A Tender Lion

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The Life, Ministry, and Message of J. C. Ryle

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To Christie,
for your patience and encouragement

and to

Henry and Hugh,
for your love and laughter

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Preface

J. C. Ryle is the most popular and the most neglected evangelical Anglican of the Victorian era. He became the undisputed leader and spokesman of the evangelical party within the Church of England in the last half of the nineteenth century, and his works continue to be read by evangelicals of various denominational stripes more than a century after his death. Despite this popularity, he has been virtually ignored. An illuminating comparison can be made between Ryle and one of his most famous contemporaries, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. In the year that Spurgeon died (1892), at least eighteen biographies were written about him. Fewer than half that many have been written about Ryle in the 118 years since his death in 1900.

M. Guthrie Clark (1947) and G. W. Hart (1963) produced the first biographies of Ryle, but they are brief and based on minimal research. Marcus Loane published a short biography in 1953 and enlarged it in 1967 and again in 1983. Loane's biographies present Ryle as a model Christian and an example of evangelical continuity within the Church of England. While Loane's works utilize more primary- and secondary-source material than the works of either Clark or Hart, they tend to be more hagiographic and devotional than critical or scholarly.

In 1975 Reiner Publications released an autobiographical fragment Ryle composed for his family in 1873 that covered his life from 1816 to 1860. Peter Toon edited the volume, and Michael Smout added a biographical postscript that discussed Ryle's life after

1860.[1] Following its publication, Toon, Smout, and Eric Russell set out to write the definitive critical biography of Ryle but fell short of their goal. Russell was forced to abandon the project because of prior vocational commitments. Soaring production costs restricted the work to fewer than one hundred pages. Moreover, the authors concluded that a definitive life could not be written until more was known about evangelicalism in the Church of England and G. R. Balleine's *History of the Evangelical Party* was replaced. Despite these setbacks, their work remained the fullest treatment of Ryle until Eric Russell's biography replaced it in 2001.

Russell's biography, *J. C. Ryle: That Man of Granite with the Heart of a Child*, is the fullest treatment of Ryle to date. Russell presents Bishop Ryle as an exemplary church leader—one who was able to combine leadership, conviction, and compassion. Russell delves more deeply into Ryle's thought than previous biographers and uncovers new and valuable material (especially in Liverpool), but in the end Russell's work has more in common with the work of Clark, Hart, and Loane than that of Toon and Smout.

Iain H. Murray published a new biography, *J. C. Ryle: Prepared to Stand Alone*, in 2016 to commemorate the two-hundredth anniversary of Ryle's birth. It is the first major biography of Ryle written by a non-Anglican. Though it is less comprehensive than Russell's work, Murray draws new attention to Ryle's love of Puritanism; his relationship with his favorite son, Herbert Edward Ryle; and the abiding emphases of his teaching. Murray presents Ryle as a champion of biblical orthodoxy in an age of doctrinal decline. He was an exemplary evangelical, as opposed to an Anglican, for Murray is clearly unsympathetic to Ryle's churchmanship. This approach may make Ryle more accessible to some non-Anglicans, but it tends to minimize important church-related aspects of his thought and ministry.

1. Peter Toon and Michael Smout, *John Charles Ryle: Evangelical Bishop* (Swengal, Pa.: Reiner Publications, 1976), 5.

Several other studies deserve mention. Ian D. Farley's outstanding work *J. C. Ryle, First Bishop of Liverpool: A Study in Mission amongst the Masses* focuses exclusively on Ryle's episcopacy in Liverpool. John Newby systematized Ryle's theology under the traditional theological loci in an unpublished dissertation titled "The Theology of John Charles Ryle." J. I. Packer penned an appreciative and insightful survey of Ryle's life and work in *Faithfulness and Holiness: The Witness of J. C. Ryle*. David Bebbington evaluated Ryle's ministry and outlook in *The Heart of Faith: Following Christ in the Church of England*. Alan Munden contributed a short but remarkably comprehensive account of Ryle's life to the Day One Travel Guide series titled *Travel with Bishop J. C. Ryle: Prince of Tract Writers*. Andrew Atherstone has edited and published a new edition of Ryle's autobiography titled *Bishop J. C. Ryle's Autobiography: The Early Years*. It is based on the original text recently rediscovered in December 2015 among the private family archives of John Charles, prince of Sayn-Wittgestein-Berleburg, grandson of Edward Hewish Ryle and named for his great-great grandfather, Bishop John Charles Ryle. It is now the definitive edition of this critically important primary source, and it includes an expansive appendix containing a number of extremely rare documents that shed light on Ryle's early years. And Lee Gatiss has recently edited and introduced three new volumes on Ryle: *Distinctive Principles for Anglican Evangelicals* (2014), *Christian Leaders of the Seventeenth Century* (2015), and *Stand Firm and Fight On: J. C. Ryle and the Future for Anglican Evangelicals* (2016). Gatiss's introduction to *Christian Leaders* on Ryle as a historian is particularly illuminating and is the first study of its kind.

The purpose of this work is to produce the first intellectual biography of J. C. Ryle. Toon and Smout were unable to produce such a work in 1975, and in many respects, this work seeks to complete what they started. Thankfully, a number of excellent studies have shed new light on Anglican evangelicalism,[2] and Balleine's

2. See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from*

work has been replaced by Kenneth Hylson-Smith's *Evangelicals in the Church of England: 1734–1984*. Therefore, an undertaking of this kind is now possible.

The primary question of this work is, Who is J. C. Ryle? The typical answer is epitomized by the nom de plume he used in the correspondence columns of the evangelical press—"an old soldier." Both friend and foe alike regard him as an "icon of unbending traditionalism."[3] I argue that he is far more dynamic and complex, progressive and pragmatic, and creative and innovative than is often realized. Ryle simply defies simple categorization. He could be traditional, moderate, and even radical—and was called such at different times by different groups during his fifty-eight-year ministry. Perhaps the difficulty in understanding the man is attributable to the many and varied roles he played in the Victorian Church. He began his ministerial career as a rural parish priest; he ended it as the bishop of the second city of the British Empire. In the time between, he became a popular preacher, influential author, effective controversialist, recognized party leader, stalwart

the 1730s to the 1980s (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989); Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Sessions from the Via Media, 1800–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Christopher J. Cocksworth, *Evangelical Eucharistic Thought in the Church of England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); John Kent, *Holding the Fort: Studies in Victorian Revivalism* (London: Epworth Press, 1978); Doreen Roseman, *Evangelicals and Culture*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 1992); Mark Smith and Stephen Taylor, eds., *Evangelicalism in the Church of England c.1790–c.1890: A Miscellany* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell Press, 2004); Peter Toon, *Evangelical Theology 1833–1856: A Response to Tractarianism* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1979); Martin Wellings, *Evangelicals Embattled: Responses of Evangelicals in the Church of England to Ritualism, Darwinism, and Theological Liberalism 1890–1930* (Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 2003); and Anne Bentley, "The Transformation of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England in the Latter Nineteenth Century" (PhD diss., University of Durham, 1971).

3. Martin Wellings, introduction to "J. C. Ryle: 'First Words.' An Opening Address Delivered at the First Liverpool Diocesan Conference, 1881," in *Evangelicalism in the Church of England c.1790–c.1890: A Miscellany*, ed. Mark Smith and Stephen Taylor (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell Press, 2004), 286.

Church defender, and radical Church reformer. Much of the work that has been done on Ryle has focused on certain aspects of his ministry or has treated the whole more generally. As a result, some aspects of Ryle's life and work have never been discussed in detail, and others have never been discussed at all. The aim of this work is to present J. C. Ryle's thought, life, and ministry in its fullness and in context. In so doing, I hope to provide a more thorough answer to the central question of this work than has hitherto been given and shed further light on Victorian evangelicalism in general and evangelicalism within the Church of England in particular.

This volume is organized chronologically and topically. Each chapter focuses on a particular period of Ryle's life and analyzes an aspect of his thought and work, building on the previous chapter thematically. For example, Ryle's preaching in Helmingham, which is the subject of chapter 2, created a market for his pastoral writings, which is the subject of chapter 3. The work concludes with a summary of Ryle's thought and life.

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highs and lows of this project—and life, more generally—over the last eight years. Their support has been incalculable.

No words can adequately express my appreciation to my wife, Christie, and my boys, Henry and Hugh. Your sacrifice, encouragement, and faith in me have made this dream a reality.

