national status of Ireland. The editorial stated that the Conservative leader was equally unclear about the status of Ireland, and must decide whether 'Ireland is a nation or it is not'. If the first, then the *Methodist Times* argued Home Rule was inadequate, as nations deserved independence, if the latter then Home Rule granted too much autonomy. This, the journal claimed, was a key contradiction in the Unionist position.

The bill having passed through the House of Commons with a majority of 367 votes to 257, it made its way to the upper chamber. Unsurprisingly, the *Methodist Times* was critical of the actions of the House of Lords when the issue was presented to them in January 1913. Although noting that there was some 'movement even in the

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[169] *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, xlvi, 377, (1 January 1913).
[170] *Methodist Times*, 9 January 1913.
[171] *Ibid.*, 23 January 1913.
[172] *Hansard 5 (Commons)*, xlvi, 2108, (15 January 1913).

House of Lords' regarding Home Rule, the journal characterised the tactics of the Opposition as permitting 'themselves to be dragged at the chariot wheel of the irreconcilable Orangemen, who, ... would have nothing to say to "that rotten, sickening policy of conciliation"'.[173] The newspaper considered this strategy by Conservative peers of refusing to negotiate and demanding a general election to be thoroughly misguided, suggesting that Ulster Unionists would not accept the result of an election and not negotiating denied the opportunity of getting the best possible deal for the Irish minority. Moreover, for the *Methodist Times,* the clearly partisan attitudes of the Opposition in the upper chamber regarding Home Rule (and Welsh disestablishment) demonstrated its anti-democratic tendencies and further undermined its position within the British parliamentary system, a place that 'might have been vindicated' if the peers had employed 'statesmanlike efforts to bring about a settlement by consent'.[174] Thus, the periodical declared that 'under these circumstances any Government would be abrogating its responsibilities if it allowed a small body of irreconcilables to stand permanently in the way of the settlement of a great imperial question'.[175]

Despite the unwillingness of either the British Conservative or Ulster Unionist representatives to seek a negotiated settlement in the House of Lords regarding the Home Rule provisions, the *Methodist Times* asserted that the bill 'even as it now stands does not contain any peril to the just rights of the minority'.[176] The editorial ascribed this favourable situation to their own consistent stance regarding the legislation. The journal claimed that it had successfully demanded that the bill embrace the fiscal supremacy of Westminster; a federal model as opposed to complete separation; Irish representation in the House of Commons; and a favourable electoral system for the Dublin assembly including proportional representation for the Senate.[177] It was claimed that these favourable conditions for the minority community could have been expanded and strengthened 'had the Opposition been willing to seek a settlement by consent ... but the forces of passion

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[173] *Ibid.,* 6 February 1913.
[174] *Ibid.,* 13 March 1913.
[175] *Ibid.,* 6 February 1913.
[176] *Ibid.,* 23 January 1913.
[177] *Ibid.,* 23 January 1913.

and prejudice have been too strong'. The attitude of the Unionists was portrayed as wilfully ignoring the 'last and golden chance' to negotiate an acceptable compromise to the crisis demonstrating 'an ineradicable enmity which is the negation of statesmanship'. While the *Methodist Times* had indeed campaigned on these issues during the development phase of the bill, it seems unlikely that they had as much influence as they believed over Liberal politicians; the failure of the 'nonconformist conscience' to force major changes to the Education Act of 1902 had sealed their decline in political influence.

Following the defeat of the bill in the House of Lords by 326 votes to 69, Home Rule received little attention from the Methodist press until the bill returned to the House of Commons in July 1913. The Methodist Conference season in Ireland and Britain passed without reference to the impending crisis; attention instead focussing on the inadequacy of Methodist premises in Belfast and increasing international tension between the United Kingdom and Germany.[178] While it appears inconceivable that the Irish Conference delegates were not as strongly opposed to Home Rule as in previous years, the absence of a debate on the issue appears to demonstrate the desire of the Conference to distance itself from the extremes of opinion and prepare to accept whatever new circumstances the legislation would present.

The passage of the bill did, nevertheless, spawn a number of coincident extra-parliamentary events, which were covered in detail by the *Christian Advocate*. The first of these was an anti-Home Rule demonstration at the Albert Hall organised by the London Council of United Protestant Societies.[179] This group claimed to represent 'nearly all British Protestant organisations', and boasted an attendance of approximately 8,000, including Irish Methodists William Whitla, and Belfast minister, William Maguire, who were invited to speak.[180] It is not clear, however, the Council did indeed represent a majority of British Protestants, in particular the many who nonconformists were still loyal to the Liberal Party, and consequently supported Home Rule as demonstrated by the *Methodist Times*. Nevertheless, the meeting

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[178] *ICM*, 1913 and *WCM*, 1913.
[179] *Christian Advocate*, 4 July 1913.
[180] *Ibid.*, 6 June 1913.

resolved that 'Home Rule is dangerous to the Religious liberties and spiritual well-being of Ireland'.[181] It maintained that Home Rule was primarily a religious issue, and that its 'establishment will mean the intolerant and oppressive rule of the Roman Catholic Church'. Moreover, the Council committed itself to 'help in every lawful way the Protestants of Ireland in resisting the imposition of Home Rule'. The inclusion of 'lawful' in the offer of assistance emphasises the concerns of British nonconformists about the military direction in which Carson was leading his supporters. The resolution did, however, explicitly support the text of the Ulster Covenant, which defined the rationale for the military defence of Ulster.

