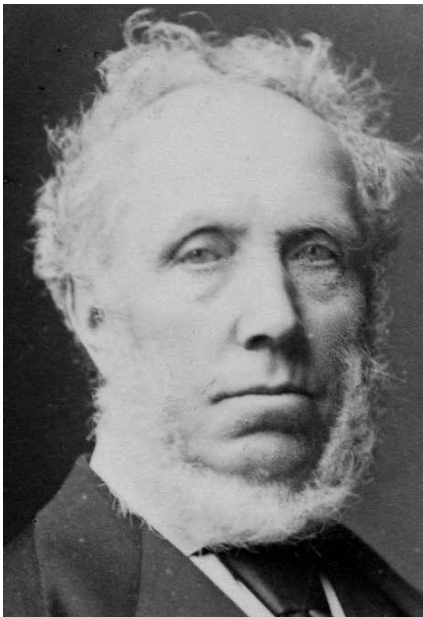


Voting reform

Gladstone's speech in 1864 opened the way to what was become the Second Reform Act – but that was not what he intended. Jim McGowan analyses the speech and its impact.

'Universally respected, a Gladstone and fran



Sir Edward Baines, 1870s (Window & Grove, albumen carte-de-visite; © National Portrait Gallery, London)

William Ewart Gladstone, 1861

Henry John Temple, 3rd Viscount Palmerston, 1864 (John Cann, albumen carte-de-visite; © National Portrait Gallery, London)

IN MAY 1864, Edward Baines, the Liberal MP for Leeds, introduced a reform bill aimed at extending the franchise in boroughs. Baines was a committed and long-standing advocate of electoral reform – like his father before him, Edward Baines Snr, who had also served as MP for Leeds. The younger Baines's support for reform was almost certainly confirmed and strengthened by his experiences as a 19-year-old journalist working for the *Leeds Mercury*, when he had been an eyewitness to the Peterloo massacre of August 1819. Given this background, the debate on Baines's bill was significant, but he would have known that it was highly unlikely to lead to any material change; it was (in the words of one commentator) a 'gesture' bill.¹

The House of Commons was sharply divided on the issue of franchise reform – many MPs had come to accept that the 1832 Reform Act could no longer be viewed as 'the final settlement' on the subject, but there was no

consensus on the way forward and none of the four reform bills introduced between 1852 and 1860 had met with any success. Palmerston, the prime minister, was known to be unimpressed with the case for further franchise reform.²

In his speech, Baines surveyed the changes that had taken place in Britain since the 1830s and argued that the time was now right for a 'considerable and yet not excessive number of the working classes' to be included within the franchise. He argued that this change would be the logical extension to the support that Britain had given in recent years to the expansion of liberty across the rest of Europe.

Palmerston was too ill to attend the debate,³ and Gladstone, as chancellor of the exchequer, was due to speak on behalf of the government. Despite the fact that the bill had negligible chance of success, there were rumours that Gladstone's speech would be particularly significant and many were 'prepared for a startling declaration'.⁴ Because of this background,

Admired and ... disliked' Franchise reform, 1864

Palmerston had written to Gladstone on the morning of the debate stating, 'I hope that in what you may say upon Baines's bill you will not commit yourself and the government as to any particular amount of borough franchise.' Palmerston recognised that at some stage public opinion might require the government to introduce a reform bill, but he was in no hurry to do this and wanted to keep his options open – so he stressed that 'it is of great Importance that we should be free to look at the question without any fresh pledges'. He also warned Gladstone of the dangers of opening the franchise door too widely for fear of the votes of the working classes 'swamping the classes above them' and because 'these working men are unfortunately under the control of trades unions, which are directed by a small number of agitators.'⁵

Gladstone began his speech by arguing that now was not the time for a change of the franchise – pointing out that the Liberal Party was very far from being unanimous on the subject. For the most part, his speech was balanced and restrained, especially when compared to the Conservative opponents of the bill, who had already stated that any measure of franchise reform was liable 'to plunge the country into the troubled waters of domestic revolution.'⁶ Given that the time was not yet ripe for change, Gladstone stated that he wanted to avoid discussions on precisely what level the franchise should be set at, but he continued:

