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Aaron T. Bicknese

University of Northern Iowa

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Aaron T. Bicknese
Professor Eiklor
01:19P Presidential Scholar Thesis

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of the Eighteenth Century

A glimpse through the engravings of William Hogarth (1697-1764) unveils a striking impression of eighteenth-century England. His satire attacks the flaws of the age, which were not in short supply. The Sleeping Congregation (see figure 1), completed in December 1736, represents the decay characteristic of spiritual life in the first decades of the century. Hogarth's preacher is giving a more literal type of rest than that intended by the Matthew 11:28 text ("Come to me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"). He is accompanied in his wakeful state only by the clerk, whose eyes, however, are fixed on the allurements of a young woman. Joseph Addison (1672-1719), in a 1712 issue of the Spectator, makes a similar observation of clerics' dry discourses: "Our preachers stand stock-still in the Pulpit, and will not so much as move a
In England we very frequently see People lulled asleep with solid and elaborate Discourses of Piety." Indeed, vigor was lacking among both Anglican and Dissenting pulpits of the day, since most sermons did not contain the urgency of the Gospel, but were rather, as Addison observes, merely ethical essays.

The philosophy of deism cannot be ignored for taking a considerable toll on preaching. Great efforts had been made to make Christianity "reasonable," and in the process, revelation was rejected as a possibility for the origin of the Christian faith. Deists discounted beliefs such as Christ's being God incarnate, claiming that such beliefs were added over the years by superstitious clergy. As John Harrison remarks, the Church of England did "virtually nothing" to stem the spread of the deistic philosophy. Rather, many churchmen became deeply influenced by it. Increasingly prevalent was the theology of latitudinarianism, which liberally endorsed difference of opinion regarding church doctrine, and which complacently accepted the world's ways. Such developments in church doctrine were a source of disgruntlement to evangelicals, as is evident in the words of John Guyse, evangelical
Nonconformist pastor of New Broad Street Chapel in London, writing in the 1720s:

The present modish turn of religion looks as if we began to think that we have no need of a Mediator. . . . The religion of nature makes up the darling topics of our age; and the religion of Jesus is valued . . . only so far as it carries on the light of nature. . . . Everything concerning [Christ] that has not apparent foundation in natural light, or that goes beyond its principles, is waived, and banished, and despised.³

The eminent apologist Joseph Butler, Bishop of Durham (1692-1752) regretted the widespread opinion that Christianity was "fictitious" and a "subject of mirth and ridicule." ("Many persons . . . treat it as if . . . this were an agreed point among all people of discernment.") With this lament in 1736 he prefaced his Analogy of Religion, an apologetic treatise intended as an antidote to the decreasing credibility of Christianity.⁴

Deism, however, cannot be the sole bearer of the blame for the crisis condition of the church. The
religious alignments of the seventeenth century's political figures had not been forgotten. A reactionary fear of extremes, Catholic and Puritan, was sufficient to stem the rise of any "passionate convictions," thus breeding a distrust of anyone not lodged in mainline tradition (Anglican or Nonconformist) and a reluctance to attempt anything doctrinally which, because of its novelty, might be perceived as suspect. Furthermore, the advent of the Hanoverian dynasty in 1714 signaled no great dedication to the affairs of the church, for in comparison with Queen Anne, whose interest in religion was a boon to the church, George I and George II were uncommitted to Christianity.

British government under the first two Georges was dominated by Robert Walpole, whose term of office from 1721 to 1742 ushered in a relative stability in foreign trade and domestic economy and a sound navy, but whose political corruption and open adultery led the way for the nation in lax morality. In 1738, George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne (1685-1753) entreated the leaders of the country to be more conscientious in setting a positive example in their observance of moral and spiritual matters. The "prevailing contempt of God's
word, and estrangement from His house" had sunk "to a
degree that was never known in any Christian country," he admonished. "Our prospect is very terrible, and the
symptoms grow stronger every day." Little heed was
given marriage vows, all classes were affected by an
unmoderated devotion to alcohol, "gambling had swelled
into an obsession of such proportions that it may fairly
be questioned whether the craze ever wielded such
absolute sway in any country of the world," the cruel
amusements of cock-fighting, bull-baiting, and bear-
baiting enjoyed considerable popularity, and crime
abounded in spite of the cruel punishments afforded
criminals, which made them only the more desperate. The
condition had permeated every aspect of English life to
such an extent that Dr. Verney, Lord Willoughby was
prompted to introduce a Bill against Blasphemy and
Profaneness into the House of Lords as early as 1721.
The bill, however, was rejected by a 60-31 majority. A
rampant materialism melted "all the distinctions of
party, religion, sex, character, and circumstances," as
Alfred New recorded, yet the concerns of most High Church
clergymen were not directed to the transformation of the
degenerate domestic condition of their country, nor to
the salvation of their countrymen's souls. Rather, they sought after prestige within the church officialdom and the emolument which comes with rank.

This materialism, though, did not provide an impetus among the lower classes to incite the ethic of industriousness necessary to overcome their impoverished status. England at the outset of the eighteenth century was a social system resistant to change with huge numbers of poor dependent on the state for their subsistence. As Wellman Warner observes, "No accurate record exists to measure the size of the [economically impotent] group, but that it was terrifyingly large was indisputable." Economists of the late seventeenth century estimated that it numbered half England's population, and few, if any, were optimistic enough to foresee relief for the situation. One cause of this societal plight may have been the transition in the structure of agriculture from the farming of common fields to the modern holding system. Though in the long run this enclosure movement brought agricultural prosperity, it forced from the fields a growing populace of poor, unpropertied workers burdening the welfare system and threatening disorder by their very existence.
That upheaval did not erupt among the impulsive and impressionable masses is remarkable in view of the growing political, as well as economic, polarism between rich and poor. It was generally assumed that landowners directed public affairs and that the masses were incompetent to govern themselves. No opportunity existed for the "inferior" classes to gain political competency, since they were largely illiterate and, in line with the retrograde morality of the times, frequently lacking in discipline and responsibility. However, the lower classes were unaware of, or unwilling to exercise, their potential to overcome inferiority and realize the promotion of their own concerns. Again, the events of the previous century provide insight into this resistance to change in English society. After the nation's seventeenth-century experiment with change, England was perhaps now more committed than ever to tradition. The strife resulting from the Puritan Commonwealth was too recent in the nation's memory to allow the repetition of such a civil conflict. Moreover, all classes were in accord behind that which, besides the absence of hostilities, made the Glorious Revolution glorious in the minds of Englishmen: the
removal of the threat of popery. Their solid stance against Catholicism, in effect, gelled both pauperized and prosperous in the existing class structure.11

Yet the Establishment was not sufficiently at ease from the fear of unrest among the poor, nor were the upper-crust consciences sufficiently at ease to go without justification for the class disparity. An answer was found in a Calvinistic theology and in a mercantilistic economic theory. The established church often taught the Calvinistic tenet of divinely assigned social status to keep the poor content with their lot in life, and mercantilism taught that the nation's well-being depended upon the maintenance of a poor working class: productivity would decline if the proletariat ceased to be poor.12

A lifeless church, a morally decadent populace, and class polarity: such is the setting of the stage for the Evangelical Revival.
Notes, Part I


11 Warner 9-10.

12 Warner 10-11.
The following hymn by Charles Wesley (1707-88) reflects the sincere prayer of the faithful that England’s moral and spiritual degeneration would not be permanently entrenched.