The summer saw the recommencement of large out-of-doors Unionist demonstrations. The 12 July parades of 1913 were attended by particular pomp and political pronouncements that elicited extensive reporting in the *Advocate*. The Methodists made a characteristic contribution to proceedings by providing the minister of Agnes Street Chapel in Belfast, the Rev. H. G. Collier, to preach at the Ulster Hall. Collier took as his text, Colossians 2:18, 'let no man rob you of your prize'.[182] He presented the United Kingdom as the prize that the Catholic Church desired to win, to become the 'base of restoring Roman Imperial power', starting with a Home Rule Ireland. Collier charted the history of Ireland since the repeal of the Penal laws, claiming that the increased freedom given to Catholics had resulted in 'more monasteries and nunneries ... in their land today than in the days of Henry VIII'; a dramatic increase in 'idolatrous and Paganised processions'; the reorganisation of education 'to suit their convenience'; and the Ten Commandments 'changed at the dictate of the Vatican ... and dangled before Protestant children'. For Collier, Catholicism was a corrupt religion, inherently threatening to true evangelical religion through the 'eternal sin' of heresy. Moreover, it was intending to use Ireland as a base for its re-conquest of Protestant northern Europe through the 'squeezing policy' they had already employed in Quebec. However, despite the grave threat that Collier perceived Catholicism as presenting, he appealed for there to be 'no riot or panic' during the week, as that would 'play into the hands of the enemy', they should restrain themselves until 'the day came when they had to strike [and] they

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[181] *Ibid.*, 4 July 1913.
[182] *Ibid.*, 18 July 1913.

would act with courage and determination'. This was an uncharacteristically confrontational speech from a Methodist minister at this time, although much of the anti-Catholic rhetoric was familiar from earlier crises, most notably from the pen of William Arthur.

The first anniversary of the signing of the Ulster Covenant was naturally the focus of Unionist events. The Continuation Committee of the Methodist Demonstration issued an appeal that the 28 September 1913, given the 'vast majority of our people are unaltered in their convictions' that Home Rule should be avoided, be used as a day 'for humiliation and prayer'.[183] While the *Methodist Times* in principle supported the call for a day of prayer concerning Home Rule, the content of such sermons as Collier's provoked them to denounce the event as 'the climax of the totally irreligious and wicked proceedings of this campaign.'[184] They appealed to Irish Methodists to have the 'courage of the Christian faith in boldly discountenancing appeals to race hatred and incitement to possible bloody strife.' Should their Irish brethren 'be overcome either by moral cowardice or religious hysteria' as to let the 'golden opportunity' to condemn extremism pass, the *Methodist Times* asserted that 'the consequences must be laid at their door.' The journal believed that the role of the Churches was that of peacemaker in the conflict, and should not, under any circumstances, be seen to incite violence. Citing the axiom from the beatitudes, 'blessed are the peacemakers', the *Methodist Times* argued that 'peace-making is never a sign of weakness, but on the other hand, it demands the highest faith and the noblest courage'.[185]

The *Christian Advocate* contained very little coverage of the events of the Ulster Day anniversary, not carrying the speeches of any of the main protagonists or senior Methodist ministers. Carson's review of the UVF was briefly mentioned, but only to note that 'everything was carried out in an orderly manner and without disturbance'.[186] Perhaps surprisingly, the *Advocate* made no mention of Carson's declaration that an Ulster Provisional Government would come into force the day

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[183] *Ibid.*, 19 September 1913 and 26 September 1913.
[184] *Methodist Times*, 25 September 1913.
[185] Matt. 5:9, King James Version and *Methodist Times*, 25 September 1913.
[186] *Christian Advocate*, 3 October 1913.

Home Rule was enacted. This announcement by the Unionist leader was, however, noted by the *Methodist Times* who were outraged by the notion.[187] Under the headline 'The Carson Scandal', the journal proceeded to condemn his actions as precluding any chance of a peaceful solution to the crisis. Carson's speeches, while 'reviewing his military levies', were described as 'clearly treasonable'. Moreover, rather than feeling ashamed of his actions, the *Methodist Times* claimed that Carson, 'not only admitted, but vaunted the illegality of his proceedings'. The newspaper maintained that by inciting violence, the behaviour of the Ulster leader was 'wickedess itself'. The *Methodist Times* was also deeply critical of what it described as the 'Unionist press' in England, primarily *The Times* and the *Spectator,* which it claimed had not condemned Carson in strong enough terms, suggesting that while it was 'easy to dismiss this all as bluff' this overlooked the injury that would occur to the young men that Carson was inciting. The editorial warned both sides in the Ulster confrontation, the Unionists and the government (who had just deployed troops on exercise in the province), that their actions were not only inflaming the situation in Ulster but risked 'strengthen[ing] the position of every violent faction in every one of our present controversies': the women's suffrage movement; 'Larkinism'; and the 'Labour youth' associated with the trade union movement.

Carson's speeches at this juncture also provoked the *Methodist Recorder* to publish their only significant comment on events. Like the *Methodist Times,* they condemned the actions of the Ulster leader, advising their Irish co-religionists that while they sympathised with their predicament they could not believe that 'this kind of talk is going to help Ulster in the very least' and that it was an 'illusion to suggest that threats of violence will make the Government capitulate'.[188] In their opposition to the violent rhetoric of Carson, the journal stated that there was 'no difference whatever in principle in the militant oratory of the Ulster leader and the criminal and revolutionary incitements of Mr Larkin'. If politics was to be conducted on such lines, the demands of Ulster were predicted to soon be dwarfed by those of organised labour.

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[187] *Methodist Times,* 25 September 1913.
[188] *Methodist Recorder,* 25 September 1913.

Following swiftly on from the Ulster Day anniversary, the Continuation Committee of the Methodist Demonstration issued an 'appeal to co-religionists in Great Britain'.[189] Reproduced in both the *Christian Advocate* and the *Methodist Times*, the pamphlet reiterated the 'unremitting' work of Irish Methodism in promoting the social ideas of the denomination: universal education, temperance and the supporting 'honest toil' of workers.[190] Again emphasising that Methodism was apolitical and non-sectarian in nature, the appeal stressed the concern of Irish Methodists for their civil and religious freedom under a regime run by men 'whose sympathies have never been, and never can be, identified with these objects'. The passage of Home Rule, they feared, would result in 'either our degradation, or our revolt, or our flight'.[191] Consequently, facing these possibilities with trepidation, they urged British Methodists 'that your influence shall be used to maintain *the Union* ... and establish religious freedom throughout the land'. This appeal was signed 'on behalf of 62,000 Methodists', the total Methodist population of the island. This claim to represent all Methodists was slightly disingenuous, though a favoured tactic of the Continuation Committee, who preferred to ignore the minority of Methodists who either supported Home Rule or objected linking politics to the Church.