I put aside every question except the very simple one which I take to be at issue, and on this I will endeavour not to be misunderstood. I apprehend my hon. Friend's Bill to mean (and if such be the meaning I give my cordial concurrence to the proposition), that there ought to be, not a wholesale, nor an excessive, but a sensible and considerable addition to that portion of the working

classes – at present almost infinitesimal – which is in possession of the franchise.⁷

He argued that the existing position was that only 2 per cent (or one-fiftieth) of the working class possessed the franchise – and he challenged the House of Commons:

Is that a state of things which we cannot venture to touch or modify? Is there no choice between excluding forty-nine out of every fifty working men on the one hand, and on the other a 'domestic revolution'?⁸

He compared the current condition of the country with that which prevailed fifty years earlier and argued that now working people had a much greater trust in parliament and quoted a delegation of working men who he had met recently who stated: 'It is true that, since the abolition of the corn laws, we have given up political agitation; we have begun from that time to feel that we might place confidence in parliament; that we might look to parliament to pass beneficial measures without agitation.'⁹ He argued that given the constructive engagement of working people in the development of the country, it was a wise move to assess the extension of the franchise and:

I think the investigation will be far better conducted if we approach the question at an early date, in a calm frame of mind, and without having our doors besieged by crowds, or our table loaded with petitions; rather than if we postpone entering upon it until a great agitation has arisen.¹⁰

After speaking for half an hour and providing multiple examples of the constructive engagement of the working classes in the development of the country over the past thirty years,

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he reasoned that it was the responsibility of the advocates of the permanent exclusion of the working class from the franchise to justify why their view should prevail. Then Gladstone stated:

And I venture to say that every man who is not presumably incapacitated by some consideration of personal unfitness or of political danger is morally entitled to come within the pale of the Constitution.¹¹

This was qualified in his very next sentence by saying, 'Of course, in giving utterance to such a proposition, I do not recede from the protest I have previously made against sudden, or violent, or excessive, or intoxicating change',¹² and then continued to speak for a further six or seven minutes on similar themes of the increased responsibility of working people. But it was the single sentence about 'every man ... [being] morally entitled to come within the pale of the Constitution' that made most impact. One contemporary review stated that 'he did not succeed in reassuring his astounded hearers. The rapturous cheers of his Radical allies accompanied him to the end of his speech.'¹³ Gladstone was puzzled by the response and recorded in his diary: 'Some sensation. It appears to me that it was due less to me than to the change in the hearers and in the public mind from the professions at least if not the principles of 1859.'¹⁴ Gladstone would attempt to clarify his statements, but the impression he had given many of his hearers was that he accepted that the vote was a right (not a privilege) and was potentially open to all, irrespective of whether or not they had a substantial 'stake in the country'. That evening Lord Stanley reported that the speech was the 'general subject of conversation' and that Gladstone was 'universally respected, admired, and, except by [John] Bright'¹⁵ and a few of that school, disliked.'¹⁶ The queen was similarly disturbed and wrote to Palmerston that she was 'deeply grieved at this strange and independent act of Mr Gladstone's.'¹⁷ Sir Charles Wood, Gladstone's predecessor as chancellor of the exchequer, also disapproved of the speech, but considered Gladstone's language 'so vague as to pledge him to nothing' and that it indicated 'no settled conviction, but is only one of Gladstone's odd inexplicable freaks: would not be surprised if he were to make another speech in the opposite sense next week.'¹⁸

Gladstone wrote immediately to Palmerston to try and repair the situation, writing that 'others will give you a better account of

any impression left by what I said than myself ... I hope I did not commit the Government to anything; nor myself to any particular form of franchise.'¹⁹ Palmerston responded by stating that 'there is little in [the speech] that I can agree with, and much from which I differ' and that it was 'more like the sort of speech with which Bright would have introduced the reform bill which he would like to propose, than the sort of speech which might have been expected from the Treasury Bench in the present state of things.'²⁰ Palmerston also probed into Gladstone's phrase 'the Pale of the Constitution' stating 'that all who enjoy the Security and civil Rights which the Constitution provides are within its Pale' and he contended that Gladstone was really laying down the Doctrine of Universal Suffrage – 'which I can never accept.'²¹

The exchange of letters continued between them – with a total of eleven letters being sent on this subject over a few days. Palmerston rebuked Gladstone for exciting agitation amongst working men, to which Gladstone responded that he had done no such thing, which led Palmerston to respond by including a cutting from *The Times* talking about agitation for parliamentary reform. Gladstone's response was that he had not called for agitation, but he had remarked that the lack of agitation was hindering the progress of reform.