I pass the churches through,
The scattered bones I see,
And Christendom appears in view
A hideous Calvary.
Can these dry bones perceive
The quickening power of grace,
Or infidels retrieve
The life of righteousness?
All-good, Almighty Lord,
Thou knowest Thine own design,
The virtue of Thine own great word,
The energy divine.
Now for Thy mercy’s sake,
Let Thy great word proceed,
Dispensed by whom Thou wilt, to wake
The spiritually dead.

The prayer was answered: the Lord’s word did indeed proceed throughout the land, and the dry bones of English Christendom were awakened during the phenomenon
known as the Evangelical Revival. Though the usual
dates assigned to this movement are 1738-42—from the
advent of the field preaching of John Wesley (1703-91)
to the blossoming of the Methodist movement—an analysis
of the period would be incomplete without considering
the factors of its origin as well as the oft-neglected
non-Wesleyan contributions. "Simple chronology disposes
of the stereotype of the whole Revival as a chain-
reaction from the Aldersgate Street experience [John
Wesley's 1738 conversion], and of John Wesley as a
solitary Moses striking the rock of a petrified
Anglicanism to release a sudden stream of revival,"
notes J.D. Walsh.² Wesley's contribution, to be sure,
was a chief tributary whereby the stream become a
torrent, but there were other tributaries, and the way
had certainly been prepared before 1738.

Pre-Revival England was "pock-marked with extinct
religious volcanic craters," as recognized previously,
yet by no means was the flame of Christianity
extinguished.³ Roland Stromberg sees the Revival as a
product of High Church tradition which, "when purged of
its intolerance and political prejudice, ... contained
a core of real Christian piety."⁴ Though such a claim
hardly appears believable when the general pre-Revival
state of Anglicanism is also considered, signs of life became evident in the form of the Religious Societies organized as early as 1678. Anthony Horneck of the Savoy Chapel in London preached "awakening sermons" which inspired groups of young men to meet weekly for Bible reading, prayer, and encouragement in the faith. The societies, which grew in number and strength over the next decades, were committed to a recognition of the natural corruption of man and the need for purification through Christ, to dedicated prayer seeking the will of God, and to concern for the physical and spiritual needs of all their fellow men.° Their connection with the Church of England is evident by the rules which required them to use the prayers of the Church of England and to be supervised by a member of the Anglican clergy. G. V. Portus declares that the society organized in 1701 by Samuel Wesley at his Epworth parish was the most famous.° It probably did leave a lasting impression on his son John, who would become the great organizer of the Methodist societies and the prominent leader of the Revival. Out of these initial gatherings arose societies with specific concerns. The Societies for the Reformation of Manners, formed in 1691, had a concern for the state of morality in the English nation, and
aimed to enforce the laws against vice and corruption.

To foster religious education in schools, to assist the Church in the colonies, and to supply low-cost, quality Christian literature, the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) was established in 1698. Three years later appeared the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (S.P.G.) with a vision for mission work in the colonies. These Religious Societies would later provide a framework for the great revivalists' preaching and for the Methodists' organization. The High Church background of the Wesleys and the potential for spirituality within the Church of England as seen in its later, revived state will further illumine Stromberg's view.

At the same time, however, negative aspects of the Church—the legalism and artificiality in practice of ritual—may be seen along with the spread of deism as causes of the revival reaction. In a similar fashion, medieval scholasticism and the legalistic ritual of the Catholic church had been causes of the Protestant Reformation, as Franz Hildebrandt notes, comparing the theological similarities between Luther and Wesley. He refers to the eighteenth-century movement as the "revival of the Reformation." The English Revival,
however, cannot be considered a precalculated response to deism or to Church decay, but an effect it certainly had under the prevailing skepticism was to reassure many with a confidence in the Gospel.

The German Protestant fervor had congealed somewhat by the seventeenth century, and a movement which may be deemed a reaction to that listlessness was to become a chief influence upon the revival in England. The Pietist movement began from within the German Lutheran Church when Philip Spener (1635-1705) held meetings in his home for Bible study, discussion, and prayer. These gatherings, called collegia pietatis, spread throughout northern Europe and eventually affected the Moravian spiritual descendants of John Hus, the Unitas Fratrum. It was through these Moravian United Brethren, under the leadership of Count Zinzendorf (1700-60), that England would be greatly influenced by the revival spirit. The new birth, the personal experience of faith, more spirited preaching, and the establishment of societies to foster personal Christian growth were qualities emphasized by this movement as well as by the English Revival. Spener discussed these points as a remedy for the church's spiritual decay in his Pia Desideria of 1675,
emphasizing Christian practice over theological theory: that a life of devotion to Christ and practicing His principles supersedes concern over dogmatic questions.

The profound influence of the Moravians on the Revival in England had a beginning during the unconverted Wesley's journey to Georgia in 1735-36. Greatly moved by the spiritual example of a group of the Brethren on board, he records:

Of their humility they had given continual proof by performing those servile offices for the other passengers, which none of the English would undertake; for which they desired and would receive no pay, saying, "it was good for their proud hearts," and "their loving Saviour had done more for them." And every day had given them an occasion of showing a meekness which no injury could move. If they were pushed, struck, or thrown down, they rose again [with] no complaint.

As Wesley bemoans his continual fear of death whenever the boat is assailed by a storm, he notes in his journal the sharp contrast of the peaceful, unafraid Moravians:

In the midst of the psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the
mainsail in pieces, covered the ship, and
poured in between the decks, as if the great
deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible
screaming began among the English. The
Germans calmly sang on. I asked one of them
afterward, 'Were you not afraid?' He
answered, 'I thank God, no... [We] are not
afraid to die.'

Wesley was to realize later that these Christians had
what he sought: salvation of the soul, forgiveness of
sins, and peace with God. It was Peter Böhler, a
Moravian, who counselled Wesley during his search for
assurance of salvation and led him to faith in Christ.
And it was to the Moravian community at Herrnhut ("The
Lord's Watch") on Count Zinzendorf's estate in Saxony
that Wesley went after his conversion in 1738 to learn
the implications of his experience, just as the Apostle
Paul went to Arabia for time alone with his Savior
before commencing his great ministry.

As Joseph Hutton declares, the well-known influence
of the Moravians on John Wesley was merely the beginning
of their contribution to the Revival. The first
congregation of the United Brethren in England
originated from the Fetter Lane Society in 1742.
Though Fetter Lane was an Anglican Religious Society, it became increasingly Moravian in character after 1740, when August Spangenberg (1704-92) took charge. The Moravians’ main goal, as recognized by Hutton, was not proselytization, but evangelization. Winning souls to Christ was far more important than promoting their own denomination. After two years in Yorkshire, for example, there were only 62 members of the United Brethren congregation, but 1200 society members whom they shepherded, most of whom belonged to the Church of England—a testimony to the Brethren’s desire “to help the Church, and not to steal her sheep.”

Thus was the later Anglican revival given impetus by the evangelical doctrine injected by the Moravian Brethren.

The effect of a new era in hymnwriting as an impetus to revival must not be overlooked. Elliott-Binns observes that Dissent’s recovery from decay coincided with the life of the Congregationalist minister Isaac Watts (1674-1748). That this recovery is attributable solely to Watts is doubtful, but it is certain that he infused a rejuvenated musical spirit into the Dissenting congregations with his renowned, revolutionary, and prolific hymns. He was instrumental in the reform of the cumbersome English psalmody. An
example of the lyrical transformation from maladroit meter to a more vigorous versification is obvious when comparing the following two paraphrases of the Ninetieth Psalm:

Our age to seventy years are set, [sic]
If to another stage we get,
And unto fourscore years arrive,
We rather sigh and groan than live.  