The year of 1913 saw the Home Rule bill pass through the Houses of Parliament, twice triggering the use of the Parliament Act to bring the bill into law. This was accompanied by escalating tension across Ireland, as Ulster Unionists made contingency plans for the worse possible scenario. The political realities of the situation, however, changed very little over the course of the year: the Liberal government was not prepared to submit the issue to a general election given the inconclusive results of the two contests in 1910 and thus needed the support of the Irish Nationalists to pursue their legislative agenda; the Parliament Act gave them freedom of manoeuvre and Unionist resistance had little impact. The Irish Methodist reaction to this was to keep a relatively low profile throughout. No official pronouncements were forthcoming, and even the *Christian Advocate* that had been

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[189] *Christian Advocate*, 24 October 1913 and *Methodist Times*, 23 October 1913. The text of the appeal was also re-printed in the letters column of the *Methodist Recorder*, 19 February 1914.
[190] *Christian Advocate*, 24 October 1913.
[191] *Methodist Times*, 23 October 1913.

the bulwark of Unionist opinion chose not to endorse the military aspects of the Unionist campaign.

'Guns for Ulster': the escalation of the Ulster Crisis[192]

At the advent of the new parliamentary session a compromise did not seem any more likely than it had at the end of the old. March 1914 saw a number of significant events that appeared likely to shape the final solution of the crisis: the launch of the British Covenant opposing Home Rule; the publication by Asquith of an amending bill; and the so-called Curragh Mutiny. Typically, the Methodist press conformed to their stated position in reacting to the new developments. The *Christian Advocate* greeted the launch of the British Covenant as 'a remarkable pronouncement' and was pleased to note that it had been signed by not only Balfour, but by Sir George Hayter Chubb and the author Rudyard Kipling.[193] The British announcement demanded that the government put the issue of Home Rule to the nation in a general election, before making any attempt to pass the Government of Ireland bill into law. In language echoing that of the Ulster Covenant, signatories committed to:

> taking or supporting any action that may be effective to prevent it [the bill] being put into operation and more particularly the armed forces of the Crown being used to deprive the people of Ulster of their rights as citizens if the United Kingdom.[194]

The *Advocate,* however, maintained that 'like Sir Edward Carson', it had always advocated compromise to resolve the crisis, but they held that 'proposals in this direction should come from the other side'. They emphasised that if compromises were not forthcoming, the 'consequences will be fearful'. By contrast, the *Methodist Times,* was appalled by the Covenant describing it as a 'preposterous' document, issued by a 'company of bitter party politicians and "die-hards"', under the 'pretext' that it was apolitical.[195] For the London-based journal, the Covenant demonstrated that the Unionist leaders lacked statesmanship, were 'bankrupt ... inadequate

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[192] Crawford, *Guns for Ulster,* (Belfast, 1947).
[193] *Christian Advocate,* 6 March 1914.
[194] *Ibid.*
[195] *Methodist Times,* 5 March 1914.

mediocrities', who were entirely 'unable to give a decisive lead' to their backbenchers.

Regarding Asquith's proposed amendment, while the *Christian Advocate* did not pass any comment, the *Methodist Times* was outspoken in its disapproval of the exclusion of Ulster, noting that while it was the least desirable option, there were obstacles impeding any other route forward. Reflecting on the concerns of their co-religionists in Ireland, the editorial stated that the government had now provided 'not only for reasonable fears and apprehensions on the part of Ulster Protestants, but also for their unreasonable ones'.[196] This conformed to the stated position of the *Methodist Times* that Irish Protestants should have nothing to fear from their Catholic countrymen under a Home Rule parliament, which was still part of the United Kingdom. Moreover, the journal characterised the rejection of Asquith's proposals by the Unionist leaders as 'spurn[ing] the offer of peace with contempt'.[197]

The political discussion was overtaken by events at the Curragh on the 20-25 March, during which 60 army officers under Brigadier-General Gough resigned their commissions, rather than obey orders that they believed were designed to coerce Ulster. Under the heading 'The Army Revolt', the *Methodist Times* argued that this incident was orchestrated by the Unionist party, asserting that Liberal and Labour MPs 'will not submit to the capture of the Army by a political party'.[198] The country was, it claimed, facing a 'situation unparalleled' in severity, but that the 'power of the executive must be vindicated at all costs'. The government must not, under any circumstances, accede to the 'threats and betrayal of trust and the shirking of duty' of the military, but assert its own authority. Should the executive fail in this objective, the *Methodist Times* declared that the country would be 'plunged into a welter of anarchy'. The *Christian Advocate* viewed the episode in an entirely different light, claiming that the government had expected 'to steal a march on Ulster' on the 19 of the month, by flooding the province with troops and sailing cruisers into the Belfast Lough, precipitating the resignation of Brigadier-General Gough at the

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[196] *Ibid.*, 12 March 1914.
[197] *Ibid.*, 19 March 1914.
[198] *Ibid.*, 26 March 1914.