By this time, Gladstone appreciated that the response to the speech had been much greater than he had anticipated (or in his own terms, he had 'unwarily, it seems, set the Thames on fire')²² and he suggested to Palmerston (in what Roy Jenkins called 'a superb display of both the irrepressible and the naïve sides of his character'²³) that the best solution to the outcry would be if he were to publish his speech, thereby getting 'rid of the strange misconstructions of which it has been the subject.'²⁴ He argued that he didn't want his views to be distorted by the newspaper coverage and noted 'the tendency of all reporters, especially in the case of a speaker difficult to follow, to omit qualifications.' Palmerston had his reservations about this approach, but accepted that Gladstone should be the judge of his actions.

When the speech was published Gladstone was at pains to make clear that this single sentence that had produced such a reaction was not 'a deliberate and studied announcement'²⁵ and had been made in response to opponents of franchise extension who were proposing that the existing arrangements could be maintained indefinitely. He continued to argue in his preface that his statement was not one of 'startling novelty' and stated that 'If I regret the manner

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in which my declaration has been interpreted, it is chiefly because of its tendency to produce in other quarters an exaggerated estimate.²⁶

Although Gladstone's speech caused such dramatic shock waves, his main themes were clearly consistent with the way in which his thinking had been developing over the previous few years. Accusations that he was simply jumping on the 'democratic bandwagon' in response to the successes of the Union forces in the American Civil War and less than six months after Lincoln delivered his famous address at Gettysburg are plainly unfounded when the progression of Gladstone's thinking is considered.

Initial opposition to reform and long-term development of views

Going back over thirty years before to the early 1830s when the Whig government was trying to steer the Reform Bill through parliament, Gladstone was still a student at Oxford, but he was clear that he disapproved of the reform initiatives that Grey's government were proposing. As Richard Shannon states, Gladstone concurred with 'Canning's arguments against the folly of attempting to replace the organic creation of centuries of history and experience with the paltry contrivances of presumptuous radicalism.'²⁷ While he was at Oxford, he helped raise money to oppose the Reform Bill, organised a petition amongst fellow students, joined demonstrations and spoke against reform at the Oxford Union. 'His anti-reform zeal was such as to lead to his "skipping chapel" thrice in five days, "of which I am really ashamed."²⁸ At the 1831 general election, he arranged for the printing, at his own cost, of placards which criticised the new constitutions of South America and France for bringing chaos and called on electors 'TO RESIST REVOLUTION TO THE DEATH'.²⁹

In his Oxford Union address (May 1831), Gladstone dismissed contemporary views about the will of the people, condemned the 'diabolical' press for stirring up popular feelings and argued that:

Human will therefore has nothing whatever to do with the foundation of government – it can never establish nor overthrow its legitimacy – divine will alone is its ground – and as to human opinion, it is only valuable and deserving of regard in exact proportion as it is calculated, from the virtue and ability of those who hold it, to embody and develope [*sic*] those eternal laws which alone are the source

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of authority, and which alone propose to us the objects of true and legitimate obedience.³⁰

Later that year, Gladstone attended a whole week of debates in the House of Lords, where opposition to the bill was most pronounced. For a conscientious student like Gladstone giving up an entire week, especially so close to his final examinations, was a major sacrifice, but it is an indication of the strength of his disapproval.³¹

His views were developed in more detail in a paper entitled 'On the principle of Government' which Gladstone wrote while he was still at Oxford.³² In this paper, he argued that humans are social beings and therefore are necessarily part of a community. And if there is community and association, then there must also be government and subordination.³³ He argues 'that a state of graduated subordination is the natural law of humanity', with the principle of subordination being:

... inferred from 'the analogy of the universe'. The whole cosmos, 'infinitely divisible into parts from its ruler downwards' is organised so that each part is dependent on the part above it in the structure, and so is ultimately dependent on the Almighty.³⁴

In Gladstone's view, authority descended from heaven; it did not arise from the people. And the imposition of order from above was not an evil to be minimised, but a good to be respected. Given this position, he was not supportive of popular self-government or the development of personal freedoms. He continued:

... as a guide in framing or modifying a Constitution, the right principle seems to me to be, not to give as much political liberty to the subjects as can be conceded compatibly with the maintenance of public order, but as little.³⁵

He drew parallels between the family and the state and argued that just as everyone was born into a family, so they were also born into a state. The relationship between the parent and the child was comparable to the relationship between rulers and their subjects – rulers were in a strong sense the fathers of their people. Given this approach it is unsurprising that monarchy is given a central role. 'Unrestricted [or absolute] monarchy I should conceive to be the government best suited to man in his perfect state because the most efficacious',³⁶ although

'Universally respected, admired and ... disliked' – Gladstone and franchise reform, 1864

he did concede that human failings and frailties could lead to a tyrannical monarch, so there was a need for checks and balances within the state.

A few years later, after his first experience of ministerial office, Gladstone's position had changed little and he remained determined to resist pressure for concessions. He wrote in his private notes that 'our duty [is] ... firmly to grasp by the understanding that human will, though it has power has not authority, in the fundamental matters of government.'³⁷

By the early 1850s Gladstone's priorities had started to shift, with a much greater focus on sound budgets and financial reform, but this did not feed through into increased support for franchise reform – rather the reverse. He saw sound finances 'as the sovereign remedy for creating social confidence and content and thus obviating the need for [parliamentary] reform. He told his fellow-Peelites that the 'financial feebleness and the extravagance' of the Whigs was the 'sure means of generating successive demands for reform.'³⁸ Similar thinking was at play when, as chancellor of the exchequer, he introduced his 1853 budget, where he renewed income tax, but also set out a step-by-step reduction until its abolition in 1860. Gladstone reduced the income level at which people started to pay tax (from £150 to £100), so that there was a much greater alignment between those who paid income tax and those who were enfranchised. His intention was that the whole of the 'educated' part of the community was brought into the tax net, but the 'labouring part' was left outside the net. As Shannon writes, 'By thus imposing a special tax burden on the electorate Gladstone hoped to impose a sense of responsibility for the mass of the unenfranchised, a fiscal doctrine of trusteeship.'³⁹

A similar approach was evident a few months later, when Lord Aberdeen's cabinet were assessing the relative priorities to be given to Russell's proposal for a new reform bill or Gladstone's plans to address reform of the civil service. Gladstone appreciated that the support for parliamentary reform was gradually starting to gain momentum, but he considered the needs of the civil service to be a much higher priority. As he explained to Sir James Graham, he saw reform of the civil service as 'my contribution to parliamentary reform.'⁴⁰

Five years later, when Derby's minority government was in office, Gladstone's support for the different reform proposals under discussion was becoming more positive. Russell was preparing some ideas for a new reform bill and he asked Graham to sound out Gladstone on whether or not he would be supportive. After

their discussions, Graham reported back to Russell that Gladstone 'made little comment but thought it would be unwise prematurely to fix details. He was less hostile to reform than I expected, and he expressed an opinion that no government could now stand which blinked the question.'⁴¹

Soon after this (in March 1859) when Disraeli introduced the government's own reform bill, Gladstone was supportive of reform and extending the franchise, arguing that 'I cannot be a party to a Reform Bill which does not lower the suffrage in boroughs. I may go a step further, and say it appears to me that the lowering of the suffrage in boroughs is the main purpose of having a Reform Bill, and that unless we are to have that lowering of the suffrage, it would be better that we should not waste our time on this subject.'⁴² Gladstone stated that parliament's failure to satisfactorily address the issue of reform was damaging its reputation in the country:

I confess it appears to me that, although the feeling of the people of this country with respect to the proceedings of the House of Commons is eminently satisfactory ... they have begun, especially of late years, to entertain a warm sentiment both of gratitude and confidence in the authority and institutions of the country, and particularly in their representative assembly – yet I doubt whether any part of that gratitude or confidence is due to the manner in which we have recently treated the subject of parliamentary reform.⁴³

In addition, the failure to resolve the reform question was undermining the efficiency of parliament:

It is bad for the nation that this House, which has so much business to transact on the part of this country and our vast empire, should be perpetually engaged in constitutional and organic discussions ... We cannot afford – as a mere matter of time – to pass year after year, to fritter away the principal part of each session in debating the question of parliamentary reform.⁴⁴

The other key theme of Gladstone's speech was the treatment of small boroughs, with this also linked to the efficient operation of parliament – 'to proceed far in the disfranchisement of small boroughs is a course injurious to the efficiency of the House of Commons.'⁴⁵ He argued for the retention of small nomination boroughs, so that they could continue to act as nurseries for

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great statesmen – citing various examples from Pelham to Pitt, Canning and Peel who had all entered the Commons at a young age as representatives of small boroughs.⁴⁶ He saw the strength of these constituencies being their willingness 'to take upon trust the recommendation of candidates for Parliament from noblemen or gentlemen who may stand in immediate connection with them,⁴⁷ thereby enabling promising young men to enter parliament at an early age.

It is not too much to say that no one of these mere boys could have become a Member of Parliament if it had not been for the means of access to the House of Commons which then existed. You must recollect that they were nearly all chosen when they were about twenty-one or twenty-two.⁴⁸

He could also have been thinking of his own case, having first entered the Commons for Newark which was under the influence of the Duke of Newcastle.

You cannot expect of large and populous constituencies that they should return boys to Parliament; and yet if you want a succession of men trained to take part in the government of the country, you must have a great proportion of them returned to this House while they are boys. The conclusion to which this brings me is that the matter will be a more serious one if you are prepared to part with your whole system of small boroughs.⁴⁹

A year later (May 1860) when Gladstone spoke in support of the Liberal government's own reform bill he again argued strongly for an extension to the franchise:

I do not admit that the working man, regarded as an individual, is less worthy of the suffrage than any other class. I do not admit the charges of corruption ... I do not believe that the working men of this country are possessed of a disposition to tax their neighbours and exempt themselves: nor do I acknowledge for a moment that schemes of socialism, of communism, of republicanism, or any other ideas at variance with the law and constitution of the realm are prevalent and popular among them.⁵⁰

Given Gladstone's speech in 1859 (and in 1860), it becomes easier to understand his diary comment of 1864 that the reaction to his 'Pale of the Constitution' speech was largely down to

a change in the public mood, rather than his statements. Quinault argues that 'Gladstone's strong support for reform in 1859 has been underplayed by historians, partly because he endorsed a Tory bill and partly because of his conservative views on the redistribution of seats.⁵¹ Although Gladstone consistently advocated the extension of the franchise in each of his three speeches, there are a number of possible reasons why the reaction to his comments was so much greater in 1864. The 1864 speech was the shortest of the three and a 'sensible and considerable' extension of the franchise was the sole focus of the speech, whereas in 1859 franchise extension may have been somewhat overshadowed by his concern for promoting the efficiency of parliament and the retention of small boroughs and in 1860 by a very detailed and complex analysis of the number of people affected by potential changes in franchise limits. Secondly, as the 1864 debate was around a 'gesture' bill (as opposed to government business) this may have, somewhat perversely, caused less distraction and given increased prominence to the opinions expressed. Finally, Gladstone's increased stature, both in parliament and with the public, by 1864 and his prominence as a prospective leader of the Liberal Party would guarantee that his speeches would generate more interest and demand more scrutiny than in either 1859 or in 1860.

There were a number of factors that influenced the development of Gladstone's thinking, but this analysis will focus on two aspects of this change.

Growing respect for the masses

The first factor was the increased exposure he had to sections of the working class, which led him to re-evaluate and assess his initial views. As his experience of the labouring classes increased, his understanding and appreciation of their behaviour and their achievements grew. They were no longer a simple aggregated block of people, but a mixture of intersecting groups taking a variety of self-generated initiatives to improve their lives and their communities.