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

One need not consult the literati for a verdict on which is the better verse. The former is of the earlier genre--from John Patrick's *Psalms of David in Metre*; the latter is from Watts' *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, published in 1707. In 1715 his hymnbook for children, *Divine Songs*, appeared; four years later he published *The Psalms of David*. Many of these hymns have endured nearly three centuries--when paging through most Protestant hymnbooks today one discovers several of Watts' works. His emphasis on intelligibility of psalms and hymns sparked a greater interest for religion among
the common parishioners. The talent of Isaac Watts did not go unnoticed by the literati, though: Samuel Johnson included him in his *Lives of the English Poets*. Commenting on Watts' devotional poetry, Johnson calls it "unsatisfactory," yet "it is sufficient for Watts to have done better than others what no man has done well." He does also bestow a less constrained compliment, saying "such he was as every Christian Church would rejoice to have adopted." The standard picture of the English Evangelical Revival (and probably fittingly so) is that of John Wesley or George Whitefield (1714-70), Bible in hand, addressing the masses out-of-doors. Though Wesley and Whitefield were the most prominent field preachers, they were not the first. It was in Wales that the first heraldings of revival were heard. As a young shepherd, Griffith Jones (1683-1761), who has earned the title "morning star of the Evangelical Revival," received a call from the Lord to serve his spiritually needy country. After his ordination in 1710, he preached not only in his own initial charge at Laugharne, but in surrounding parishes as well. The year after his death, the *Gentleman's Magazine* printed a sketch of his life which contained the following description of his preaching:
Every word was like a fresh attack, and carried with it a sort of triumphant accent. No wonder that he was so successful in the conversion of sinners, when it was the Divine Spirit that made the Word effectual. By his preaching the drunkards became sober, the sabbath-breakers were reformed; the prayerless cried for mercy and forgiveness; and the ignorant were solicitously concerned for an interest in the Divine Redeemer.  

As rector of Llandowror in Carmarthenshire, Jones instituted a public literacy campaign in 1731 after discovering that the education of his countrymen badly needed supplement. The organization became known as the Circulating Welsh Charity Schools, which were attended by adults as well as children. At the time of his death, 158,000 students were enrolled in the nearly four thousand schools which had been opened across Wales.  

Daniel Rowland, Howell Davies, and Howell Harris, the other prominent figures of the Welsh Revival, considered the field-preaching pioneer Griffith Jones their model and precedent. By 1736, these leaders had begun to establish Calvinistic Methodist societies, with which George Whitefield would later be associated.
Across the Atlantic in New England, the Puritan settlers, like their countrymen in the motherland, were facing a lapse of momentum in the Church. Yet the community of Northampton, Massachusetts was to become the center of the American Great Awakening under the leadership of Jonathan Edwards. In his Faithful Narrative, an account of the Awakening, he records the impressive statistic of nearly thirty conversions per week during the spring of 1735. Not only did the movement spread in New England, but as Susan O'Brien investigates, a network of correspondence was created with others in the colonies and in England itself. Literature and revival accounts were circulated in this manner, bringing many, especially in England, to realize the need for revival. Isaac Watts and John Guyse published Edward's Narrative in 1737. John Wesley was among the Englishmen upon whom it left a deep impression, and he promoted its circulation.

H. M. Larner names a book which "beyond all others may be counted as a source of the revival." The book is A Serious Call to a Holy Life by William Law (1686-1761). (Larner's comment must first be moderated with the phrase "excepting the Bible," for the Bible was foremost in wielding revival influence. Indeed, as the
Word of God, it was the very life-force behind the movement.) Wesley praised the work in 1787 when he recommended "next to the Bible, . . . Mr. Law's Works." Boswell quotes Dr. Samuel Johnson:

I . . . became a sort of lax talker against religion, for I did not much think against it; and this lasted till I went to Oxford, where it would not be suffered. When at Oxford, I took up "Law's Serious Call to a Holy Life," expecting to find it a dull book, (as such books generally are,) and perhaps to laugh at it. But I found Law quite an overmatch for me; and this was the first occasion of my thinking in earnest of religion, after I became capable of rational inquiry. Law's thesis refuted the notion that God was a God Who loved vengeance. He clarified the extent of God's boundless love by which He became a man in Jesus Christ and by which He died to rescue fallen man from eternal punishment. Man, whose separation from God is caused by placing his own self-will above God's will, can be restored to harmony with God, if he will only surrender to the Resurrected Christ.
Notes, Part II


7 Franz Hildebrandt, *From Luther to Wesley* (London: Lutterworth, 1951) 110.


Hutton 425-6.

L. E. Elliott-Binns, The Early Evangelicals: A Religious and Social Study (Greenwich, CT: Seabury, 1953) 110.


As qtd. in Davies, Churches 121.


Johnson 4:180.

As qtd. in Wood, Blaze 42.

Wood, Blaze 44.


Part III

Before the colossi of the revival could preach to the masses and inspire others to do the same, it was necessary for them to first receive that grace on which, for which, and through which they preached. We will pause to consider this concept so essential to the Revival--this "reception of grace." Conversion, regeneration, the experience of salvation, the rebirth, and justification are a few of the terms by which it is known. Jerald Brauer has made a commendable analysis of the stages of this process which was seen repeatedly in the Evangelical Revival and which has characterized many personal transformations since the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1) [The individual is in] a period of inattentiveness or indifference--and in some cases an open hostility--to [Christian] religious matters.

2) The first signs of dissatisfaction mark the onset of the conversion experience. The person becomes self-conscious and aware of his shortcomings, failures, and perhaps sinfulness.

3) A new level of understanding is achieved
through the leadership of the Spirit of God.
The sinner becomes aware of certain aspects of
the will of God and his own failures, and he
becomes interested in reading Scripture,
hearing sermons, engaging in conversation with
converted believers, and pursuing a course of
critical self-examination.
4) Attitudes, habits, and actions are changed
so much that some believe that they are
already converted. There is a new feeling
toward self and God. Nevertheless, this is a
very unstable state, which increases the
anxiety and tension.
5) Suddenly a conversion experience occurs.
Led by the Holy Spirit, the person sees the
full depth of his alienation from God and
enmity toward him, toward his fellow human
beings, and toward himself. Original sin is
exposed as the base of all uncertainties. He
experiences God’s mercy and forgiveness as
intervening to pluck him from death and
transport him to the new life.
6) As a consequence of the conversion, the
believer feels like a new being, a new person
without contradictions, insecurities, terrors, and tensions. There is a new form of life with a new perception of God and man. Where there was disunity and terror there is now unity and sweetness. There is a sense of fulfillment and release which compels him to a new life-style for both himself and for his fellow human beings.