Curragh.[199] This, they alleged, demonstrated the willingness of the Liberal administration, 'if necessary, [to] deluge it [Ulster] in blood' and furthermore, at 'a time when Ulster was perfectly quiet'. The newspaper claimed that the assertion that the government was taking 'precautionary measures', strained their credulity too much. The journal did, however, mitigate its damning condemnation of the government in the following week, when they reported that there had been 'much change for the better' in the political situation.[200] Noting that rather than ordering the troops to invade Ulster, General Paget had 'only' asked Gough, whether his officers would 'do their duty', and 'if permission to temporarily withdraw [was] given to officers from Ulster' how many this would affect? The hysterical tone of the *Advocate's* initial reaction to the unfolding events demonstrates the fear and distrust that the crisis was engendering. The more measured tone of the second piece absolved the government of immediate plans to impose Home Rule by force. But the editor clearly did not approve of the Ulster Unionist Council statement that accused the government of 'concocting a scheme which would have dyed Ulster in blood', noting that Carson was too clever to be a signatory of a document that could not be proven.[201]

The introduction of the amending bill in May 1914, which would provide for counties to opt out of Home Rule for six years, did little to ease to political pressure. The *Methodist Times* was concerned at the proposals to divide Ireland; rhetorically asking 'where should the exclusion border be drawn'?[202] The journal questioned whether the exclusion should be on the basis of the historic boundaries of Ulster, should include all Protestant-majority counties, or should occur on a more localised basis thereby dividing the counties of Tyrone and Fermanagh. Despite these difficulties, the *Methodist Times* asserted that 'the task ought not to be insuperable' if undertaken by John Redmond and Sir Edward Carson with the genuine desire to reach agreement. It believed that the situation could not be solved by British politicians, but only by the Irish representatives. Regarding a time limit on exclusion, the journal opined that 'if Ulster is not to be coerced at the start it cannot be coerced at the

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[199] *Christian Advocate*, 27 March 1914.
[200] *Ibid.*, 3 April 1914.
[201] *Ibid.*, 24 April 1914.
[202] *Methodist Times*, 21 May 1914.

finish', as this would only encourage Orange resistance in the excluded area. This appears to indicate the recognition by the London-based newspaper of the likelihood of the situation escalating into civil war, and reflects a desire to avoid that eventuality. The decision of the Liberal administration to make special provision for Ulster thus signalled to British Methodists that the situation had shifted from a case where the attainment of the principle of Irish independence was possible, to one where civil war was probable unless special provision was made for all, or part of Ulster. It was, therefore, seen as right for the government to abandon coercion as a policy, the new constitutional arrangement, they asserted, 'must start with goodwill and consent' if it was to have any chance of success. In such circumstances, the 'most reasonable compromise' appeared to the *Methodist Times* to be that 'Ulster should remain outside Home Rule until such time as a scheme of general devolution, misnamed federalism, has been adopted for the whole of the United Kingdom'.[203] This marks a significant modification of the periodical's previous attitude towards Home Rule, which it had anticipated as applying to the whole of the island. This acceptance of the exclusion of Ulster demonstrates the aversion of the journal to the prospect of civil war, and desire to avert that eventuality if at all possible. However, the promotion of a scheme for devolution across the United Kingdom indicated that the *Methodist Times* still believed that some form of Home Rule would be viable in Ulster in the future.

The *Christian Advocate* condemned the proposal to exclude six counties of Ulster for six years as 'worse than useless'. They declared that such a proposal would not alleviate the situation, not assist in a resolution, but to the contrary, the 'agitation would go on in the interval, and would be almost sure to end in civil war'.[204] Even if this worse case scenario did not occur, the *Advocate* was convinced that all business in the excluded counties would come to a 'standstill' because of the uncertainty, and risk economically crippling the area. The journal rested its hopes that the amending bill might be if both Irish Nationalist and Unionist MPs abstained from voting on the basis that dividing the country was unacceptable. Meanwhile, the editor exhorted all 'Christian people ... to pray ... save our country from fratricidal strife'. The hope

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[203] *Ibid.*
[204] *Christian Advocate*, 15 May 1914.

that a compromise could be reached on the question of Ulster was undermined by Carson's speech to the Women's Unionist Association in early June that while there was 'still a hope' in the amending bill he had 'but little faith' in Balfour's negotiations, expecting that when the results were produced 'they would find nothing more than a putrid skeleton of some past rejected offer'.[205]

The annual Methodist Conference met at the end of June 1914 with the political outlook particularly grim. It was thus inevitable that Home Rule was a key concern of delegates, despite the agreement reached in 1912 to keep the question 'out of the Church'.[206] The President of the Conference received a deputation from the Continuation Committee of the Methodist Demonstration and the 'Layman's Union' of Belfast[207] requesting that the Conference 'express in the strongest and most solemn manner our opposition to the present Home Rule bill'.[208] This was not met by uncritical approval, with the *Methodist Recorder* expressing its displeasure that the 1912 agreement had been broken and the *Methodist Times* suggesting that the reception of the delegation was an unwarranted 'new departure' that had not been permitted by J. H. Rigg during his presidential year of 1893.[209] The *Christian Advocate,* in the meantime, while broadly supporting the aims of the resolution, noted that prior to the Conference convening, there had been considerable concern that a discussion of Home Rule would 'lead to great diversity of opinion and not a little bad blood' among delegates, and that for this reason the President had only reluctantly consented to receive the delegation.[210]

During the debate, the Rev. George Wedgwood, chairman of the Continuation Committee, moved a resolution that those assembled 'reaffirm the action of 1912 and pledging the Conference to continued opposition of Home Rule'.[211] Dublin JP, Richard Booth, however, suggested that this should be amended to affirm the

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[205] *Ibid.*, 5 June 1914.
[206] *Methodist Recorder*, 2 July 1914.
[207] This group was a branch of a devotional society within Irish Methodism dedicated to encouraging active lay involvement in denominational life.
[208] *Daily Christian Advocate*, 22 June 1914 and *Methodist Times*, 25 June 1914. From 1910 the *Christian Advocate* was published in daily edition for the duration of the Conference.
[209] *Methodist Recorder*, 2 July 1914 and *Methodist Times*, 25 June 1914.
[210] *Daily Christian Advocate*, 26 June 1914.
[211] *Ibid.*, and *Methodist Recorder*, 25 June 1914.