Early in his career while at the Board of Trade, Gladstone spent time investigating the workings of the coal trade in London and in particular the employment conditions of the coal whippers, labourers who were employed on a casual basis to unload coal cargoes as ships arrived at the London docks. On a number of previous occasions, parliament had legislated to tackle the most severe problems in the industry, but with little success. When Gladstone

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addressed the issue, the practice was still for the captain of a coal ship to approach a local publican to provide a gang of men to unload the coal, with the gang being sent out from the public house. A contemporary commentator described the operating conditions as follows:

There was no professed or pre-arranged deduction from the price paid for the work; the captain paid the publican, and the publican paid the coal-whippers; but the middleman had his profit another way. The coal-whipper was expected to come to the public-house in the morning; to drink while waiting for work; to take drink with him to the ship; to drink again when the day's work was done; and to linger about and in the public-house until almost bedtime before his day's wages were paid. The consequence was, that an enormous ratio of his earnings went every week to the publican ... The captains preferred applying to the publicans rather than engaging the men themselves, because it saved them trouble; and because (as was pretty well understood) the publicans curried favour with them by indirect means.⁵²

Gladstone helped to steer the Coal Vendors Act (1843) through parliament and this placed the coal whippers in a much more advantageous position, with the creation of a central employment office, curtailing the power of the publicans. The example of the coal whippers gave Gladstone accurate and detailed experience of the harsh and degrading employment conditions suffered by some working people, but it also gave him a deeper connection with this particular group of workers. A few years later, at the height of the Chartist agitation, he was eager to make the Commons aware of the support provided by the coal whippers who, like Gladstone himself,⁵³ had offered their services as special constables. He spoke warmly of 'the encouragement given to all classes of labourers by the tribute of approbation which, on our part, such conduct will never fail to receive.'⁵⁴ The wider message he was drawing was that where the state was able to make judicious interventions to improve the lives of working people, there was an excellent chance that those people would respond with gratitude and a desire for self-improvement.⁵⁵ He maintained his links with the coal whippers and in May 1851 addressed them in a public meeting at Shadwell – their gratitude for Gladstone's support was very clear.⁵⁶

Two years after addressing the coal whippers in the East End, Gladstone was in Manchester

for the inauguration of the Peel monument, where he spoke to an audience with a large proportion of working men. It was an occasion for mutual admiration – the people of Manchester for Gladstone's eminence and progress in initiating admirable commercial measures and Gladstone expressing his support and appreciation for their 'advanced intelligence' and commitment to self-improvement.⁵⁷

Building on the connections that had been made in London and Manchester, Gladstone was keen to note over the next few years the various pieces of evidence to demonstrate the multiple different ways in which the working classes were changing. Examples included the formation of friendly societies, trade unions and the cooperative movement (which he described as having 'no greater social marvel at the present day'),⁵⁸ increased participation in municipal government,⁵⁹ self-improvement and education.⁶⁰ He was also very aware of the dramatic growth in libraries, reading rooms and newspaper circulation, all of which were described in detail by Edward Baines when he opened the debate on his bill for extending the franchise. Gladstone's links with Manchester gave him a particular insight into the suffering during the Lancashire cotton famine of the early 1860s: in the midst of this distress, he argued, the people had shown 'self-command, self-control, respect for order, patience under suffering, confidence in the law, regard for superiors.'⁶¹ Were not these the very qualities that you would desire in someone who was to exercise the franchise?

Developing theology

The second factor that had a bearing on Gladstone's evolving views on the franchise was the development of his theology between the 1830s and the 1860s. Gladstone's Christian faith was vibrant and dynamic and as such his theological understanding changed and developed throughout his life, but one particular aspect of that development is of interest.

As a child, the major influences on his faith had been his mother and his elder sister, Anne. Anne's influence over William was heightened by the fact that she was seven years his senior and was also his godmother. Both his mother and his sister had strong and clear evangelical convictions, which William also developed.⁶² Prominent amongst these convictions were an emphasis on the fallen state of human beings, their unworthiness before God, and their reliance on God's free and unmerited gift of grace in order to be reconciled with him. While

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Gladstone was studying at Oxford and considering a vocation in the church, he weighed and reassessed many of the doctrines that he had understood from childhood, but his overall approach was still heavily influenced by a strongly evangelical perspective.