1

Christian and Clergyman

John Charles Ryle was born on May 10, 1816, at Park House, Macclesfield. He was the fourth of six children and the eldest son. The Macclesfield of Ryle's birth was a growing factory village with a population of 17,746, according to the census of 1821.[1] It was situated on a main route from London to the northwest and was linked to the major industrial centers of Manchester and Liverpool by canals. It was home to a copper works and a number of cotton mills, but the silk industry dominated all others. The silk trade prospered during the closing decades of the eighteenth century, and that prosperity was accelerated by the Napoleonic Wars, which made French silks scarce. During these years many industrialists made a fortune in silk. John Ryle (1744–1808), Ryle's grandfather, was one of them.

Shortly before Ryle's birth, the religious character of Macclesfield was strongly Protestant, Anglican, and evangelical. Lollardy took root in Macclesfield during the fifteenth century, its forest providing a safe haven for worshipers. There is no available evidence about the town's response to the Reformation, but based on subsequent history, it was probably well received. Puritanism

1. For the history of Macclesfield, see C. Stella Davies, *A History of Macclesfield* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1961); J. P. Earwaker, *East Cheshire Past and Present: A History of the Hundred of Macclesfield, in the County of Palatine of Chester*, 2 vols. (London: J. P. Earwaker, 1877, 1880); George Ormerod, *The History of the County of Palatine and the City of Chester*, 3 vols. (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1882).

flourished in Cheshire in general and Macclesfield in particular. As early as the late sixteenth century, Puritan services, the Geneva gown, and popular religious lectures could be found in the Macclesfield church. Roman Catholicism, on the other hand, almost vanished altogether after the Reformation; it survived only in the households of a few wealthy Roman Catholic families. Given the town's Puritan sympathies, it is not surprising that it supported the Parliamentarians during the Civil War, nor is it surprising that ten ministers within the deanery of Macclesfield lost their livings as a result of the Great Ejection.

The reception of the evangelical revival in Macclesfield deserves special attention. Evangelical preaching and doctrines were first brought to the town by the itinerant John Bennet of Chinley in the early 1740s. John Wesley came in 1745 and then again in 1759. From that time on he visited regularly. One of the more remarkable features of Wesley's ministry in Macclesfield was his unusually strong relationship with the established church in the community. The vicar of St. Michael's, James Roe (1711–1765), became an evangelical late in life. David Simpson (1745–1799), the vicar of Christ Church, was an ardent and enthusiastic evangelical. He was an active pastor, prolific author, a local itinerant, and intimate friend of John Wesley. For a season, all the parish churches in Macclesfield were in evangelical hands, and local Methodists were all communicants in the Church of England.

Family

By all accounts John Ryle was a remarkable man. He became a successful silk manufacturer, prosperous landowner, and respected banker. When he died in 1808, he left his son, J. C. Ryle's father, somewhere between 250,000 and 500,000 pounds. John's success also extended to the political sphere. He was elected alderman and then mayor of Macclesfield. He was also a committed evangelical Christian, Methodist, and philanthropist. His mother had been converted after hearing John Wesley preach in 1745, and through her

influence he became a Christian. Wesley and Ryle became intimate friends, and Wesley often stayed at Ryle's home when he visited Macclesfield, which he did regularly from 1759 until his death in 1791.[2] Ryle provided the site for the construction of a Methodist meetinghouse in 1764 and the land and the funds for another in 1779. J. C. Ryle never knew his grandfather or his grandmother; both died before he was born. He spoke of them and their evangelical faith with great admiration in his autobiography, however.[3]

The parents of J. C. Ryle, John Ryle (1783–1862) and Susanna Hurt, form an interesting contrast with his grandparents. Both Ryle's grandfather and father were professional successes. Ryle's father continued to run the lucrative family silk business. He purchased more land and properties and expanded the family's holdings. He also took over a failing bank in 1800 and made it profitable for decades. Both Ryle's grandfather and father were interested in politics and public service. Ryle's father was elected mayor of Macclesfield in 1809 and 1810. He became the first MP for Macclesfield elected under the reformed Parliament in 1832, and he held that seat until 1837.[4] He later became the high sheriff of Cheshire. Before his bank crashed in 1841, he was so excessively popular that he was practically the "king of the place."[5] Ryle's mother, Susanna, also came from a wealthy, land-owning family. She was related to Sir Richard Arkwright, the inventor of the

2. John Wesley often mentioned these visits in his journals. See *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock, 8 vols. (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1909–1916), 4:310; 6:14, 100, 226, 411; 7:300. For more information about Methodism in Macclesfield, see Benjamin Smith, *Methodism in Macclesfield* (London: Wesley Conference Office, 1875); and R. B. Walker, "Religious Changes in Cheshire, 1750–1850," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 17 (1966): 77–94.

3. See J. C. Ryle, *Bishop J. C. Ryle's Autobiography: The Early Years*, ed. Andrew Atherstone (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2016), 6.

4. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 5.

5. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 5.

spinning jenny. But neither John nor Susanna showed much interest in spiritual matters.

Ryle recorded in his autobiography that his home was destitute of real spiritual religion. Family prayers were almost never said. His father's spiritual instruction consisted of showing the children pictures in an old Bible on sleepless Sunday nights. His mother's spiritual instruction consisted of nothing more than occasionally listening to the children recite the Church catechism in "a very grave and rather gloomy manner."[6] Sometimes the elderly members of the family read sermons silently on winter Sunday nights, but they looked so "unutterably grave and miserable" that Ryle concluded sermons must be dull and religion must be disagreeable.[7] His first governess was a Socinian, and none of her successors had "any real spirituality about them."[8] The Christian Sabbath was not kept, they had no religious friends or family members, and no Christians ever visited them or brought them any religious books or tracts.[9]

The family regularly attended Christ Church, which was one of only two parish churches in Macclesfield. For a brief period, both churches had evangelical incumbents, which was unusual for the time.[10] They were not, however, succeeded by evangelical clergymen. Ryle described the incumbents of St. Michael's and Christ Church of his childhood as "wretched high and dry sticks of the old school" and remarked, "I can truly say that I passed through childhood and boyhood without hearing a single sermon likely

6. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 62–66.

7. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 62.

8. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 64.

9. Ryle said that the only two books that affected him as a child were Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Mrs. Sherwood's *Conversations on the Church Catechism*.

10. Charles Row, the incumbent of St. Michael's, had an evangelical conversion late in life. David Simpson, the minister of Christ Church from 1779 to 1799, was an outspoken evangelical, popular preacher, and energetic pastor. He regularly allowed John Wesley to preach in his pulpit. See Mark Smith, "David Simpson," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 683–84.

to do good to my soul."[11] He was brought up to regard evangelical clergymen as "well-meaning, extravagant, fanatical enthusiasts, who carried things a great deal too far in religion."[12]

Ryle summed up the spiritual condition of his family and childhood as follows:

> The plain truth is that neither in my own family nor among the Hurts or Arkwrights with whom I was most mixed up when young can I remember that there was a whit of what may be called a real spiritual religion. There was literally nothing to make us young people thorough Christians. We never heard the gospel preached on Sunday and vital Christianity was never brought before us by anybody from the beginning of the year to the end or on a weekday.[13]

Education

Ryle was a precocious child and an eager learner. Isaac Eaton, the clerk of St. Michael's, taught him to read, write, and cipher at an early age. Miss Holland, his sister's Unitarian governess, instructed him in the rudiments of Latin as well. By the age of four he had become a proficient reader and was extremely fond of books, especially books about travel, natural history, military battles, and shipwrecks.[14]

In 1824, at the age of eight, Ryle was sent to a preparatory school run by John Jackson, vicar of Over. This was not a happy time in his life. The accommodations were rough and uncomfortable. He was one of seventeen pupils who were lodged in two rooms and shared one washroom. He later remarked, "Of course at

11. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 63.

12. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 64.

13. Ryle, *Autobiography,* 64.

14. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 20. Military battles and seafaring remained a lifelong fascination for Ryle. He regularly used military and maritime illustrations in his sermons.

this rate we could not be very clean."[15] There was also a great deal of "petty bullying and tyranny." For example, with the master's permission, he was tossed in a blanket by the older boys for not rising with the rest of the students. He was thrown to the ceiling and then fell to the floor when a student let go of one corner of the blanket. He suffered a concussion and was sick for some time, but the incident was hushed up and his family was never told.[16] Furthermore, the pupils were often left unsupervised for long periods of time while Rev. Jackson attended to the needs of his parish.