resolution of 1912 and express the hope that 'a peaceful settlement by consent will be arrived at, and one honourable and satisfactory to the people of Ulster'.[212] But this amendment was defeated by 143 votes to 110. A second amendment was proposed by another lay delegate, Mr A. M. Kerr, who proposed that the phrase 'continued opposition' be removed from the resolution and replaced with one recognising that a majority of Irish Methodists were opposed to Home Rule. This amendment was accepted by 188 votes to 61, with the *Christian Advocate* expressing surprise that any vote at all was required on this issue.[213]

The final resolution expressed the deep concern of the Conference regarding the 'intense gravity of the crisis' that had been precipitated by the Home Rule bill and that it had 'repeatedly and strongly declared its conviction that such a bill is unnecessary and perilous to the spiritual, social and commercial welfare of the country'.[214] It was recognised that the resolution represented 'the unchanged views of the majority of Irish Methodists' and exhorted members to 'daily lay the matter in faith before God, specially seeking that our King and Parliament may be Divinely guided to a just, wise and speedy settlement'. This clearly demonstrates the anxiety that was felt at the peak of the crisis, and it is particularly notable that, unlike in previous crises, no dissenting voices were recorded. Moreover, all the Methodist organs acknowledged that the resolution did indeed reflect the views of a majority of Irish Methodists, despite the British journals regretting that the matter had again been discussed at the Conference.[215]

The Conference coincided with the continued passage of the amending bill through parliament. The House of Lords substitution of the clause permitting the exclusion of six counties for six years, for one permanently excluding the whole of Ulster, created an impasse in parliament as such provision was completely unacceptable to the Irish Nationalists. This was greeted by the *Methodist Times* as the defeat of the 'die-hards' within Unionism in favour of the moderates. However, it stated that

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[212] *Daily Christian Advocate*, 26 June 1914.
[213] *Ibid.*, and *Methodist Recorder*, 25 June 1914.
[214] *ICM*, 1914.
[215] *Christian Advocate*, 26 June 1914; *Methodist Times*, 26 June 1914; and *Methodist Recorder*, 25 June 1914.

although such an exclusion was useful as a tactic for 'staving off strife and of gaining time ... it cannot be the last word upon the subject'.[216] The journal suggested that while it would be acceptable to extend the exclusion for an indefinite number of years, all parties should recognise that a permanent arrangement, apart from exclusion, must be found, claiming that the actions of the Unionist leaders would 'haunt' them in the future. The *Christian Advocate* was also somewhat ambivalent in its response, suggesting that while Carson would probably accept permanent exclusion as the basis of peace, he was currently in denial about the severity of the situation.[217] Nevertheless, the Belfast-based journal articulated the belief that the option of permanent exclusion made the 'outlook a little more hopeful than it was' although also noting that 'the prospect of peace is not as reassuring as could be wished'. Despite their criticism of Carson's inability to grasp the political reality of the situation, the *Advocate* blamed only Redmond for the failure of the Buckingham Palace Conference, stating that he 'will not, and dare not, yield' being the hostage of his extreme Nationalists.[218] The political process having reached stalemate, and violence within Ireland rapidly mounting, the country looked as if it was rapidly heading towards civil war. This situation was only averted by the outbreak of the European war, which overshadowed domestic concerns. The eclipse of Home Rule as the major political issue of the day was reflected in the Methodist press: both the *Methodist Times* and the *Methodist Recorder* immediately turned their attention to the role of the churches during the military crisis.[219] Curiously, the *Christian Advocate* did not mark the declaration of war on Germany in their issue of 7 August, instead it focussed on the debates of the British Conference. This may have been an attempt to avoid commenting on Redmond's speech in the House of Commons on 3 August where he suggested the amalgamation of the two Volunteer movements for the defence of Ireland. This was a very divisive speech for Unionists because while southern unionists were prepared to accept Redmond's sincerity, Ulster Unionists

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[216] *Methodist Times*, 9 July 1914.
[217] *Christian Advocate*, 3 July 1914.
[218] The Buckingham Palace conference was an all-party forum convened by George V between 21 and 24 July 1914, in an attempt to negotiate an acceptable agreement regarding Home Rule based on the full or partial exclusion of Ulster.
[219] *Methodist Times*, 6 August 1914 and *Methodist Recorder*, 6 August 1914.

were highly suspicious of the Nationalist leader's motives.[220] The *Advocate* was therefore attempting to avoid controversy and foster a sense of Methodist unity.

Conclusion

When assessing the role of Methodism during the third Home Rule crisis, what is most remarkable is not what was done, but what was *not done*. *In contrast to the* previous two Home Rule episodes, and considering the third crisis stretched over three years, there were very few specifically Methodist initiatives. Moreover, unlike 1886 and 1894 where clergy led the Methodist opposition to the bills, in 1912-14 the laity were much more prominent in articulating Methodist commitment to Unionism, including, for the first time, women. The most prominent speaker at the Methodist Demonstration in March 1912 was a layman; and, while the Rev. William Crawford chaired the Continuation Committee, the Secretaries were all laymen. Moreover, the request from that Committee for Home Rule to be discussed at the 1914 Conference was instigated by a meeting of the Belfast Layman's Union. Similarly, it is notable that relatively few eligible ministers signed the Ulster Covenant in September 1912, and that there was no significant support for Home Rule within the Conference. This is in marked contrast to 1893 when a majority of Methodist ministers had signed *A Grave Crisis*.