Over the next twenty years, Gladstone's ideas on multiple aspects of his faith shifted and developed as a result of numerous influences, including friendships, reading, thinking and deliberation, personal experiences, exposure to different Christian traditions and involvement in bitter controversies.⁶³ Crucial to this development was that Gladstone 'altered his doctrine of the cross so as to put it in a broader context'⁶⁴ and, coupled with this, reassessed his view of the role of humanity within God's creation. Rather than putting all his emphasis on the sinfulness of man and the redemption of mankind by Jesus on the cross – in theological terms 'the atonement' – he now saw this as part of a wider narrative where the high point in the story was in fact the Son of God being born in human form in a stable – in theological terms 'the incarnation'. As Robert Wilberforce (who was a significant influence on Gladstone at this time) wrote: 'For that Our Lord should become man, was a far greater descent, than that when He was man he should suffer contempt and death.'⁶⁵ In a sermon in early 1864, Gladstone declared that the incarnation was 'the master-key of religion.'⁶⁶ And 'the incarnate Christ had imparted a new grandeur to humanity.'⁶⁷

And if God himself could stoop to take on human form, then humanity had to be viewed in a more positive light. As Gladstone stated in his 1860 address on the 'The Work of Universities', 'man himself is the crowning wonder of creation,'⁶⁸ the pinnacle of God's work. As David Bebbington states:

From his fresh insight into the achievement of the incarnate Christ, however, Gladstone had come to see that human beings are also capable of transformation. Christ, through coming into the world without any trace of imperfection, was made perfect over time. Similarly his followers, though possessing unalterable characteristics, could make moral advances ... Gladstone did not ... uncritically embrace a full-bodied notion of inevitable progress; but he did come to accept that major improvement was possible. Humanity had immense scope for betterment.⁶⁹

Gladstone's more favourable view of humanity and the potential for moral improvement

helped to make him more receptive than earlier in his career to a much wider expansion of the franchise.

Conclusion

Although Gladstone was very clear that his statement that 'every man ... is morally entitled to come within the pale of the Constitution' was not 'a deliberate and studied announcement' and he stated that he regretted how his declaration had been misinterpreted to produce 'an exaggerated estimate', it is clear that he believed that a sensible and substantial expansion of the franchise was both a political and a moral imperative. The absence of detailed proposals in his 1864 speech had the effect of making it a clear and unambiguous call for parliament to effectively address the issue of franchise extension and resolve it in a satisfactory manner.

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- 1 R. Jenkins, *Gladstone* (Macmillan, 1995), p. 247.
- 2 D. Cannadine, *Victorious Century: The United Kingdom, 1800–1906* (Allen Lane, 2017), p. 297.
- 3 D. Southgate, 'The Most English Minister ...': *The Policies and Politics of Palmerston* (Macmillan, 1966), p. 529.
- 4 R. Shannon, *Gladstone* (BCA, 1999), p. 506.
- 5 Palmerston, letter, 11 May 1864, in H. J. T. Palmerston, W. E. Gladstone, & P. Guedalla, *Gladstone and Palmerston: Being the correspondence of Lord Palmerston with Mr. Gladstone, 1851–1865* (V. Gollancz Ltd, 1928), p. 280.
- 6 Hansard, Parl. Debs. (series 3) vol.175, col. 310 (11 May 1864).
- 7 *Ibid.*, col. 316.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*, col. 318.
- 10 *Ibid.*, col. 326.
- 11 *Ibid.*, col. 324.
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *The Quarterly Review*, July 1864, quoted in Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 508.
- 14 Diary entry for 11 May 1864, H. C. G. Matthew, *The Gladstone Diaries: Volume VI* (Clarendon, 1978), p. 275.
- 15 Radical MP for Birmingham.
- 16 Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 510.
- 17 Quoted in Southgate, *Most English Minister*, p. 531.
- 18 Quoted in Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 511.