7) The person now enters the path of transformation of both self and society. Regeneration is followed by sanctification. To be sure, sanctification is a life-long process to be completed only at death.¹

It is now fitting to observe how leaders of the Revival each experienced regeneration, and how their experiences are notably similar to the process outlined by Brauer. First we must turn to George Whitefield, for history indicates that it was he who began field preaching in England, who made contact with awakenings in New England, in Scotland, and in Wales, and who was the first itinerant clergyman.² Born the son of a Gloucester innkeeper in 1714, Whitefield was raised in a markedly coarser environment than his fellow evangelist John Wesley. However, they had Oxford in common, and
after entering Pembroke College as a servitor in 1732, the innkeeper’s son began to search for life’s answers. He sensed God’s calling to some special service, though he could not yet discern what it might be. During this period of searching, Whitefield joined the Holy Club, a society founded by the brothers John and Charles Wesley, and whose members were "zealously striving after the Christian ideal." Whitefield, too, in practice became a "Methodist," the appellation affixed in ridicule to the members of the Holy Club, known across the campus for their methodical attention to devotional practices. (This name was not to disappear, for the societies of converts formed by both Whitefield and Wesley in their later ministries were also to become known as Methodists.) A particular bond was formed between Whitefield and Charles Wesley, who guided the former in his devotional reading. It was through this reading, particularly through Henry Scougal’s *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, that Whitefield became convinced of man’s need for salvation. He describes the 1735 experience of salvation becoming real to him:

[After Easter] this fit of sickness continued upon me for seven weeks, and a glorious visitation it was. The blessed Spirit was all
this time purifying my soul... One day, perceiving an uncommon drought and disagreeable clamminess in my mouth, and using things to allay my thirst, but in vain, it was suggested to me that when Jesus Christ cried out, 'I thirst,' his sufferings were near at an end. Upon which I cast myself down on the bed, crying out, 'I thirst! I thirst!'... The spirit of mourning was taken from me, and I knew what it was truly to rejoice in God my Savior.4

In the following months the renewed Whitefield eagerly shared his newfound joy with others in his native Gloucester, visiting the poor and sick and reading the Bible with them, and preaching at the Religious Societies there. When he returned to Oxford, several friends as well as the Bishop of Gloucester recommended him for the ministry, which he eventually accepted. In 1736 he was ordained deacon, and his first sermons, as his later ones also, stressed the need for an individual decision to be reborn in Christ, that the ritual of water baptism in itself was not enough for salvation. J.S. Simon asserted that Whitefield's preaching "lifted into the light the most conspicuous doctrine of the
Methodist Reformation, a doctrine without which that
Reformation would have been impossible. As his inward
strength increased, so did his fruits. Many Londoners,
who came in droves to hear his powerful sermons, found
the same joy in Jesus that Whitefield had.

While Whitefield was winning souls in London in
1737, John Wesley and his brother Charles were far away
in Georgia on a mission to the Indians there, of which
John wrote, "I who went to America to convert others was
never myself converted to God." It was only after
their return that the Wesleys recognized that coming to
terms with God personally was necessary before any "good
works" could be effective. Before their conversions
both were under the impression that it was possible to
attain salvation by their own endeavors to serve God,
having not yet realized that works are a result, rather
than a means, of salvation. As John Wesley would write
nine years later, the Word of God "does not properly
take root till we are convinced of inward sin, till we
begin to feel the entire corruption of our nature." After receiving sound advice from the Moravian Peter
Böhler on the faith in Christ necessary to breach the
chasm between corrupt man and perfect God, both were
prepared for the transformation that took place in May
1738. On the 21st, Charles, like George Whitefield, became assured of his salvation after a period of illness. After itinerating like his brother for a decade after his conversion, Charles would remain in Bristol, one of Methodism’s strongholds, supervising the Methodist society there. His greatest contribution to the Revival was the composition of 7000 hymns and poems, which, like those of Watts, after two and a half centuries are still to be heard on Sunday mornings in houses of worship throughout the English-speaking world. More remarkable than the tremendous quantity of his works is that so many are of enduring quality. John Wesley had "continual sorrow and heaviness [of] heart" the three days before his conversion. On the morning of May 24, 1738, he appropriately opened his Bible to II Peter 1:4: "There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the divine nature" and to Mark 12:34: "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God." That evening he went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart
through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.\textsuperscript{11}

The same year, Lady Selina, Countess of Huntingdon became assured of her salvation. This event began her career as the "patroness of the Revival" and as a close associate of George Whitefield. New gives the account:

She was now aiming to establish her own righteousness, and endeavouring by prayer, fasting, and alms-deeds, to recommend herself to the favour of Heaven. She entertained high opinions respecting the dignity of human nature. . . . [Yet she] was far from enjoying the happiness which she anticipated would result from her pious endeavours. [When she became seriously ill], her mind was deeply affected with the thought of God's holy nature; she dreaded the idea of standing in His presence to render an account of her deeds; her heart appeared full of sin and deceit.
She was about to give up all hope of salvation, when . . . she felt a strong desire to relinquish every other method, and to cast herself wholly upon Christ. This desire she expressed in fervent prayer to God, and was shortly after realized. . . . She was filled with joy and peace in believing. ¹²

The justification in extensively citing the above accounts lies in the centrality of conversion to a revival. Such a movement consists of large numbers of conversions similar to those abovementioned.
Notes, Part III


8 Dowley 447-8.

9 Wesley, *Journal* 63.


11 Wesley, *Journal* 64.

The Revival itself can be said to have three branches, as even its critics noted: "We shall use the general term of Methodism to designate those three classes of fanatics [who conspire] against common sense and rational orthodoxy." Sidney Smith, writing in the 1808 Edinburgh Review, did not bother, however, to point out the distinction between those three groups: The followers of George Whitefield and Lady Huntingdon were the Calvinistic Methodists; Wesley's disciples were those who later were to begin the Methodist Church as a denomination separate from the Church of England, whom we may call Wesleyans or Arminian Methodists; and the Evangelicals were those within the Anglican Church whose views were very similar to those of the Methodists, yet they exercised their revival mission while strictly adhering to the established ecclesiastical structure. (Doctrinally, all of the above can be called "evangelicals"--those who profess a personal faith in Christ, having been converted, and who desire to share this Gospel message with others--but we will use the capitalized word "Evangelicals" to refer specifically to that wing within the Church of England.)
The close friends Whitefield and Wesley were firmly united in their labors until 1740, when an unfortunate doctrinal disagreement arose between them which prompted their separation. Whitefield was a Calvinist, and advocated the notion of predestination; the Wesley brothers were Arminian, and emphasized that free grace for salvation was available to all. (It must be remembered, though, that both parties were evangelical and had the same vision to save souls, even after the breach.) Upon occasion, Whitefield had preached against the doctrines of the Wesleys using their name; in 1739 Wesley published his sermon on "Free Grace," in which he refutes the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination. Affixed to Wesley's sermon was a hymn on the subject by his brother Charles, by which Whitefield felt offended. After this initial flare, though, the disciples of each evangelist welcomed each other. After Wesley willingly accepted the invitation to preach to a gathering of Whitefield's followers, he wrote, "It behoveth us to trample on bigotry and party zeal. Ought not all who love God to love one another?" He enjoined his preachers

... not to fight against notions but sins.

Least of all should I advise you once to open
your lips against Predestination. It would do more mischief than you are aware of. Keep to our one point--present inward salvation by faith, by the divine evidence of sins forgiven."

George Whitefield, having been ordained a priest in January 1739 at the age of twenty-four, had begun to face reproach from the more traditional churchmen who were offended by his insistence on the need for a personal rebirth. When churches closed their doors to his sermons, he undauntedly turned to field preaching, as the Welsh antecedents of the English Revival had done. In his Journal, Whitefield records England's first experience with out-of-doors preaching, when on February 17, 1739, he spoke to a group of two hundred Bristol colliers:

Blessed be God that I have now broken the ice! I believe I was never more acceptable to my Master than when I was standing to teach those hearers in the open fields. Some may censure me; but if I thus pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ."