The Methodist press also displayed this slight discomfort concerning the third Home Rule crisis. While there is no doubt that the *Christian Advocate* remained opposed to Home Rule, in contrast to its actions during the first and second crises, on this occasion the journal strove to keep its tone moderate, avoiding the glorification the actions of Unionist paramilitary groups and continuing to publish the correspondence of the minority of its readership that supported Home Rule. The newspaper even published a gracious obituary of Jeremiah Jordan on his death in December 1911, a man they had previously declared in 1886 to have forfeited the right to call himself a Methodist. The attitudes of the two British journals reflected the apathy of British nonconformity on the Home Rule issue. Apart from the National Unionist Association, which had only a fraction of the influence it had exerted in 1893, there was no great passion for either position in the Home Rule

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[220] Thomas Hennessy, *Dividing Ireland: World War One and partition*, (London, 1998), pp49-56.

debate. Nonconformity was no longer unanimously Liberal, and the Irish question was no longer perceived to be a great moral issue, thus the shaping of the bill was left to politicians.[221] Therefore, while the *Methodist Times* continued to actively support Home Rule, it did not consider it to be the pre-eminent issue of the day, but more a debt to be discharged and the tone of its coverage lost much of the stridency that had characterised Hughes' editorials. By comparison, the *Methodist Recorder* opted not to engage with the controversy, refusing to print contentious correspondence and permitting the publication of Unionist protests only through paid advertisements. Only two events induced them to break this silence: Carson's speech on Ulster Day 1913 when they condemned the militaristic tone of the Unionist leader and the anti-Home Rule resolutions of the Irish Conference of 1914 to which they objected on the basis of bringing politics into the Church.

The apparent temerity of Methodists to assert their opinions regarding Home Rule appears in sharp contrast to the previous episodes. Although not specifically cited as the cause of their reticence, two issues in particular, which were unique to the third crisis, clearly weighed on the minds of many prominent Methodist ministers. Firstly, the political strategy of the Unionist leadership was increasingly focussed on winning concessions from the Liberal administration regarding Ulster's exceptional status as a majority Protestant and Unionist province. This was problematic for the Conference as 22 per cent of Irish Methodists resided outside of Ulster, and the Church, as an institution, would have to come to terms with a Home Rule assembly even if Ulster was granted exclusion.[222] The official association of the Connexion with Ulster Unionism could have caused much bitterness among southern Methodists and cultivated the perception that they were being abandoned to their fate among a hostile people, without any support from their Church. This also partially explains the predominance of the laity in Methodist protests, since they were permanently resident in a locality they could afford to associate themselves with regional politics. The clergy, by contrast, were bound by the itinerancy system to move around the country every three years. Most ministers active in 1912, therefore, could expect to move circuits before 1915, and serve somewhere in the

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[221] Bebbington, *The nonconformist conscience*, pp103-5.
[222] *Census Ire., 1911.*

southern three provinces before retirement. Consequently, in an effort to avoid internal strife, and in the knowledge that Methodism was nationwide, Methodist ministers chose not to formally ally the Connexion with the Ulster Unionist movement.

The second restraining factor influencing the official Methodist position was the increased threat of civil war. The military rhetoric in Carson's speeches intensified during the course of the crisis, and tensions were exacerbated by the creation of the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Irish Volunteers and the apparent willingness (prior to the Curragh mutiny) of the Government to employ the British Army to implement Home Rule in Ulster. Although violence, or threats of violence, had been a common feature of Irish politics during the nineteenth century, Methodism had always condemned those tactics, encouraging its members to influence events through the electoral system and public office. Moreover, because of the precarious situation of Methodism in the eighteenth century, Wesley had bequeathed to his Connexion the principle of loyalty to the duly constituted government, and respect for law and order. This had been recognised by the Lord Lieutenant in Ireland during the 1798 rebellion, when he exempted the Methodist Conference from the ban of gatherings of more than five men.[223] Methodism thus had no concept of the 'conditional loyalty' tradition of Ulster Presbyterianism, and which became such a notable feature of Ulster Unionist rhetoric and preparations for resisting Home Rule. However, many Methodists objected to the principle of Home Rule, and feared its consequences, having no doubt that the Westminster Parliament had the authority to enact such a measure.

The third crisis was, therefore, quite different in tone and trajectory to the previous two Home Rule episodes. All the major protagonists of 1886 and 1893, both religious and political, had died in the intervening years, introducing a whole new cast into the controversy. Home Rule was not instigated as an integral part of a reforming programme or moral campaign as had been the case with Gladstone, but as a matter of parliamentary expediency honouring a previous commitment. Moreover, from a Methodist perspective, while British nonconformity still believed

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[223] Cooney, *The Methodists of Ireland,* pp51-2.

that it held a position of particular influence with the Liberal Party, the post-Gladstonian leaders had little interest in a religious alliance and nonconformity was hindered by its own internal divisions on political issues. The inherent weakness of British nonconformity on the political stage was demonstrated by its ineffectual opposition to the Conservative-sponsored 1902 Education Act, confirmed by the Liberals' failure to seriously pursue educational reform after their return to power in 1906. Thus, while it was often assumed by Methodists on both sides of the Irish Sea that British nonconformity would have a decisive voice in deciding Home Rule, this no longer reflected reality. The tide of British politics was turning from the relatively brief period under Gladstone when religion was married to politics, and towards the driving force of twentieth-century politics: the Labour movement.

The two issues of violence and partition that were at the centre of the third crisis were particularly problematic for Methodism in Britain and Ireland. The threat of civil war was abhorrent to the Church and contradicted their desire for peaceful reform. There was no concept of 'conditional loyalty' within the Methodist Connexion of Britain and Ireland, and most were sincerely committed to the British tradition of representative government. Partition was equally challenging for the Church, which perceived itself as a national institution, and as a branch of the worldwide Methodist mission, called to minister evangelical religion to the Catholic population of Ireland. This, combined with one fifth of the Methodist membership residing in the south of the country, meant that the Connexion could not just retreat into Ulster as the Presbyterian Church seemed wont to do. The contribution of the Methodist Church to the third Home Rule crisis was consequently relatively modest, and probably had little impact on events. The analysis presented here demonstrates, however, that the Irish Protestant Churches were neither completely unified nor as unreserved in their support of Home Rule as is frequently portrayed. By 1912, the ecumenical ventures that had played such a significant role in the second Home Rule episode had been superseded by the independent political organisation, the Ulster Unionist Council and its women's counterpart, the Ulster Women's Unionist Council. While it suited these organisations to adopt and distribute literature produced by the Churches, such as the facsimiles of Whitla's speech at the Methodist demonstration, it was not a

reciprocal arrangement. The Methodist Church in Ireland had no desire to directly align itself with the Councils, preferring to steer a more neutral course as events progressed. Individual Methodists were at liberty to actively participate in any political organisation as their conscience directed, but the Conference retreated from the front line of opposition to Home Rule, finding solace in Wesley's 'no politics' ruling.