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- 19 Gladstone, letter, 11 May 1864, in Guedalla, *Gladstone and Palmerston*, p. 280.
- 20 Palmerston, letter, 12 May 1864, in Guedalla, *Gladstone and Palmerston*, p. 281.
- 21 Palmerston, letter, 12 May 1864, in Guedalla, *Gladstone and Palmerston*, p. 281.
- 22 Quoted in Guedalla, *Gladstone and Palmerston*, p. 73.
- 23 Jenkins, *Gladstone*, p. 248.
- 24 Gladstone, letter, 21 May 1864, in Guedalla, *Gladstone and Palmerston*, p. 286.
- 25 W. E. Gladstone, *Speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the bill for the extension of the suffrage in towns, May 11, 1864* (John Murray, 1864), p. 2.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 3. Gladstone also used the preface to expand on his statement's two qualifications – the franchise 'should exclude those who are, presumably, in themselves unfitted to exercise it with intelligence and integrity. Secondly, it should exclude those with respect to whom it might appear that, though no personal unfitness can be alleged against them, yet political danger might arise from their admission; as, for example, through the disturbance of the equilibrium of the constituent body, or through virtual monopoly of power in a single class.'
- 27 Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 30; relates to Gladstone's reading in 1830–31
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
- 29 Roland Quinault, 'Gladstone and Parliamentary Reform', in David Bebbington and Roger Swift (eds.), *Gladstone Centenary Essays* (Liverpool University Press, 2000), p. 77.
- 30 Gladstone Papers 44721, British Library, quoted in D. Bebbington, *The Mind of Gladstone: Religion, Homer, and Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 13.
- 31 Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 32.
- 32 Gladstone Papers 44721, British Library, quoted in Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 15.
- 33 Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 24.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- 36 Gladstone Papers 44721, British Library, quoted in Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 20.
- 37 GP 44725, quoted in Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 53.
- 38 Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 244.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 269; see also H. C. G. Matthew, *Gladstone, 1809–1898* (Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 123.
- 40 Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 280; see also J. Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (Macmillan, 1903), vol. i, p. 511.
- 41 C. S. Parker, *Life and Letters of Sir James Graham: Second Baronet of Netherby, P.C., G.C.B., 1792–1861* (J. Murray, 1907), vol. ii, p. 360 (quoted by Shannon, *Gladstone*, p. 362).
- 42 Hansard, Parl. Debs. (series 3), vol. 153, col. 1053 (29 Mar. 1859).
- 43 *Ibid.*, col. 1050.
- 44 *Ibid.*, col. 1066.
- 45 *Ibid.*, col. 1054.
- 46 *Ibid.*, col. 1056.
- 47 *Ibid.*
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- 50 Hansard, Parl. Debs. (series 3), vol. 158, col. 632 (3 May 1860).
- 51 Quinault (2000), p. 80
- 52 Henry Mayhew, letters to the *Morning Chronicle*, 1849–1850, retrieved from <http://www.victorianlondon.org/mayhew/mayhew22.htm>
- 53 Quinault, 'Parliamentary Reform', p. 79.
- 54 Hansard, Parl. Debs. (series 3), vol. 97, col. 459 (13 Mar. 1848).
- 55 Shannon, *Gladstone*, pp. 208–9.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 244.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 277.
- 58 Hansard, Parl. Debs. (series 3), vol. 175, col. 326 (11 May 1864).
- 59 Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 274.
- 60 Chris Wrigley, 'Gladstone and Labour' in Roland Quinault, Roger Swift & Ruth Clayton Windscheffel (eds.), *William Gladstone: New Studies and Perspectives* (Routledge, 2012), p. 55.
- 61 Hansard, Parl. Debs. (series 3), vol. 175, col. 325 (11 May 1864).
- 62 Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 44.
- 63 See Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, chapters 3 and 4.
- 64 *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- 65 Quoted in Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 102.
- 66 Gladstone Papers 44781, British Library, quoted in Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 137.
- 67 Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 141.
- 68 Gladstone, 'Inaugural Address: The work of Universities', quoted in Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 214.
- 69 Bebbington, *Mind of Gladstone*, p. 137.

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