Bristol became the base for Whitefield's evangelism which was not restricted to his native England. In that
era of tedious ocean travel, he made seven trips to America as well as two to Ireland and fifteen to Scotland. He is said to have given 18,000 sermons in the course of his career, preaching forty to sixty hours per week. Whitefield's interest was the "cutting edge" of evangelism—preaching to the unconverted masses—which he preferred to the extensive organizational and follow-up work required to nurture the new Christians. These duties he left to others, not the least of whom were the Welsh revivalist Howell Harris and the Countess of Huntingdon.

Known for his powerful manner of preaching, he could be heard by 30,000 at once, as calculated by Benjamin Franklin, who, during one of Whitefield's visits to Philadelphia, determined the range of Whitefield's voice by measuring the distance in city blocks from which he could be heard. The oratorical might which he wielded is acknowledged by the Earl of Chesterfield, who wrote in 1749, "Mr. Whitefield's eloquence is unrivalled—his zeal inexhaustible; and not to admire both would argue a total absence of taste." In Benjamin Franklin's Autobiography we read of the time Whitefield's oratory was able to melt even Franklin frugality:
I happened . . . to attend one of
[Whitefield's] sermons in the course of which
I perceived he intended to finish with a
collection, and I silently resolved he should
get nothing from me. I had in my pocket a
handful of copper money, three or four silver
dollars, and five pistoles of gold. As he
proceeded I began to soften and concluded to
give the coppers. Another stroke of his
oratory made me ashamed of that and determ'ed
me to give the silver; and he finished so
admirably that I empty'ed my pocket wholly into
the collector's dish, gold and all.9

This collection was taken for the Orphan House that
Whitefield had established in Georgia. That the funding
would be used for anything but charity is promptly
refuted by Franklin. As Whitefield's American printer,
he knew the evangelist personally, and was "decidedly of
opinion that he was in all his conduct a perfectly
honest man."10 Charity funding, though, was not the
only effect of his oratory. We turn again to Franklin's
description of his influence:

The multitudes of all sects and denominations
that attended his sermons were enormous, and
it was matter of speculation to me, who was one of the number, to observe the extraordinary influence of his oratory on his hearers and how much they admír’d and respected him, notwithstanding his common abuse of them by assuring them they were naturally half beasts and half devils. It was wonderful to see the change soon made in the manners of our inhabitants. From being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seem’d as if all the world were growing religious, so that one could not walk thro’ the town in an evening without hearing psalms.¹¹

Fellow Englishmen, too, were impressed by changes wrought by Whitefield. Although many ridiculed him, wrote the statesman William Pulteney, Earl of Bath in 1749, "still I contend that the day will come when England will be just, and own his greatness as a reformer."¹² In a more skeptical manner, Horace Walpole also testifies to the growing movement.

This nonsensical new light is extremely in fashion, and I shall not be surprised if we see a revival of all the folly and cant of the
last age [probably referring to Puritanism].
Whitfield preaches constantly at my Lady
Huntingdon’s at Chelsea; ... what will you
lay that next winter he is not run after
instead of [the actor] Garrick?\(^{13}\)

Whitefield’s name appears quite frequently in the
letters of Horace Walpole, whereas Wesley’s is hardly
mentioned. The probable reason for this is that, among
the aristocracy, Whitefield was the better known because
of his patroness the Countess of Huntingdon, through
whose efforts the upper classes were reached with the
Gospel. Evangelical preachers banned from pulpits found
a place in her chapels, and Whitefield was one of those.
After constantly attending wherever he preached, the
Earl and Countess of Huntingdon invited Whitefield to
their house and made him domestic chaplain. There,
"crowded and fashionable congregations" heard his
sermons. "Henceforth," writes Tyerman, "Hervey [whom we
shall discuss later] by his writings, and Whitefield by
his preaching, began to mould the character of not a few
of the highest nobility in the land."\(^{14}\) Some of the
nobility, though, were repulsed by the Methodists’
message in general: "It is monstrous to be told that you
have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl
on the earth," wrote the Duchess of Buckingham. "This is highly offensive and insulting." Others, such as Lord Bolingbroke, were far less affronted:

Mr. Whitefield is the most extraordinary man in our times... The bishops and inferior orders of the clergy are very angry with him, and endeavour to represent him as a hypocrite, an enthusiast; but this is not astonishing—there is so little real goodness or honesty among them.

This very problem within the Established Church was addressed by Whitefield and the Countess. It was Lady Huntingdon's design, which she imparted to Whitefield, that they divert their efforts from multiplying the Calvinistic Methodist societies to reforming the Church of England itself. Beginning, then, in 1748, this became a primary mission for them: Whitefield converted men for the ministry, and the Countess arranged their ordination and built them chapels. In 1768 she procured a building in Trevecca, Wales to be used as a preacher's college, for which she provided the trainees' expenses. Tyerman sees these efforts by Whitefield and the Countess to raise up evangelical clergymen as a direct
cause of the Revival within the Church of England itself.¹⁷

For the sake of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ, John Wesley covered over 250,000 miles on horseback after the commencement of his career in 1738. At eighty-five years of age, he would reminisce, attributing his long life partly "to my constant preaching at five in the morning, for above fifty years."¹⁸ Boswell recorded Dr. Johnson's thoughts on this example of dedication:

Whatever might be thought of some methodist teachers, [Johnson] said, he could scarcely doubt the sincerity of that man, who travelled nine hundred miles in a month, and preached twelve times a week; for no adequate reward, merely temporal, could be given for such indefatigable labour.¹⁹

In the first months after his conversion, these miles were traveled from parish to parish, and both Wesley brothers preached in whichever pulpits were open to them. But, like Whitefield, they did not remain popular for long among the Established clergy, so they resorted to preaching to common people in marketplaces, town squares, or anywhere an audience was willing to
listen. Wesley, raised in High Church tradition, did not at first take easily to this overturn of custom. Yet he would later write, "What but field preaching could reach these poor sinners? And are not their souls also precious in the sight of God?" In this fashion the working classes were evangelized, and Hugh Price Hughes writes that Wesley and his contemporaries were the first preachers since the medieval Franciscans to devote their ministry to the working classes.  

Fitting was the text which Wesley used for his first open-air sermon on April 2, 1739 to 3,000 in Bristol:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

While the sometimes rough-edged Whitefield had an extensive ministry to the upper classes, the scholarly gentleman Wesley preferred to deal exclusively with the common people. He viewed the lazy, luxurious lifestyle of the wealthy with much distaste. After the dull response of an audience of the "rich and great" to a sermon of his which put them on a level with the lowly
under Scripture's equalizing conviction of all under sin, he said to them, "I do not expect that the rich and great should want either to speak with me or to hear me; for I speak the plain truth—a thing you hear little of and do not desire to hear." The field-preaching ministry to the poor compensated for an insufficiency in the Established Church which did not meet the needs of the entire society. Wesley wrote of the masses:

Had the minister of the parish preached like an angel, it had profited [these poor wretches] nothing; for they heard him not. But when one came and said, 'Yonder is a man preaching on the top of the mountain', they ran in droves to hear what he would say. It is hard to conceive anything else which could have reached them.

The organizational capabilities of this precise-minded saint are perhaps wherein much of his greatness lies. He knew the necessity of nurturing sown seed: after he left a place, the converts he had won had, at his bidding, been organized into a society; the next time he passed through the area, they were there to receive him and to be encouraged by him, in the meantime having built each other up in the faith.
Others looked to Wesley as an example, and emulated his field preaching. In 1744 he organized all these peripatetic Methodist preachers into a conference, whose first meeting was in June of that year. So that the movement would remain pure, its leaders "endeavored to purge the society of all that did not walk according to the gospel. By this means we reduced the number of members to less than nineteen hundred."²⁶ It is probably due more to Wesley’s organization of his movement than to any other factor that his wing of the Revival is the most famous and far-reaching.