Conclusion

The period 1867-1914 was characterised by an increased Methodist involvement in the political affairs of both Great Britain and Ireland. The emergence of the 'nonconformist conscience' as a feature in British political life was confirmed in 1891, when British nonconformists forced the resignation of the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, Charles Stewart Parnell. But the nonconformist conscience actually developed from the mid-1860s.[1] The revelations of the 1851 English religious census that Methodism was the second largest denomination in the country and the enfranchisement of a significant proportion of English nonconformists in 1867 encouraged British Methodists to exert their influence on government. This was further reinforced by the election of William Gladstone as Prime Minister in 1868, as he was known to be sympathetic to the ideal of religious ethics driving the political life of the nation.[2] This influence, while at its peak during the periods of Gladstone's premiership, had a residual effect in the early years of the twentieth century, until overtaken by the rise of labour and the advent of democracy.

Traditionally, Methodism in Ireland and Britain adhered to the Wesleyan precept that there should be 'no politics' in the Church, although comment on the morality of the nation was permitted. The late nineteenth century saw the emergence of individuals, notably the Liberal leader Gladstone and within Methodism Hugh Price Hughes, who challenged the customary understanding of what constituted a moral issue in political life. Some questions were rapidly accepted as comprising a moral aspect: education; the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts; the liquor and opium trades; gambling; and the character of politicians. Others, however, proved more controversial. Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, and, by implication, the disestablishment of the other national churches, while a major issue for many English nonconformists collected under the banner of the Liberation Society, was rejected by the Wesleyans as not constituting an issue on which they should directly comment. Home Rule was particularly a problematic case. Most Methodists in the

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[1] Bebbington, *The nonconformist conscience.*
[2] Bebbington, 'Gladstone and the Nonconformists', pp369-382.

United Kingdom accepted that it included a significant ethical element, with few consistently arguing that constitutional affairs amounted to a purely political issue. Irish and British Methodists were, however, deeply divided on whether it was a moral imperative that a Dublin legislature should be instituted, or to the contrary, that the moral and religious life of the nation would be irreparably harmed if a Home Rule bill should pass into law. This conflict was never satisfactorily resolved.

Irish Methodists were quick to recognise the influence of their English brethren on policy makers and attempted to impress upon them the realities of the Irish situation that it might be relayed to Westminster. This was particularly effective regarding the 1870 Education Act, as can be determined through the correspondence of William Arthur, Principal of Methodist College, Belfast, with his friend and colleague J. H. Rigg, chair of the British Methodist Education Committee. Arthur revealed to Rigg the difficulties of the Irish situation, and how they would be exacerbated if denominational schooling were commended by the Act. This strategy of conveying Irish Methodist concerns to the Liberal government through the agency of the British Church was the first course of action taken when Home Rule appeared on the agenda in 1885. Irish Methodists appealed to their English co-religionists to consider the future of Protestantism in Ireland, should a Dublin legislature be instituted.[3] It is important to note that, partially because of the surprise appearance of Home Rule on the political agenda, Irish Methodists did not immediately seek the assistance of other Irish Protestant denominations in campaigning against the bill, but rather relied on existing channels of communication and fellowship for support. Unlike in 1870, however, the request for assistance had little impact on British Methodist support for Home Rule, where the London-based journal the *Methodist Times* campaigned vigorously in favour of the Nationalist proposals.[4] Consequently, although a petition was sent to British Methodist ministers in 1893, the main drive of opposition to Home Rule was channelled elsewhere, principally into the Ulster Convention of 1892.[5] This shift from regarding their sister Church in Great Britain as their foremost ally in political affairs, to developing alliances with other Protestant

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[3] Arthur, *Shall the loyal be deserted?*.
[4] See for example, *Methodist Times*, 15 April 1886.
[5] Arthur *et al.*, *A Grave Crisis*.

Churches is a key feature of the second Home Rule episode, not having developed by 1886, and not being repeated during the third crisis.

The actions of Methodists during the period 1912-14 were qualitatively different from those of their previous political forays. Firstly, the leadership of Methodist opposition to Home Rule was primarily lay, not clerical. Whereas throughout the nineteenth century the Methodist response to political affairs had been defined by senior ministers in the Conference, opposition during the third Home Rule crisis was a popular and populist movement. The defining moment of Methodist resistance to the third bill was the mass Methodist demonstration at the Ulster Hall in March 1912, organised by a committee consisting mainly of laymen and purporting to represent the entire 62,000 Methodists resident on the island.[6] By contrast, the official, and semi-official, organs of the Church, the Conference, the Committee of Privileges, the *Christian Advocate* and many ministers forbore to express their political views with the vehemence displayed in 1886 and 1893. While it is difficult to ascertain with absolute certainty the reason for this, it is nevertheless clear that the spectre of partition and the threat of civil war weighed heavily on ministerial minds. This was especially pertinent to Irish Methodism, which as a national church, needed to prepare itself to work under whatever new constitutional arrangements might emerge from the crisis. Moreover, on a personal level clergy active in 1912-14 could be fairly confident that they would at some point in the remainder of their career be posted outside of Ulster and effectively minister to a congregation potentially suffering from a sense of abandonment by the Ulster Unionist movement. During the period 1912-14, the Methodist Church of Ireland did not subscribe to the political rhetoric of Ulster Unionism, but as an organisation it played a distinct role in the campaign against the third Home Rule bill. Methodist protests were adopted and used by Ulster Unionists to enhance their own campaign, while individual Methodist members were, of course, at liberty to express their political views in any manner that their conscience permitted.