In terms of academics, things were more tolerable. The students were well grounded in Latin and Greek. They were also taught writing, arithmetic, history, geography, French, and dancing. The two most popular sports were cricket and stone throwing, and Ryle excelled at both. Religious instruction was nonexistent, and as a result, the moral condition of the school was deplorable. He later recalled, "As to the religion at the private school there was literally none at all, and I really think we were nothing better than little devils. I can find no other words to express my recollection of our utter ungodliness and boyish immorality."[17]

Ryle's three and a half years at Jackson's preparatory school gave him a good grounding in Latin and Greek; produced a sturdy, independent, and combative young man;[18] and laid a good foundation for future academic success at Eton and beyond. From a moral and spiritual standpoint, however, his education was a complete failure. He recollected, "I am quite certain that I learned more moral evil in a private school then I ever did in my whole life afterwards and most decidedly got no moral good."[19]

15. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 23–24.

16. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 24.

17. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 66.

18. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 25: "I don't think I was an ill-natured, bad-tempered boy, but I was sturdy, very independent and combative. I had a very strong opinion of my own, and never cared a bit for being a minority, and was ready to fight anybody however big if necessary."

19. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 26.

The King's College of Our Lady of Eton beside Windsor was founded by Henry IV in 1440 to combat heresy and provide a clerical education for the middle class.[20] When Ryle entered in January 1828, it was doing neither. His classmates were hardly middle class. Most of them were the sons of noblemen, aristocrats, or the rich and well connected. Religion had no place in the curriculum. The headmaster of the school was the infamous Dr. John Keate, who stands out in the public mind as the supreme symbolic figure of the old unreformed Eton.[21] Keate was an excellent classical scholar, a poet, and an accomplished teacher, but he is probably best remembered for his savage floggings. The curriculum under Keate was exclusively, narrowly, and monotonously classical. Homer, Virgil, and Horace were read in extenso. Under Keate, a student could expect to read through the *Iliad* and *Aeneid* twice during his tenure at Eton. Translations from books of extracts, such as *Scriptores Graeci*, *Scriptores Latini*, and *Scriptores Romani* rounded out the curriculum. Mathematics was optional. History, English literature, and geography were studied only insofar as they had a bearing on the classics. The only natural science that was offered consisted of occasional guest lectures. Religious instruction was nonexistent and even discouraged until the Duke of Newcastle established a scholarship to encourage the study of divinity in 1829.[22]

20. For two of the best histories of Eton, see H. C. Maxwell Lyte, *A History of Eton College 1440–1875* (London: Macmillan, 1877); and Christopher Hollis, *Eton: A History* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1960). See also William Lucas Collins, *Etoniana, Ancient and Modern* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1865); Lionel Cust, *A History of Eton College* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899); Wasey Sterry, *Annals of the King's College of Our Lady of Eton beside Windsor* (London: Methuen, 1898); and Francis St. John Thackeray, *Memoir of Edward Craven Hawtrey D.D., Headmaster and Afterward Provost of Eton* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1896).

21. Hollis, *Eton: A History*, 191.

22. Keate's antagonism to religious instruction has been well documented. John Bird Sumner, the archbishop of Canterbury, was forbidden "from saying a single word about God to his pupils" while serving as an assistant master at Eton from 1802 to 1817. Every Sunday afternoon between two and three all the boys

Upon entering Eton, students were divided into groups, or houses. Ryle was assigned to Hawtrey's House, which was named for the assistant master Edward Craven Hawtrey.[23] This assignment was extremely fortunate for the young student. By all accounts, Hawtrey's House was the best in Eton in every respect. It was comfortable, the boys were well cared for, and there was no positive cruelty. Moreover, Hawtrey was an attentive and encouraging tutor, which was unusual for Eton at the time. Though Eton had not yet adopted the private system pioneered by Thomas Arnold at Rugby, Ryle received something akin to it from him. Under Hawtrey's tutelage, Ryle studied French, history, and English literature, in addition to Keate's narrow selection of Greek and Latin authors. Hawtry also personally helped him prepare for Oxford. Under Hawtry's guidance, Ryle read nearly every book in which he was later examined for first-class honors at Oxford. Although Ryle had almost nothing positive to say about Keate, he remained grateful to his tutor for the rest of his life. In 1890, Bishop Ryle said, "I am certain that if it had not been for Hawtrey, I should never have been a First-class man side by side with Dean Stanley in classics, or Craven University Scholar."[24]

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of the upper school were required to hear "prayers" read by the headmaster. The "prayers" turned out to be discourses on abstract morality from *Blair's Sermons*, the *Spectator*, or a pagan moral philosopher like Epictetus. Eton historian Henry Maxwell Lyte said, "It seems incredible that there should ever have been an entire absence of religious teaching at the greatest school in Christian England; yet such, from all accounts, must have been the case at Eton until about sixty years ago." See Lyte, *History of Eton College*, 361.

Ryle later returned to Eton to rectify this deficiency personally. He was invited to preach at chapel in 1871, and though the sermon has not survived, according to his friend Rev. C. W. Furse he proclaimed the uselessness of "high morality" and "gentlemanly conduct" apart from the saving grace of God. See the *Authorized Report of the Church Congress Held at Nottingham* (London: W. Wells Gardner, 1871), 414–15.

23. Edward Craven Hawtrey was assistant master from 1814 to 1834, headmaster from 1834 to 1853, and provost from 1853 to 1862. See Thackeray, *Memoir of Edward Craven Hawtrey*.

24. Thackeray, *Memoir of Edward Craven Hawtrey*, 51.

Ryle described his first year and a half at Eton as "thoroughly miserable." He did not know any of the six hundred boys at the school. He was awkward, shy, younger than many first-year students, and felt out of place in the South. Shortly thereafter, he began to flourish. He made steady academic progress during his six and a half years at Eton. He rose to the top of his class by the time he reached the fifth form. He placed fourth in the Newcastle Scholarship, to the surprise of many. He joined the debating society and took a prominent part in its proceedings as well. By his sixth year, he was regarded as one of the most prominent boys in the school. He believed he could have achieved even more academically if his tutor was ill less frequently.

Ryle's academic success was equaled by his athletic prowess. He was blessed with a tall, robust, and athletic frame, which earned him the nickname Magnus.[25] He took fencing lessons, enjoyed rowing, and excelled in hockey, but cricket was his great love.[26] He was a member of Eton's cricket club. The top eleven cricketers—known as the XI—were chosen to represent Eton in matches against Harrow and Winchester. He earned a place on the team and went on to become its captain. He later said that his time as captain of the XI helped prepare him for leadership in the Church.[27]

25. Ryle's size and stature were impressive even later in life. For example, at the Swansea Church Congress (1876), one of the speakers said the following of the sixty-three-year-old Ryle: "Canon Ryle dropped a hint that he was ready to turn up his sleeves, and double his fists, and square his shoulders, against any one who should say a word in favour of confession. It seemed that at this point he drew the line. Certainly I should not like to accept battle with him for I am afraid, judging from the Canon's build, I should get, in plain English, an awful drubbing." *The Official Report of the Nineteenth Annual Church Congress Held at Swansea* (London: John Hodges, 1879), 397.

26. "Nothing did I enjoy so much as cricket when I was in the XI and as long as I live I think I shall say, that the happiest days I ever spent in a simple, earthly way were the days when I was captain of the XI in Eton playing-fields." Ryle, *Autobiography*, 36.

27. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 36–38.

Ryle's years at Eton also proved to be a time of limited spiritual awakening. Though Headmaster Keate discouraged religious instruction and gave it no place in the school's official curriculum, the founding of the Newcastle Scholarship in 1829 encouraged the study of divinity. Those competing for the prize—fifty pounds a year for three years—had to demonstrate proficiency in Greek and Latin and submit three papers: one on the Gospels, one on Acts, and one on general divinity and church history. Preparing for the Newcastle examination exposed Ryle to dogmatic Christianity for the first time, and he traced the beginning of his first clear doctrinal views back to his preparation for this exam. He later wrote, "It is a simple fact, that the beginning of any clear doctrinal views I have ever attained myself, was reading up the Articles at Eton, for the Newcastle Scholarship."[28]

Ryle completed his education in 1834 and left with unfeigned regret. His last two years at Eton were some of the happiest of his life, but he felt compelled to leave. He was ready to compete for first-class honors in the classics at either Oxford or Cambridge. He decided on Christ Church, Oxford, and entered in October 1834.