Dedication, as well as theological soundness, was of paramount importance, as Wesley wrote:

Can you bear the summer sun to beat upon your naked head? Can you suffer the wintry rain or wind? . . . And yet these are some of the smallest inconveniences which accompany field preaching. Far beyond these are the contradiction of sinners, the scoffs both of the great vulgar, and the small; contempt and reproach of every kind; often more than verbal affronts--stupid, brutal violence, sometimes to the hazard of health, of limbs, or life.²⁶ Wesley records numerous confrontations with mobs, who
became easily incited against the "enthusiast." This term in the eighteenth century had a connotation not far removed from "mad dog." A 1756 pamphleteer describes the appellation as "the cant word of the day for the many-headed monster, the bugbear of the times." Wesley, though, countered this accusation, writing that evangelical Methodism was "rational, as well as scriptural; it is as pure from enthusiasm as from superstition. . . . Who will prove that it is enthusiasm to love God?" The hostile, however, usually remained unconvinced of this. One account of his dealings with a mob follows:

'Are you willing to hear me speak?' Many cried out, 'No, no! knock his brains out; down with him; kill him at once.' Others said, 'Nay, but we will hear him first.' I began asking, '... Which of you all have I wronged in word or deed?' ... I broke out aloud in prayer. And now the man who just before headed the mob turned and said, 'Sir, I will spend my life for you: ... not one soul here shall touch a hair of your head.'

One cannot help but recall Jesus' similar experiences, and His prediction that His servants would undergo
persecutions even as He Himself did. One marvels at how safely Wesley was kept through this trial, yet another recollection of the words of Jesus Christ will serve to answer our wonderment.\textsuperscript{30}

Though faced in the first years of preaching with hostility, the growth of Wesleyan Methodism was remarkable. At the time of Wesley’s death in 1791, 56,605 Methodists in England had been organized into societies.\textsuperscript{31} This is no small accomplishment for a single man’s career of fifty-three years. Its effects were noticed even in prisons, as Boswell records, quoting a Clerkenwell jailer’s derisions of a Methodist preacher in 1770:

\begin{quote}
I don’t care if the devil had him; . . . here has been nothing but canting and praying since the fellow entered the place.—Rabbit him! the tap will be ruined—-we han’t sold a cask of beer, or a dozen of wine . . . . The gentlemen get drunk with nothing but your damned religion.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

Wesley made the same observation of the infamous Newgate prison, although naturally from a rather different point of view:

Of all the seats of woe on this side hell,
few, I suppose, exceed or even equal Newgate . . . , so great was the filth, the stench, the misery, and wickedness. . . . How was I surprised then, when I was there a few weeks ago! 1) Every part of it . . . is as clean and sweet as a gentleman's house; it being now a rule that every prisoner wash and clean his apartment . . . 2) Here is no fighting or brawling. [If a disagreement occurs, the keeper] decides the affair at once. . . . 4) Here is no drunkenness suffered, however advantageous it might be to the keeper. . . . 5) Nor any whoredom. . . .

The influence of the Gospel message became widely known. The High Churchman Samuel Johnson recommended that convicts be attended by a Methodist preacher, for "one of our regular clergy will probably not impress their minds sufficiently."

A theological point stressed by Wesley was that of full sanctification, which he considered the "grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists." Today in evangelical circles this is probably more commonly known as spiritual growth: the process, after the initial experience of salvation, of
continually submitting the sinful self-will to the will of God and thus gradually becoming more holy. Colossians 1:28 provides the foundation for this doctrine, that all who have accepted the gift of salvation will one day be presented "perfect in Christ." Paramount in this process of perfection is reliance upon the Holy Spirit's power, for reliance upon the sinful self would not yield the restoration of purity. That man was basically fallen and corrupt drew little attack from Wesley's critics, but attacks on the doctrine of perfectionism abounded. The Wesleyans were called overidealistic and impractical, as setting overly high and discouraging standards. Yet sanctification was a process, and Wesley himself never claimed to have reached full sanctification. The process, though, had a markedly positive influence upon society, for once the individual life was reoriented and an inner harmony produced, the inevitable consequence was improvement of outward conduct, and, in turn, of society, if a large enough number of individuals were working with God towards this change. Wesley wrote that full sanctification through Christ is "the medicine of life, the never-failing remedy for all the evils of a disordered world... Wherever this is, there are
virtue and happiness going hand in hand." The Revival, then, did not push exclusively the afterlife and ignore the here and now. Rather, it was thus able to transform not only the individual in a positive way, but also to wield a profound impact on society.

Impact would, indeed, be wrought by the Wesleyan movement, but the society it was to change was one which had for generations been plagued by poverty. Idleness had to be dealt with. The Wesleyan societies did tackle the poverty problem, realizing two alternatives for the individual: either "industriousness or morally corrosive sloth." One of the fruits of conversion was expected to be an application to duty in the daily calling-- laziness could not be tolerated. Members of the societies were to ask themselves every morning, "Am I resolved ... this day ... to be diligent in the business of my calling." Through this ethic of industriousness, Methodists were urged to attain economic independence, since many were unpropertied. Material gain was not condemned, but condoned: "Live thou today," wrote Wesley. "Be it thy earnest care to improve the present hour." While the work ethic was beneficial to the well-being of society, it also had its spiritual dangers, as Wesley admonished in 1763:
I gave our brethren a solemn caution not to 'love the world, neither the things of the world.' This will be their grand danger: as they are industrious and frugal, they must needs increase in goods. This appears already: in London, Bristol, and most other trading towns, those who are in business have increased in substance seven-fold, some of them twenty, yea, a hundred-fold.\(^1\)

W. J. Townsend, who reminds us that "side by side with preaching and organizing went philanthropy and social reform," writes of the financial firstfruits of Methodism as being used "not for ministerial maintenance; but to provide humble buildings for worship and to succour the poor and needy."\(^2\) Roger H. Martin has termed the period in England from ca. 1780 to ca. 1850 as "the golden age of private philanthropy," and attributes the primary cause of the rise of almsgiving to the emphasis given it by the doctrines of the Revival.\(^3\)

The Revival, as was previously noted, consisted not only of the two Methodist branches, but also of a rebirth of vitality in the Established Church itself. It can be argued that the field preachers exerted the
necessary awakening influence on the Church of England, for, in fact, the Methodist movements never intended to become separate entities. John Wesley emphasized repeatedly that the Methodists' intent was "not to be a distinct party but to stir up all parties, Christians or heathens, to worship God in Spirit and in truth; but the Church of England in particular, to which they belonged from the beginning." His followers attended Sunday services at the local parish, as Wesley strongly encouraged, for he had no intention of competing with the mother Church. These revived churchgoers cannot be ignored as an influence on Anglican revitalization. The Whitefield-Huntingdon movement's substantial effect on the Church has also been indicated; yet a significant observation is that, in 1779, a law compelled Lady Huntingdon's chapels to be registered as "Nonconformist meeting-houses." Hence, these clergy that the Calvinist movement raised up (as well as their parishioners) for the most part did not remain within the Anglican Church. (The Wesleyan movement eventually separated from the Church also, but this was only after Wesley's death.) A 1756 pamphlet, however, will reveal a way in which Whitefield's movement (and most likely Wesley's also) did indeed exert an influence of probable
magnitude upon the Church of England for revival. Part of the inordinately long title of this pamphlet is *The Great Secret Disclosed; ... and why Methodism started up, and daily increases; ... with an effectual method for bringing about a Reformation by destroying Methodism*. The pamphleteer strangely does not deride Methodism in the pamphlet, as the title may indicate. Rather, he writes:

> Mr. Whitefield has a hundred thousand followers, most of whom, before his preaching, were the vilest of mankind, but are now sober and religious persons, good members of society, and good subjects of the king. It is also said that Mr. Wesley's preaching has had as good an effect on the like numbers; most of whom have been brought to be members of the Church of England.**

The "effectual method" referred to in the title was a recommendation to the Church of England clergy to (1) treat Methodists as Church members and (2) "out-pray and out-preach them." This may have been an incentive to clergymen to do so for competition's sake. (The Apostle Paul records such a thing in his day. Yet, as he said, "The important thing is that in every way, whether from
false motives or true, Christ is preached."47) Although the pamphleteer's intention appears anti-Methodist from the title, his purpose for naming the pamphlet in such a way may have been to attract readers who would concur with such a thesis, and persuade them to the contrary, or it may have been because he truly felt that if the entire Church of England could be revived, there would no longer be a distinction between High Churchgoers and members of Methodist societies, thus "destroying" Methodism.

The experts disagree on the extent to which Methodism was a direct cause of the Anglican revival. Elie Halévy and J. Wesley Bready advance the view that the Evangelical wing within the Church owed its existence largely to Methodism48; Elliott-Binns, Wood, and John Wesley himself moderate this opinion.49 Wesley wrote that William Romaine (1714-95), the first of the Evangelical leaders in London, owed no help to him.50 Indeed, most of the Evangelical clergymen were converted independently of any Methodist influence. That the movements were largely separate in origin yet alike in purpose lends credence to an inspiration by the Holy Spirit of the simultaneous stirrings, as the evangelicals themselves believed.
The Evangelicals, too, had their field preachers. William Grimshaw (1708-63) itinerated through Yorkshire, arousing the envy of less evangelical ecclesiastics in the area, who then summoned their superior, the Archbishop Matthew Hutton. The Archbishop could find no fault with Grimshaw after choosing a text and giving him two hours' notice to preach on it; nor could he criticize him after learning that before his coming to Haworth, Yorkshire in 1742, the parish had had twelve communicants, but now after two years of his labors there, the winter average was three to four hundred and the summer figure sometimes reached 1200. Grimshaw's successor, Henry Venn (1725-97) had no desire for field preaching, but was known for his excited interest in preaching the Gospel. His excitement never abated, for while on his deathbed, the doctor said, "Sir, in this state of joyous excitement you cannot die." An Anglican minister of great literary popularity was the refined and studious James Hervey (1714-58), who aimed his evangelistic writings at the more affluent levels of society. His Philadelphia publisher printed on the 1794 edition title page of his *Meditations Among the Tombs*: "This book has been more read since it was first published [in 1746], than any other in the English
Aspasio was Hervey's second effort, and second great success, for in 1755, the first edition of 6000 copies sold out immediately, and two more editions were needed the first year. Hervey's popularity has been considered remarkable, in light of his "elaborate and stilted style." Nonetheless, this style was effective in reaching an elaborate and stilted aristocracy with the Gospel.

An Evangelical man of letters whose less-stilted style has contributed to his greater renown through the generations was the Dr. Samuel Johnson (1709-84). His biographer James Boswell (1740-95) considered him "in a dignified manner, a Methodist." A perusal of Johnson's many prayers will reveal a man who continually examined and sought to improve the state of his spiritual life. An example of his intent for a well-ordered life follows:

My Purpose is from this time

1 To reject or expel sensual images . . .

2 To avoid Idleness.

To rise early.

To study a proper portion of every day.
3 To worship God diligently.

4 To read the Scriptures.  

Mentioning "the whole discipline of regulated piety" with respect in his *Rambler* number 110, it was this characteristic—the pursuit of full sanctification—by which he was a "dignified Methodist." Where there is no hope, there can be no endeavour," he writes, asserting that only the hope of salvation enables one's life to truly improve. Johnson's spiritual influence in his own day, and since, is probably too great to attempt an estimate. In the tomes by him and about him which are left behind, it is certain that many have been affected by his example. Throughout his life Dr. Johnson constantly combatted sin and prayerfully relied on his Savior for comfort, strength, and peace. His last recorded prayer, written eight days before his death, reflects a deep peace in his commitment to Jesus Christ and a calm anticipation of his release from worldly troubles.

One of the greatest contrasts in a personal life wrought by conversion to Christ was the case of John Newton (1725-1807). He was a hardened slave trader for the ten years before he experienced conversion in 1754.
Elliott-Binns says of Newton, "Few men have managed
to crowd into their lives so much of sin and doubtful
adventure and still to retain something that was noble
and admirable." A North Atlantic storm brought Newton
to the very jowls of death, and, when his life passed
before him, he vowed to change his ways. Newton,
ordained in 1760, kept his vow, and a life of procuring
slaves for temporal profit was transformed into a life
of procuring souls for eternal profit.
Notes, Part IV

1 As qtd in A. Skevington Wood, The Inextinguishable Blaze (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960) 129.


5 Tyerman 1: 179-80.

6 Wood, Blaze, 80.


8 As qtd in Tyerman 2: 194n.

9 Franklin 1: 222.

10 Franklin 1: 223.

11 Franklin 1: 220-21.

12 As qtd. in Tyerman 2: 193n-94n.

16 Tyerman 2: 188.
17 As qtd. in Tyerman 1: 160.
18 As qtd. in Tyerman 2: 194n.
19 Tyerman, 2: 192.
27. As qtd. in Tyerman, 2: 388.
32. Boswell, 2: 123n.
34. Boswell, 4: 329.
46 As qtd. in Tyerman, 2: 386-87.
47 Bible, Philippians 1:15-18.
49 L. E. Elliott-Binns, The Early Evangelicals: A Religious and Social Study (Greenwich, CT: Seabury, 1953) 169; and Wood, Blaze, 130-32.
51 Wood, Blaze, 146.
52 As qtd. in G. W. E. Russell, "Henry Venn," A Dictionary of English Church History, eds. S. L. Ollard,


54 Elliott-Binns 148.

55 Boswell 1: 458n.


58 Johnson, Rambler, 2: 221.

59 Johnson, Diaries, 417-18.

60 Elliott-Binns 257.
Part V

In what age has such a work been wrought, considering the swiftness as well as the extent of it? When have such numbers of sinners in so short a time been recovered from the error of their ways? When hath religion—I will not say since the Reformation, but since the time of Constantine the Great—made so large a progress in any nation within so small a space?¹

John Wesley found prodigious cause for praise when reviewing what had been wrought as early as 1745. He noted not only the rapidity of the movement, but marveled at its depth as well. The number of lives changed would have a profound effect on society, he perceived, and for this he rejoiced.

The greatest success of the Evangelical Revival in social reform was perhaps, as Royle and Walvin maintain, the suppression of the slave trade and of slavery.² The two greatest warriors for this cause were members of a group of a later generation of devoted churchmen known as the "Clapham Sect." Three miles from London, with a population of 2000, the "holy village" of Clapham was the home of this remarkable coterie of Evangelicals, who
exercised a great influence over the upper society. They were men distinguished in wealth, in Parliamentary sway, in legal and rhetorical prowess, and in piety. Christopher Dawson declares of the Clapham Sect that "there has never been a time when religious idealism played so important a part in the development of the Empire."