While it is clear that a majority of Irish Methodists during all three Home Rule crises were adamantly opposed to the establishment of a Dublin assembly, Nationalist

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[6] *Christian Advocate*, 8 March 1912.

dissenters within Methodist ranks always existed. The development of attitudes towards these individuals over the course of the period illuminates the extent to which Methodists were prepared to tolerate dissent. In 1885, the *Christian Advocate* considered it legitimate to question Jeremiah Jordan's right to self-identify as a Methodist because of his membership of the Irish Parliamentary Party, reporting his death in 1911 they glowingly described him as 'an ardent temperance reformer, and a loyal Methodist' although glossing over his political career.[7] While no less opposed to the political views of Jordan in 1912 than in 1885, in later years the *Christian Advocate* was no longer as adamant that there was only one possible political outlook for Irish Methodists. Rather they tolerated a greater degree of diversity among the membership. Moreover, despite the opposition of a majority of Irish Methodists to Home Rule, supporting a change in Ireland's constitutional status was no bar to a minister rising to the highest positions in the Irish Church. For example, the noted proponent of Home Rule, the Rev. William Crawford was elected Vice-President of the Conference twice during the period, in 1900 and 1907. Conversely, it is notable that in the years of the Home Rule crises, the Conference was careful to elect ministers of known Unionist sympathies to the post of Vice-President: William Gorman in 1892, William Guard in 1893, and George R. Wedgwood in 1912. The Vice-Presidents of 1913 and 1914, Samuel T. Boyd and William R. Budd respectively, had kept aloof from the debates on Home Rule, but can be assumed to have been inclined to Unionism given the lack of opposition to the anti-Home Rule resolution at the Conference of 1914. Consequently, it appears reasonable to conclude that, except at moments of intense crisis, there was a widespread acceptance of political diversity within the denomination. As a correspondent of the *Christian Advocate* observed in 1886: the Nationalist Methodist was 'a *rara avis*, but of course perfectly entitled to his opinion'.[8]

The political breach between majority opinion in Irish and British Methodism was arguably of greater significance than the few dissenting voices with the Irish Church. Because of its diminutive numerical size, Irish Methodism was frequently depicted as

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[7] *Christian Advocate*, 18 December 1885 and 5 January 1912.
[8] *Ibid.*, 22 January 1886.

a 'lowly vine, of slender stem, struggling in unfriendly soil'.[9] The use of this metaphor reveals, however, that Irish Methodism also considered itself to be a branch of a greater whole, a 'fruitful vine whose branches run over the wall' through the emigration of its members to Churches abroad, but also sustained by its connexional relationship to more successful Methodist manifestations, in the first instance in Britain.[10] The relationship with the British connexion was particularly intimate, both because of geographical proximity but also through sharing a president and an identical ecclesial structure. The case of the Education Act of 1870 demonstrates the expectation of Irish Methodists that, when fully apprised of the facts, the British Conference would move to support their weaker sister Church. This expectation was still present when Home Rule appeared on the agenda, but on this occasion British Methodists held to their own analysis of the situation, which often contradicted that of their Irish co-religionists. This was perceived in Ireland as gross betrayal, and tantamount to the abandonment of the Methodist mission in Ireland, causing the *Christian Advocate* to publicly express concerns about the reliability of British Methodism as portrayed by the *Methodist Times*.[11] It therefore seems remarkable that there was no decisive split on an ecclesiastical level between the two connexions. Throughout the period, the role of President to the British and Irish Conferences was held jointly, and fraternal greetings and representatives crossed the Irish Sea. Likewise, the two Churches remained completely unified on matters of doctrine and ecclesiology. When the Irish Conference introduced innovations of admitting lay representatives to Conference in 1877, the British did likewise the following year.[12] Similarly, both Conferences passed resolutions to admit women representatives to the Conference in 1910.[13] Fundamentally, Methodism was a distinctive theology and ecclesiology; despite the power of the 'nonconformist conscience' politics did not define Methodist identity, nor was it permitted to sour connexional relations. This essential unity of understanding regarding the core of Methodism also explains why Irish Methodists instinctively looked to other Methodists for support, rather than to other Protestant

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[9] Arthur, *An Explanation by the Rev William Arthur*, p.10.
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] *Christian Advocate*, 22 January 1886.
[12] *ICM, 1877* and *WCM, 1878.*
[13] *ICM, 1910* and *WCM, 1910.*

denominations within Ireland, with whom they still had significant theological differences. This connexional affection also explains why political cooperation with the other Protestant Churches in Ireland was a relatively short-lived phenomenon, with Irish Methodists considering their denominational identity more important than the creation of a pan-Protestant alliance.

Throughout the period of 1867-1914 Irish Methodism principally defined itself as a distinct ecclesial unit within the Irish religious landscape. It perceived its role as evangelical mission on a national, and international, stage. The identity of Irish Methodism was intertwined with its relationship with its British counterpart, with the Irish Protestant aspect only developing relatively late, and only fleetingly. Theologically, the Irish Methodist Church was not prepared to act without a wider Methodist consensus; politically, it sought to influence groups whose values corresponded with their own, cooperating with loose coalitions so long as their own aims were met. Thus, while the 'nonconformist conscience' had little resonance in the Irish context, Irish Methodists were nevertheless prepared to use the influence of the church in Great Britain to promote its own concerns. Similarly, when it was convenient to present a united Protestant front to British public opinion in pursuit of their own aims, Irish Methodist ministers were eager to cooperate, withdrawing when the movement departed in directions of which they disapproved.

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