Christ Church was founded as Cardinal College by Cardinal Wolsey in 1525 for the education of the youth in virtue and the maintenance of the Christian church and faith.[29] It received a new name, Christ Church, and a new royal foundation from King Henry VIII in 1546. Under the leadership of Cyril Jackson (dean from 1783 to 1809), Christ Church became preeminent among the colleges of Oxford. Jackson's success, however, was not maintained by

28. J. C. Ryle, *Who Is the True Churchman? or, The Thirty-Nine Articles Examined* (London: William Hunt, 1872), 38.

29. For the history of Christ Church, see Judith Curthoys, *The Cardinal's College: Christ Church, Chapter and Verse* (London: Profile Books, 2012). See also W. G. Hiscock, *A Christ Church Miscellany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946); and Henry L. Thompson, *Christ Church* (London: F. E. Robinson, 1900). For a superb study of nineteenth-century Oxford, see M. G. Brock and M. C. Curthoys, eds., *Nineteenth-Century Oxford, Part 1*, vol. 6 of *The History of the University of Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

his successors. When Ryle entered Christ Church in October 1834, Thomas Gaisford was dean. Though his scholarship was legendary, he opposed all reform, and as a result Christ Church suffered.

Ryle's tutors at Christ Church were Augustus Short and Henry Liddell. Ryle had nothing positive to say about Short. "Short as a tutor was perfectly useless," he complained, "and I never learned anything from him."[30] Liddell, on the other hand, was "a very good tutor and I heartily wished I had been under him during the whole time I was at Oxford." He later remarked that "if I had only had such a wise and kind tutor as Liddell was all the time I was there, I believe I might have carried off three times as many honors as I did."[31]

As it was, Ryle managed to carry off a number of honors during his three years at Oxford. He won a Fell Exhibition at the end of his first year. He won the Craven University Scholarship at the end of his second year. At the end of his third and final year he won a "very brilliant" first class in *Literae Humaniores*, an achievement that remained a source of pride for the rest of his life.[32] Following his spectacular first, he was urged to come forward as a candidate for a fellowship at Christ Church, Brasenose, or Balliol, but declined all such offers, believing his future was in politics, not academia.

In addition to academic success, Ryle continued to excel in cricket. He made the University XI all three years he was at Oxford and was the captain of the team during his second and third years.

30. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 51.

31. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 51–52, 59. For a life of Liddell, see Henry L. Thompson, *Henry George Liddell: A Memoir* (New York: Henry Holt, 1899). Ryle is specifically mentioned on p. 27 as one of Liddell's first thirteen pupils. Liddell described this first group of students as "a very good set who will keep all my wits at work." His relationship with his students was also described as "more directly pastoral." See Thompson, *Henry George Liddell*, 28–29.

32. There were eleven first-class honors awards in 1837, but the examinations of Ryle, Arthur Stanley, and Henry Heighton so far exceeded the rest that making a small class of these men was discussed.

He also helped revive the old Oxford versus Cambridge matches by contacting his former Etonian classmates at Cambridge.[33]

Despite his success, Ryle was not happy during his time at Oxford. He disliked the tone of society among the undergraduates. The "miserable idolatry" of money and aristocratic connection disgusted him so completely that he contemplated becoming a republican. His classmates were distant and cold, and he missed the camaraderie he had experienced at Eton. And the tutors, with the exception of Liddell, gave him no help, counsel, or advice and seemed generally disinterested. As a result, he developed a "rather soured misanthropical view of human nature" and concluded that the whole system needed reform. Though Ryle's academic and athletic careers at Christ Church were, by all accounts, outstanding, he said, "I left Oxford with a brilliant reputation for the honors which I had taken but with very little love for the university and very glad to get away from it."[34]

Before moving forward, something should be said about Ryle's spiritual and theological development during this period of his life. Ryle entered Oxford as the first of the *Tracts for the Times* were being published by the leaders of the Oxford movement. In fact, E. B. Pusey, one of the movement's principal leaders, was the Regius Professor of Hebrew at Christ Church. Ryle appears to have been completely indifferent to Tractarianism at the time.[35] Nor was he drawn to evangelicalism. Ryle noted that there were a good number of evangelical men at Oxford at the time, but their preaching

33. Toon and Smout, *John Charles Ryle*, 30n3.

34. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 54.

35. Tractarianism had little influence in Christ Church. J. H. Newman complained to H. W. Wilberforce that "Christ Church alone is immobile." Oriel, Trinity, and Exeter were the Tractarian strongholds. See Peter B. Nockles, "Lost Causes and…Impossible Loyalties: The Oxford Movement and the University," in *Nineteenth-Century Oxford, Part 1*, vol. 6 of *The History of the University of Oxford*, ed. M. G. Brock and M. C. Curthoys (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 232.

was "very defective."[36] He did, however, speak positively of the preaching of Edward Denison and Walter Hamilton at St. Peter's in the East, who were sympathetic to evangelicalism at this point in their ministries.[37] Ryle also wrestled with skepticism for a time—which he omitted in his autobiography.[38] He was delivered from it by reading George Stanley Faber's *The Difficulties of Infidelity*.[39] For the most part, Ryle was generally indifferent to religion during his time at Oxford until midsummer 1837.

Despite his personal indifference, Ryle was compelled to study divinity as part of the requirements for his degree. The new examination statute of 1800, which introduced the concept of honors degrees, required that every candidate demonstrate a knowledge of the Gospels in Greek, the Thirty-Nine Articles, and Bishop Butler's *Analogy* (William Paley's *Natural Theology* could be substituted). Ryle's account of the viva voce portion of his examination sheds further light on his reading. In addition to the Articles, Bible, and Butler/Paley, Ryle was examined on the prayer book, church history and tradition, the fathers, the creeds, Augustine, and Pelagius.[40]

36. Ryle's comment about the noticeable presence of evangelical men seems to confirm J. S. Reynolds's contention that evangelicals were well represented at Oxford at this time, and their strength should not be gauged exclusively by their response to the *Tracts*. He wrote, "Thus the evangelicals at Oxford were not content with defending their theological views. They were still busy extending their spiritual work. During a critical period they can be said to have neglected neither doctrine nor practice." J. S. Reynolds, *The Evangelicals at Oxford 1735–1871: A Record of an Unchronicled Movement with the Record Extended to 1905* (Oxford: Marcham Manor Press, 1975), 115.

37. Hamilton later became an Anglo-Catholic.

38. Years later he recalled, "I can remember the days when I tried hard to be an unbeliever, because religion crossed my path, and I did not like its holy requirements. I was delivered from that pit, I believe, by the grace of God leading me to…Faber's *Difficulties of Infidelity*. I read that book, and felt that it could not be answered." J. C. Ryle, *Unbelief a Marvel* (London: William Hunt, 1880), 17.

39. George Stanley Faber, *The Difficulties of Infidelity* (Philadelphia: Thomas Kite, 1829).

40. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 55–57. For more information, see James Pycroft, *The Student's Guide to a Course of Reading Necessary for Obtaining University Honours by*

Through his pursuit of first-class honors at Oxford, Ryle unintentionally, and perhaps to some degree unwillingly, received a substantial theological education.

Conversion

In autumn 1837, before he took his degree, Ryle underwent an evangelical conversion. He described it as a gradual process as opposed to a sudden change. This process began with the Newcastle Scholarship, preparing for an honors degree at Oxford, and the preaching of Denison and Hamilton. In his autobiography Ryle mentions a number of significant events that he believed the Holy Spirit used in a special way to convert him.

The first was a rebuke from a friend. While out hunting with a group of friends about a year after leaving Eton, Ryle swore in the presence of Algernon Coote, who proceeded to rebuke him sharply. The rebuke pricked his conscience and made a deep and lasting impression on him. It made him consider the sinfulness of sin for the first time, and it was the first time someone ever told him to think, repent, and pray. He later said that this rebuke "was one of the first things that I can remember that made a kind of religious impression upon my soul."[41]

The second was the evangelical ministry of a newly opened church in Macclesfield—St. George's in Sutton. St. George's was originally opened as a Congregational chapel in 1824, but it was reopened for Church of England services in 1828 after a dispute divided the congregation. The bishop of Chester was asked to bring St. George's under episcopal authority. It was officially consecrated

a Graduate of Oxford (Oxford: Henry Slatter, 1837). This is practically a CliffsNotes to honors degrees, but even this condensed reading list shows how much divinity Ryle would have been responsible for. This anonymous graduate encourages students to make an outline of Jewish history from the Old Testament; memorize the Thirty-Nine Articles; familiarize themselves with the major arguments of Butler, Paley, and Sumner; and read the Bible thoroughly.

41. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 68.

in 1834, and the land for the church and the churchyard was donated by Ryle's father. The newly appointed bishop of Chester, the evangelical John Bird Sumner, appointed an evangelical clergyman, William Wales, to be its first minister.[42] He was succeeded by another evangelical in 1834, John Burnet. According to Ryle, the "gospel was really preached" by these men, and they introduced "a new kind of religion" into the Church of England in that part of Cheshire.[43] He attended St. George's with his family while home on holiday, and its evangelical ministry began to "set him thinking about religion."