Among their number were Granville Sharp (1735-1832) and William Wilberforce (1759-1815), both renowned for their anti-slavery campaign efforts. Sharp made the English public aware of the frightfulness of the "Middle Passage," and in 1787 he founded the first Committee for the Suppression of the Slave Trade. When Wilberforce, who had been elected MP for Yorkshire in 1784, was converted, he considered forsaking politics for the ministry. Fortunately, however, John Newton, the converted slave trader, convinced him that God had a mission for him in Parliament, that God had a purpose for giving him his natural gifts of eloquence and persuasion. Wilberforce persuaded his fellow and more experienced MP William Pitt to espouse his Resolution for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1789. In 1792, in 1796, and in 1804 their Bill for Abolition carried in the House of Commons but failed in the Lords.
Wilberforce called his fellow Evangelicals to intercessory prayer on the issue. He had the support and encouragement of John Wesley, whose last letter was written to Wilberforce:

Unless the Divine Power has raised you up to be an Athanasius contra mundum, I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise, in opposing that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature ... but, if God be for you, who can be against you? Oh, be not weary of well-doing. Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun, shall vanish away before you.

Wilberforce fought arduously for the next sixteen years for the unpopular cause, and it was in 1807 that the Act Abolishing the Slave Trade finally became law. The next battle, then, was the abolition of slavery itself. In 1824, Wilberforce moved for total abolition within the Empire, and lived just long enough to see his victory come to pass in 1833.

Among the other causes which Wilberforce pursued—according to Russell the "most unfashionable"—were the
support of popular education, tempering of the cruel criminal punishments of the day, the suppression of vice, the support of Christian missions, and the circulation of the Bible. He published in 1797 *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in the Country, contrasted with real Christianity*. In this work, which ran through fifty editions, Wilberforce expounded the realities of sin, death, repentance, and life. Wilberforce had been a churchgoer for many years before his conversion, and it was a concern for these unconverted churchgoers which prompted him to address the topic.

We have already observed the economic effect of the Revival's principles upon the lower classes. Maldwyn Edwards asserts that it was the Methodist movement which played a major part in preparing the society for the Industrial Revolution as well as for the Reform Act of 1832 which brought political emancipation to many of the unpropertied. The Methodists had been taught "the lessons of steadiness, sobriety, and industry," and were learning the responsibility of the acquired wealth which resulted. A similar view can be extended to include the political effects of the Methodist Revival. John
Wesley, raised a Tory, continued throughout his life with this alignment. He claimed to be no politician, and frowned on preachers speaking on any political topic except one: defending the King and his ministers from slander. They accepted the government as divinely ordained, having the duty to prescribe what was best for the people. This view is probably justified when the state of English common people of the mid-eighteenth century is considered: their level of education was low, the information channels were not reliant, and they were, in general, politically naive. Government in the hands of the people under such conditions, then, would very likely result in chaos. Furthermore, Christians in the Revival realized that they had a mission wherever they were stationed in life, and they should perform this function to the best of their ability. The doctrine that all are sinful and corrupt regardless of their station in life promoted the view that social or economic position does not determine one's status as a human being. One must simply endeavor through God's guidance to live a holy and well-ordered life whatever the social station, and things will improve. As was investigated in Part IV, things did improve for the socially afflicted who came to Christ in the Revival and
who sought to be sanctified (see pp. 54-55).

Inevitably, stability would be the result of a society heavily influenced by such a philosophy.

This was a different kind of stability than that described in Part I. The pre-Revival status quo was characterized by external factors entrenching the society against change for the better. The concept behind the Evangelical Revival was an emphasis on reform of the individual, and when many individuals were reformed through conversion and the goal of living a holy life, society, built of individuals, would be comprised of individuals striving for sanctification.

The result of such a societal change is noted by Wilberforce, writing in the early years of the nineteenth century:

The gracious Providence of God has indeed abundantly answered the prayers of many among us. . . . While those causes were in operation which were hereafter to manifest themselves in various forms of social and domestic evil, it pleased God to diffuse a spirit of an opposite kind, which began to display its love of God and love of man by the formation of societies of a religious and
moral nature, which have . . . invested our
own nation with a moral glory never before
enjoyed by any nation upon earth."

The French historian Elie Halévy noticed this
phenomenon also, being particularly interested in
finding the reasons for England's development into a
bourgeois society without a bloodstained metamorphosis
such as that undergone by his homeland. In his History
of the English People in 1815, he divides his
observations of the country into the political, the
economic, and the religious. In the multifaceted
English political system of the eighteenth century, he
sees "a confusion of oligarchy and anarchy," and in the
fledgling industrial capitalism a condition "of unbridled
competition, of class war." But he clearly affirms that
the religious sphere was a stabilizing force in English
society which served to balance the possible consequences
of the unsettled politics and economy of the nation.¹⁰

Seeing England through French eyes, Halévy sought a
reason for that country's stability which persisted
during and after the Revolution of 1789. He names
Methodism "the antidote to Jacobinism," using the
following rationale:

Uniting their influence with the influence of
industrialism, they fashioned the character of the English middle class, dogmatic in morals, proud of its practical outlook, and sufficiently powerful to obtain respect for its views from the proletariat on the one hand, from the aristocracy on the other.\textsuperscript{11}

In his essay \textit{The Birth of Methodism in England}, Halévy states that

The proletariat require \ldots a doctrine, an ideal: they need leaders to provide this ideal for them.\ldots As a general rule, [these leaders] do not come from the common people.\ldots It is the bourgeoisie which provides nations with their moral tone.\textsuperscript{12}

For Halévy the Evangelical Revival was a diffusion of the stabilizing doctrines from the middle class to the lower and upper classes. Through the evangelical instruction of the middle class, a respectable working class appeared, fit to assume the responsibilities of the changing era.

Recalling our overview at the end of part I of the condition of the English lower class in the early part of the century, we saw a bleak picture of stark class disparity. A similar picture was to be seen in France
during the same time period. On one side of the channel, the situation was addressed by the French Revolution, which sought to radically change the existing social establishment, and it resulted in considerable strife. On the other shore, a growing movement stressed renewal of the individual soul, the ethic of industry, and personal discipline to effect a positive transformation of the individual first, society next. The traditional institutions were respected, and were reformed from within rather than from without.

It would be an exaggeration to propound that the Evangelical Revival was the sole reason for England’s avoidance of cataclysm, but that it had a very considerable effect toward that end can hardly be denied. Individual lives were transformed, bringing many out of degeneracy and despair. Upon this foundation the society became respectable again, and English life was less accurately represented by the engravings of Hogarth.

Its improvement of the spiritual tone of the country is easily seen, and what was a desiccated institution before the Revival became a vigorous movement of genuine Christianity. Most importantly, as the evangelicals agreed, were the eternal fruits of
the movement, whereby sinners of all backgrounds came to
a personal knowledge of their Savior, to find the real
rest offered by Christ from sorrows and cares of life,
rather than drowsy pew-sitting rest offered by the
lethargic lull of an arid sermon. Transformed lives
were dedicated to the One Who had transformed them, and
the commitment of individual wills to the will of the
Creator put to work Christ's promise: "Seek, and you
will find." It was this which gave the Evangelical
Revival its historical significance.
Notes, Part V


11 Halévy 514.


Bibliography


1753-91.