The third was the conversion of Harry Arkwright, Ryle's first cousin. He was converted while preparing for ordination with Rev. Burnet of St. George's. Ryle was struck by the "great change" that took place in Harry's character and opinions. Shortly thereafter, Ryle's sister Susan "took up Mr. Burnet's opinions" and was converted as well. As a result, evangelical religion became the subject of many family conversations, and he began to think more deeply about it.

The fourth was a severe illness that struck in midsummer 1837 as he was preparing for his exams. He was confined to his bed for days and was brought "very low for some time." During this "very curious crisis," he began to read the Bible and pray for the first time. He later credited these new habits with helping him go through his exams "very coolly and quietly."[44]

The fifth and final event was hearing a lesson read from Ephesians 2 one Sunday morning.[45] Around the time of his examinations, Ryle attended Carfax Church, formally known as St. Martin's, feeling somewhat depressed and discouraged. The reader

42. For a solid biography of John Bird Sumner, see Nigel Scotland, *John Bird Sumner: Evangelical Archbishop* (Leominster, U.K.: Gracewing Books, 1995).

43. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 68.

44. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 68–70.

45. For a more detailed analysis of the dating and the circumstances of Ryle's conversion, see Appendix 4: "Canon Christopher on Ryle's Conversion," in Ryle, *Autobiography*, 199–213.

of the lesson made some lengthy pauses when he came to verse 8: "By grace—are ye saved—through faith—and that, not of yourselves—it is the gift of God." This unusual and emphatic reading of Ephesians 2:8 made a tremendous impact on him and led to his own evangelical conversion.[46] By year's end, J. C. Ryle was "fairly launched as a Christian."

The beginning of Ryle's Christian pilgrimage was not easy. He had no spiritual mentors or guides. He was left to "fight out everything" for himself and, as a result, "made sad blunders."[47] Through this process of trial and error, he finally found the guidance he so desperately wanted in books. Those that helped him most were William Wilberforce's *Practical View of Christianity*, John Angell James's *Christian Professor*, Thomas Scott's *Remarks on the Refutation of Calvinism by George Tomline*, John Newton's *Cardiphonia*, Joseph and Isaac Milner's *History of the Christian Church*, and Edward Bickersteth's *The Christian Student*.[48]

Moreover, his new evangelical convictions were challenged almost as soon as they were embraced. The opponents of evangelicalism within his family, and his cousin Canon John Ryle Wood in particular,[49] were horrified by his evangelical conversion, and they tried to convince him to abandon his new religious principles.

46. Ryle had Ephesians 2:8 engraved on his gravestone.

47. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 70.

48. William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the High and Middle Classes in this Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*, 17th ed. (London: T. Cadell, 1829); John Angell James, *The Christian Professor* (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Company, 1837); Thomas Scott, *Remarks on the Refutation of Calvinism by George Tomline, D.D., F.R.S., Lord Bishop of Lincoln, and Dean of St. Paul's, London*, 2nd ed. (London: A. Macintosh, 1817); John Newton, *Cardiphonia: or, The Utterance of the Heart: In the Course of Real Correspondence* (Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, 1824); Joseph Milner and Isaac Milner, *The History of the Church of Christ* (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1836); and Edward Bickersteth, *The Christian Student* (London: R. B. Seeley and W. Burnside, 1829).

49. Rev. John Ryle Wood was canon of Worcester from 1841 to 1886. He also served as tutor to Prince George.

Contending for his newly found evangelical faith only rooted him more deeply in it and attached him more firmly to it. He explained, "The whole result was that the more they argued, the more I was convinced that they were wrong and I was right, and the more I clung to my new principles. Nothing I believe roots principles so firmly in people's minds as having to fight for them and defend them…. What is won dearly is prized highly and clung to firmly."[50]

His refusal to abandon his evangelical faith came with heavy personal costs. It caused "great uncomfortableness" in his family. He was estranged from friends and relatives, and this "miserable state of things" continued for a period of about three and a half years. Though he lost many friends at this time as a result of his conversion, he made some new ones in evangelical circles, which he described as a "kind of immediate free-masonry."[51] Among them were John Thornycroft and his two sisters, Harry Arkwright, Mr. Massey, the two Misses Leycesters of Toft, Admiral Harecourt and his wife, Admiral Sir Harry Hope, and Mrs. Georgina Tollechmache. Ryle said these friends "strengthened me in my principles, encouraged me in my practice, solved many of my difficulties, assisted me by their advice, counseled me in many of my perplexities, and cheered me generally by showing me that I was not quite alone in the world."[52]

Religious Opinions

By winter 1837, Ryle had developed "strongly marked, developed, and decided" religious opinions. He said his new views "seemed to flash out before my mind, as clearly and sharply as the pictures on a photographic plate when the developing liquid is poured over it."[53] He summarized them as follows:

50. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 71–72.
51. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 74.
52. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 75.
53. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 72.

> The extreme sinfulness of sin, and my own personal sinfulness, helplessness, and spiritual need: the entire suitableness of the Lord Jesus Christ by His sacrifice, substitution, and intercession to be the Saviour of a sinner's soul; the absolute necessity of anybody who would be saved being born again or converted by the Holy Ghost; the indispensable necessity of holiness of life, being the only evidence of a true Christian; the absolute of coming out from the world and being separate from its vain customs, recreations, and standards of what is right, as well as its sins; the supremacy of the Bible as the only rule of what is true in faith, or right in practice, and the need of regular study and reading it; the absolute necessity of daily private prayer and communion with God if anyone intends to live the life of a true Christian; the enormous values of what are called Protestant principles as compared to Romanism; the unspeakable excellence and beauty of the doctrine of the Second Advent of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; the unutterable folly of supposing that baptism is regeneration or formal going to church Christianity or taking the sacrament a means of wiping away sins, or clergymen to know more of the Bible than other people or to be mediators between God and men by virtue of their office.[54]

Though this quotation provides a good summary of J. C. Ryle's theology, some clarification is desirable. Ryle's theology is best described as Protestant, Reformed, Puritan, evangelical, Anglican, and premillennial.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Protestant Reformation for Ryle. According to him, it saved English Christianity, gave birth to the Reformed Church of England, and was the source of all of England's spiritual and material prosperity under God. His view of the English Reformation will be discussed at greater length in chapter 4. In terms of his religious opinions, however, there are three doctrines that he particularly associated with the

54. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 72–73.

Reformation. The first is the sufficiency and supremacy of the Holy Scriptures, which make it the only rule of faith and practice. The second is the right, duty, and necessity of private judgment. The third is justification by faith alone. These three doctrines were the "principles which won the battle of the Protestant Reformation" and the "keys of the whole controversy between the Reformers and the Church of Rome."[55]

In terms of soteriology, Ryle is best described as a moderate, or evangelical, Calvinist. He wrote, "In a word, I believe that Calvinistic divinity is the divinity of the Bible, of Augustine, and of the Thirty-nine Articles of my own Church."[56] He believed that as a result of the fall, man was dead in sin and had no power to turn to God.[57] He believed that election was unconditional.[58] He believed that God's saving grace worked monergistically and efficaciously. He believed in the perseverance of the saints. Yet he believed that

55. J. C. Ryle, *Prove All Things: A Tract on Private Judgment* (Ipswich: Hunt and Son, 1851), 3.

56. J. C. Ryle, *The Christian Leaders of the Last Century; or, England a Hundred Years Ago* (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1869), 379.

57. J. C. Ryle, "Your Election," in *Home Truths: Being Miscellaneous Addresses and Tracts by the Rev. J. C. Ryle, B.A.* (Ipswich: W. Hunt, 1872), 8:151.

58. Ryle, "Your Election," 148:

> The true doctrine of election I believe to be as follows. God has been pleased from all eternity to choose certain men and women out of mankind, whom by His counsel secret to us, He has decreed to save by Jesus Christ. None are finally saved except those who are thus chosen. Hence the Scripture gives to God's people in several places the name of "God's elect," and the choice or appointment of them to eternal life is called "God's election." Those men and women whom God has been pleased to choose from all eternity, He calls in time, by His Spirit working in due season. He convinces them of sin. He leads them to Christ. He works in them repentance and faith. He converts, renews, and sanctifies them. He keeps them by His grace from falling away entirely, and finally brings them safe to glory. In short God's eternal election is the first link in that chain of a sinner's salvation of which heavenly glory is the end. None ever repent, believe, and are born again, except the elect. The primary and original cause of a saint's being what he is, is in one word, God's election.

Christ's death was sufficient for the whole world, that He "tasted death for every man," and that He bore the sins of the whole world.[59] He believed that God loves all mankind, not just the elect. He denied that the doctrine of election destroys human responsibility or the free offer of the gospel. He rejected the doctrine of double predestination. Such are the contours of Ryle's Calvinism.

In terms of personal piety, Ryle's view of the Christian life is definitely cast in the Puritan mold.[60] He believed that the Holy Spirit is the source and sustainer of all spiritual life. Like the Puritans, he believed that the Spirit always works in a similar manner or pattern, and thus he stressed the importance of "marks" or "evidences" of the Spirit's work. His spirituality was also Christocentric. More specifically, it was focused on Christ's atonement, ongoing intercession, and second advent.[61] He also stressed the importance of the diligent use of the means of grace. These included Bible reading, private prayer, regularly attending public worship, regularly hearing the preaching of God's word, and regularly receiving

59. J. C. Ryle, *Do You Believe?* (London: William Hunt, 1860), 12–13:

> I confess, boldly, that I hold to the doctrine of particular redemption, in a certain sense, as strongly as any one. I believe that none are effectually redeemed but God's elect. They and they only are set free from the guilt, and power, and consequences of sin. But I hold no less strongly, that Christ's work of atonement is sufficient for all mankind. There is a sense in which He has tasted death for every man, and has taken upon Him the sin of the world. I dare not pare down, and fine away, what appear to me the plain statements of Scripture. I dare not shut a door which God seems, to my eyes, to have left open. I dare not tell any man on earth that Christ has done nothing for him, and that he has no warrant to apply boldly to Christ for salvation. Christ is God's gift to the whole world.

60. Ryle admired the Puritans and published approving biographical sketches of a number of them when they were generally very unpopular among churchmen. For Ryle's defense of the Puritans, see *Light from Old Times; or, Protestant Facts and Men with an Introduction for Our Own Days*, 2nd ed. (London: Chas. J. Thynne, 1898), xiv–xviii. Furthermore, he quoted from Puritan divines extensively in *Holiness*.

61. The Christocentrism of Ryle's hymnals, which are an excellent and neglected source of his spirituality, will be discussed in chapter 3.

the Lord's Supper. Finally, he stressed the importance of observing the Christian Sabbath as well.

J. I. Packer argues that Ryle's ministerial agenda, as well as his spirituality, was also influenced by the Puritans. Ryle's desire to evangelize the English people, purify and reform the national church, unite all English Christians, and promote the holiness of English believers matches what Packer calls the "Puritan quadrilateral."[62]

Ryle regularly and repeatedly identified himself as an "evangelical," and evangelical religion, according to Ryle, was characterized by five leading features.[63] First, evangelicals assign absolute supremacy to the Holy Scripture and regard it as the only rule for faith and practice. Second, evangelicals emphasize the doctrine of human sinfulness and corruption and the need for a radical cure. Third, evangelicals attach paramount importance to the person and work of Christ and the necessity of faith in Him. Fourth, evangelicals stress the importance of the inward work of the Spirit in the heart of the believer and an experimental acquaintance with it. Finally, evangelicals insist that the inward work of the Spirit will always be manifested outwardly by a holy life. For Ryle, these points constituted the essence of the evangelical gospel and the Christian faith.

Ryle was a committed Anglican churchman. He regarded the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Church's confession of faith, as the greatest human doctrinal standard. He loved the prayer book, its liturgy, and its forms of prayers. He affirmed, with the thirty-fifth article, that the homilies contain "godly and wholesome Doctrine." He repeatedly quoted from the Church catechism with approbation. Furthermore, Ryle was firmly attached to the episcopal form of church government. He considered it to be the most scriptural form of church government and the best means of providing pastoral oversight for the nation. In short, when properly administered, the

62. J. I. Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness: The Witness of J. C. Ryle* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2002), 37–43.

63. J. C. Ryle, *Evangelical Religion: What It Is, and What It Is Not* (London: William Hunt, 1867).

Church of England was the best church on earth. This deeply held conviction led Ryle to become an enthusiastic Church reformer and defender.

In terms of eschatology, Ryle was a premillennialist.[64] He summarized the chief articles of his "prophetical creed" as follows:

> (I) I believe that the world will never be completely converted to Christianity by any existing agency, before the end comes. (II) I believe that wide-spread unbelief, indifference, formalism, and wickedness, which are seen throughout Christendom, are only what we are taught to expect in God's Word. (III) I believe that the grand purpose of the present dispensation is to gather out of the world an elect people, and not to convert all mankind. (IV) I believe that the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is the great event which will wind up the present dispensation, and for which we ought daily to long and pray. (V) I believe that the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ will be a real, literal, personal, bodily coming…. (VI) I believe that after our Lord Jesus Christ comes again, the earth shall be renewed, and the curse removed; the devil shall be bound, the godly shall be rewarded, the wicked

64. I would have liked to address this aspect of Ryle's thought (as well as the other ones), but space did not permit a more extensive treatment. See Alan Munden, "The 'Prophetical Opinions' of J. C. Ryle," *Churchman* 125 (2011): 251–62, for a helpful summary of Ryle's eschatology.

Ryle apparently began reading works on eschatology shortly after his ordination. In 1853 he specifically mentioned having read the following works: *The Mystery of Israel's Salvation* by Increase Mather; *Prophetical Landmarks* by Horatius Bonar; *Redemption Drawing Nigh* by Alexander Bonar; *Popular Objections to the Premillenial Advent Considered* by George Ogilvy; *Sermons on the Second Advent* by Hugh M'Neile; *The Restoration of the Jews* and *A Practical Guide to the Prophecies* by Edward Bickersteth; and *Isaiah as It Is: Judah and Jerusalem the Subject of Isaiah's Prophesying* by Alexander Keith. His interest in this subject appears to have peaked in the 1850s. Ryle preached a number of sermons on the subject at that time and later published them as tracts. He also attended the annual Lent sermons at St. George's, Bloomsbury, at the invitation of Henry Montagu Villiers, later bishop of Carlisle, which focused on unfulfilled prophecy. Ryle addressed this gathering in 1851, 1853, and 1855. But the second advent of Christ and the future gathering of the Jews remained prominent emphases for the rest of his ministry.

> shall be punished; and that before he comes there shall neither be resurrection, judgment, nor millennium, and that not till after he comes shall the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. (VII) I believe that the Jews shall ultimately be gathered again as a separate nation, restored to their own land, and converted to faith in Christ, after going through great tribulation. (VIII) I believe that the literal sense of the Old Testament prophecies has been far too much neglected by the Churches, and is far too much neglected at the present day, and that under the mistaken system of *spiritualizing* and *accommodating* Bible language, Christians have too often completely missed its meaning. (IX) I do not believe that the preterist scheme of interpreting the Apocalypse, which regards the book as almost entirely *fulfilled*, or the futurist scheme, which regards it as almost entirely *unfulfilled*, are either of them to be implicitly followed. The truth, I expect, will be found between the two. (X) I believe that the Roman Catholic Church is the great predicted apostasy from the faith, and is Babylon and antichrist, although I think it highly probable that a more complete development of antichrist will yet be exhibited in the world. (XI) Finally, I believe that it is for the safety, happiness, and comfort of all true Christians, to expect as little as possible from Churches or Governments under the present dispensation,—to hold themselves ready for tremendous convulsions and changes of all things established,—and to expect their good things only from Christ's second advent.[65]

Ryle was a moderate premillennialist.[66] He refused to speculate about dates and times, and he did not discuss controversial

65. J. C. Ryle, *Coming Events and Present Duties*, 2nd and enlarged ed. (London: William Hunt, 1879), viii–xi.

66. His premillennialism, coupled with his pessimism about the future, place Ryle in the "Recordite" or "extreme" faction within Anglican evangelicalism according to Boyd Hilton's taxonomy. See Hilton, *Age of Atonement*; and *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783–1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 174–84, 401–5. Hilton argues that a division emerged in Anglican

subjects publicly. He insisted that his prophetical views were not articles of faith but private opinions, and acknowledged that "holier and better men than myself do not see these subjects with my eyes, and think me utterly mistaken."[67] But he believed his "prophetical creed" was scriptural and consistent with church history and personal experience.

Ordination

After graduating from Oxford, Ryle moved back to Macclesfield and lived with his family at Henbury. His father purchased the estate in 1837, and by all accounts it was beautiful. It was three miles west of the city center and closer to the more congenial, high-class country society. It consisted of a thousand acres, a large house, woods, and water. He quickly became attached to it and, as the eldest son, was destined to become the lord of the manor.

In 1838 he moved to London to read the law at Lincoln's Inn. He stayed only six months because of illness. He believed he had not yet fully recovered from preparing for his degree at Oxford. This London interlude was not a happy time. He made no friends, felt isolated, and was shocked by the immorality of the city.[68] While

evangelicalism in the 1820s between two groups: the Claphamites and the Recordites. The Claphamite evangelicals were respectable, enlightened, rationalist, postmillennial, and moderate, but the Recordites were Pentecostal, premillenarian, adventist, revivalist, and extreme. J. C. Ryle, John Bird Sumner, and Edward Bickersteth were premillennialists, but hardly extremists, and were closer to the moderate strand of Claphamite evangelicalism than Hilton's taxonomy allows.

67. Ryle, *Coming Events and Present Duties*, vi.

68. In an address to the Liverpool YMCA in 1889, Ryle discussed his time in London:

> When I had finished my college education I was launched in London all by myself, and went there to read law. It was only a comparatively small circumstance which prevented me from following the law altogether; however, when I was there I remember that I thought that it was impossible for a man to serve Christ and be a true Christian when living in a great wicked and corrupt city such as London, the metropolis of the world, is sure to be. The thought came across my mind,—How can a man serve and follow Christ and be able to resist

in London, however, he became a communicant member of Baptist Noel's chapel, St. John's, Bedford Row, Holborn.[69]

He returned to Henbury later in the same year and went to work at his father's bank in order to learn the family business. Over the next four years, he became a prominent man in Macclesfield. He became a county magistrate. He was made captain of the Macclesfield troop of the Cheshire Yeomanry, which was comprised of six hundred men, and most of the leading men in Cheshire were his officers. He began his career as a public speaker and addressed both religious and political gatherings. He also began reading in preparation for going into Parliament. His parents urged him to marry, and his father offered him eight hundred pounds a year and a house, but he was not ready to do so.

From a spiritual perspective, these four years were not satisfying. His religious convictions continued to be a source of tension in

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> the world, the flesh, and the devil, when he does not know any one, and there is no one to help him or encourage him? How can it be done? Is it possible? The doubt came across my mind again and again, and it was only by the great mercy of God that I was able to resist it.

J. C. Ryle, "Daniel the Prophet," in *The Rule of Life and Conduct: Discourses Delivered before the Members of the Liverpool Young Men's Christian Association* (Liverpool: Young Men's Christian Association, 1889), 8.

69. St. John's was an important evangelical proprietary chapel. Richard Cecil and Daniel Wilson, both prominent evangelical clergymen, served as its ministers. Baptist Wriothesley Noel became its minister in 1827 and attracted large and influential congregations. He became an early leader of the evangelical party but abandoned the Church of England in 1848 as a result of the Gorham controversy. The stir his secession caused was almost as great as John Henry Newman's. He became critical of the union of church and state but never joined the disestablishment movement. He later defended evangelical clergymen from attacks by C. H. Spurgeon in *Baptismal Regeneration.* For more information on Baptist Noel, see Grayson Carter, "Baptist Wriothesley Noel," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 969–70; Grayson Carter, "Evangelicals and Tractarians: Baptist Noel and the Evangelical Response to the Gorham Affair," in *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Sessions from the Via Media, 1800–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and David Bebbington, "The Life of Baptist Noel: Its Setting and Significance," *The Baptist Quarterly* 24 (1972): 389–411.

the home, and he had the uncomfortable feeling that he was merely being tolerated. The estrangement from former friends and family members continued. But Rev. John Burnet and his future brothers-in-law, both evangelicals and both students for ordination under Burnet, were a source of encouragement. During this period he admitted that he was too focused on his own spiritual conflicts and difficulties and did not sufficiently "aim at works of active usefulness to the souls of others."[70] He did, however, read prayers in the housekeeper's room and occasionally visited a sick or dying person, but his parents' objections kept him from regular teaching, preaching, visiting, and evangelizing. Ryle later described this period of his life as a time of "patient learning and not active doing."[71]

Everything changed in 1841. Ryle's grandfather had taken over the first and only bank in Macclesfield in 1800 and made it profitable. After his passing, Ryle's father took it over. He was not well suited to banking. He was too easygoing, too good natured, and too careless about details. He loaned his brother-in-law Charles Wood two hundred thousand pounds to start manufacturing cotton in Macclesfield. The plan failed, and the money was lost. Wood encouraged John to open a second branch of his bank in Manchester to cover the losses. The Manchester branch was initially successful, but it was not properly supervised by John and his business partner, Mr. Daintry. To make matters worse, they left it in the hands of a bad manager, who chronically made unwise loans to unfit applicants. When the situation became known, John and Daintry's banking associate in London stopped payment, their banks went bankrupt, and the Ryles were ruined. J. C. remarked, "We got up one summer's morning with all the world before us as usual, and went to bed that same night completely and entirely ruined."[72]

70. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 83.
71. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 84.
72. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 88.

Limited liability was not applied to the banking industry until 1858, and thus everything had to be sold to pay the creditors. Henbury was sold immediately. The household servants and staff were dismissed. Ryle sold his two horses, Yeomanry uniform, sword, saddle, and accoutrements for 250 pounds. The children were left with nothing but their personal property and clothes. In short, "everything was swept clean away."[73] But his mother's dowry, which was worth thirty thousand pounds, could not be touched by the bankruptcy. His parents, along with his unmarried sisters, moved to Hampshire and lived off the interest for the rest of their lives. Over the next twenty years, both father and son made payments to settle the debts of the bank. The last payment of nine thirty-seconds of a penny was made in 1861. It was observed that Ryle went around in threadbare clothing to save as much money as he could to pay off his father's debt—for which he was not legally responsible.[74]

Embarrassed and humiliated, Ryle went to live with a family friend, Colonel Thornhill, in New Forest to contemplate his future. He had no desire to be a private tutor. The learned professions—engineering and the law—would not allow him to support himself for several years. He was approached about being a private

73. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 87.

74. A few days after the death of J. C. Ryle, Canon Alfred Christopher (1820–1913), rector of St. Aldate's, Oxford, published his reminiscences of the late bishop in *The Record* (June 15, 1900):

> When the beloved veteran, the late Canon Bardsley, Rector of St. Ann's, Manchester, was in Oxford many years ago as deputation for the Church Pastoral-Aid Society, he told me he knew that for many years, when Mr. Ryle was rector of Helmingham, he wore threadbare clothes, and denied himself many things, in order to pay off, so far as possible, the small depositors at his father's bank. He was not himself a partner in the bank, and was not legally liable for anything…. When I next saw Bishop Ryle, I asked him if Canon Bardsley's story was in all respects correct, and he was obliged to acknowledge that it was so.

See appendix 4: "Canon Christopher on Ryle's Conversion," in Ryle, *Autobiography*, 211–12.

secretary to William Gladstone, but he declined. He wrote, "I felt no confidence in him, and would not have it for a moment."[75] He became a clergyman because he "felt shut up to do it, and saw no other course of life open to me."[76]

Ordination was a process that involved a number of steps.[77] First, the candidate had to contact the bishop or his secretary, declare his intentions, and receive instructions regarding requirements. The second step in the process was usually an interview with the bishop. If that meeting was satisfactory, the candidate would be asked to submit a series of documents that included evidence of an academic degree, testimonials of the moral character of the candidate, a baptism certificate that demonstrated the candidate was of canonical age (twenty-three), the *Si Quis*,[78] and a nomination by an incumbent who offered a title to orders in the form of a curacy with a specified stipend. Once the paperwork was in order, the candidate had to pass a series of episcopal examinations, which usually took place from Thursday to Saturday. Having passed the exam, the candidate was ordained on Sunday.

Ryle sought ordination at the hands of Charles Sumner, the evangelical bishop of Winchester, in December 1841.[79] Sumner's candidates for ordination were housed in Farnham Castle, and the examination process followed the typical Thursday to Sunday plan. Examinations began each morning at ten. The candidate's

75. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 98. Ryle remained a lifelong opponent of W. E. Gladstone both in politics and religion. Gladstone and Ryle collided on a number of issues discussed below, most notably the disestablishment of the Irish church and Ryle's leadership of the diocese of Liverpool.

76. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 98.

77. I am deeply indebted to Alan Haig's explanation of the ordination process in *The Victorian Clergy* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 183–92.

78. The *Si Quis* was a notification of the candidate's intention to present himself for ordination to inquire whether any impediment may be alleged against him. This was usually publicly read at the candidate's home church.

79. Charles Sumner's ordination process is discussed in detail in George Henry Sumner, *Life of Charles Richard Sumner, D.D. Bishop of Winchester* (London: John Murray, 1876), 142–45.

paperwork was reviewed by one examining chaplain, and after that a viva voce examination took place with another. Each candidate was then personally interviewed by Bishop Sumner, who typically discussed any concerns he had about the exams, the candidate's previous ministerial work, or the sample sermons candidates were required to submit. The exams ended each day around four or five o'clock and dinner was served at seven. Sumner typically invited outstanding clergymen to dine with the candidates to give them advice and encouragement. A final service was held at ten at night in which the bishop expounded an appropriate Scripture text for candidates for the ministry. For the ordination service, which was held on Sundays in an intimate chapel in the castle, Sumner selected a well-known preacher to deliver a stirring charge to the candidates at this important moment of their lives.

Ryle was ordained a deacon on December 12, 1841, and preached his first sermon a week later on December 19. He was later ordained a priest on December 11, 1842.

Early Ministry

After ordination, Ryle became the curate of Rev. William Gibson, the evangelical rector of Fawley. Gibson was kind to Ryle and held him in high esteem, but for most of Ryle's curacy, Gibson was away in Malta and offered little guidance. When Gibson did reside, Ryle complained that he was too cautious and unduly influenced by his wife, who thought he was dangerous and extreme.

Fawley was a large rural parish that occupied a triangular section of New Forest between Southampton Water and the Solent. Ryle was given charge of St. Katherine's, a chapel of Ease, in the district of Exbury, which contained around seven hundred people. Exbury offered a number of challenges for the new curate. Many of the inhabitants were poor and unaccustomed to an active, evangelical ministry. The district was home to a number of poachers and smugglers and almost no gentlemen. Drunkenness abounded. The Baptists and the Methodists carried off many of the more serious

Christians. Snakes infested the wetlands; thus snakebites were common and resulted in a number of deaths. Ague, typhus, and especially scarlet fever were persistent problems as well.

Ryle went to work in Exbury with uncommon zeal. He prepared two written sermons for Sundays.[80] He delivered two extempore expository lectures each week in cottages. He taught and supervised the parish Sunday school. He kept up an aggressive system of pastoral visitation, which included visiting every home in the district each month, amounting to nearly sixty visits per week. In addition to his pastoral labors, necessity compelled him to serve as a doctor and policeman.[81]

The impact of Ryle's ministry on the town was difficult to determine, and Ryle later said that two years is not enough time to really get to know the people. The church was full on Sundays and people seemed interested in his teaching, but the farmers were "a rich, dull, stupid set of people," and the laborers were set in their ways.[82] He took unpopular stands against late-night cricket on Saturday nights and refused to play cards and dance, which caused some to regard him as "an enthusiastic, fanatical mad dog."[83] And he continued to struggle with the transition from riches to poverty. Nevertheless, Ryle learned two valuable lessons in Exbury that served him moving forward. First, he learned "what power one man has against a

80. Ryle's earliest extant sermon, "The Compassion of Christ," dates from this period. It was preached to raise money for foreign missions, which remained a lifelong priority. It can be found in *The Christian Race and Other Sermons* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900), 219–30.

81. For a description of Ryle's work as a doctor and police officer, see *Autobiography*, 101–3. Also, Ryle's experience "doctoring the people's bodies" gave him great respect for the medical profession. On July 31, 1883, he gave the opening address at the annual conference of the British Medical Association in Liverpool. In his address, "Luke, the Beloved Physician," he said, "Next to the office of him who ministers to men's souls, there is none really more useful and honourable than that of him who ministers to the soul's frail tabernacle—the body." J. C. Ryle, *The Upper Room: Being a Few Truths for the Times* (London: William Hunt, 1888), 31.

82. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 102.

83. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 103.

multitude as long as he has right on his side."[84] Second, preaching to agricultural laborers taught him the value of simplicity in preaching and the importance of a "good lively delivery."[85]

In November 1843, Ryle resigned the curacy of Exbury due to illness after ministering there less than two years. He blamed it on the climate of the district, but his symptoms—"constant headache, indigestion, and disturbances of the heart"—are consistent with anxiety or depression, which could have been caused by isolation, being overworked, a lack of rest, and grief over his recent personal losses. After resigning, he traveled to Leamington Spa to recuperate under the supervision of Dr. Henry Jephson.

Shortly thereafter, Bishop Sumner offered Ryle the rectory of St. Thomas, Winchester. He accepted it immediately and began in early December. Winchester was a cathedral town of three thousand inhabitants. It was home to the famous Winchester School, whose headmaster was George Moberly, the future bishop of Salisbury. John Keble, one of the fathers of the Oxford movement, lived nearby and exerted considerable influence in the town. Samuel Wilberforce, a canon of the cathedral, was an influential figure as well. He took an interest in Ryle and unsuccessfully attempted to convince him to abandon his evangelical views on baptism. He was, however, much more successful with Ryle's family, who lived in his parish at the time.[86]

From Ryle's perspective, the whole place was in a "very dead state."[87] The cathedral body was worldly. Most of the seven parishes were occupied by unsatisfactory incumbents. Even the evangelical clergymen were cautious and fearful. The previous rector of

84. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 103.

85. J. C. Ryle, *Simplicity in Preaching* (London: William Hunt, 1882), 6, 47.

86. Ryle's younger brother, Frederick William, was Wilberforce's curate in Alverstoke. Samuel Wilberforce, Henry Manning, and Henry Wilberforce frequently visited the Ryles and eventually carried everyone in Ryle's family, except his father, into the "tide" and "current" of ritualism. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 122–23.

87. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 109.

St. Thomas, an evangelical, had grown increasingly inactive before his retirement. Ryle went to work immediately. He preached two services on Sunday, started a popular weekday expository lecture in the infant school, made house-to-house pastoral visits during the week, and supervised a district visitors' society. As a result of his work, St. Thomas, which could hold six hundred people, was filled to capacity and the whole parish was turned upside down.

Five months into his ministry in Winchester, Ryle received an offer he could not refuse. He was offered the rectory of Helmingham in Suffolk. It was a small, rural parish of only three hundred people, but he was offered five hundred pounds per annum, which was five times more than he was earning in Winchester. Though Ryle was flourishing in Winchester, poverty constrained him to take the offer. The new position made him financially independent of his father and allowed him to help pay back his father's creditors.

Conclusion

Ryle began his ministry in Helmingham on Easter Sunday, 1844, and he would remain there for the next seventeen years. While in Helmingham, Ryle would become well known in evangelical circles as a preacher and a writer. But the substance of his sermons and works, as well as the character of his entire ministerial outlook, was shaped during the formative years discussed in this chapter.

Ryle embraced evangelical principles and experienced an evangelical conversion sometime in fall 1837. By the winter of that same year, his religious opinions were firmly settled and remained virtually unchanged in every point for the rest of his life. New circumstances brought out new emphases in his works, but the substance remained the same. Moreover, that Ryle was forced to defend his new evangelical convictions almost as soon as he embraced them helped turn him, a person who was already naturally competitive and perhaps combative to some degree, into a formidable evangelical controversialist.

Ryle frequently lamented that he had no one to guide him spiritually during the first twenty-eight years of his life. His parents showed almost no interest in his soul. The church of his childhood did him no good. Religious instruction was nonexistent at Rev. Jackson's preparatory school and at Eton. The tutors at Christ Church, with the exception of Liddell, showed little interest in him. His only spiritual guides, until the Reverends Wales and Burnet came to St. George's, were books. Therefore, it is not surprising that he would begin publishing a wide variety of religious works almost as soon as he found the time to do so in Helmingham. Through those works, especially his tracts, he would become a spiritual guide and father to many.

Ryle's early ministerial experiences in Exbury and Winchester taught him to value an active, aggressive, and fearless evangelical ministry. With little guidance or oversight, he filled his churches in Exbury and Winchester by preaching, lecturing, visiting, distributing tracts, and running the parish machinery—that is, the Sunday school and district visitors' society. These were the means he discovered for doing good to souls. He would employ these same tactics in Helmingham, Stradbroke, and Liverpool.

Finally, Ryle was emerging as an independent thinker and actor. He was naturally independent as a child and became even more so as a result of his experiences at home and school and in his early years in the ministry. Speaking of his position in Winchester, Ryle made the following statement, which could, with some justice, be regarded as his life's motto:

> The story of my life has been such that I really cared nothing for anyone's opinion, and I resolved not to consider one jot who was offended and who was not offended by anything I did. I saw no one whose opinion I cared for in the place, and I resolved to ask nobody's counsel, in the work of my parish, or as to the matter or manner of my preaching, but just to do

> what I thought the Lord Jesus Christ would like, and not to care one jot for the face of man.[88]

Ryle's independence would become a defining characteristic of his ministry. On occasion, it would cause him to run afoul of other churchmen, even those within his own party. It also helped propel him into national leadership and earned him the respect of churchmen of all schools of thought.

88. Ryle, *Autobiography*, 110.