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## England Before and After Wesley

By Donald Drew

In 1738 Bishop Berkeley declared that religion and morality in Britain had collapsed “to a degree that was never before known in any Christian country”. That statement could be endorsed from widely different literary sources such as Pieltong, Defoe, Swift, Bolingbroke, Pope, Steele, Addison, Walpole and Johnson. Historians of divergent views also agree with Berkeley: Lecky, Stephen, Ranke, Macaulay, Green, Robertson, Trevelyan, Halevy and Temperley. The fact of a phenomenal religious and moral degeneracy of this time was beyond dispute.

There were a number of reasons for this lamentable state of affairs, but we need to note these three:

*First*, Following the death of Cromwell and later that of his son Richard, Charles Stuart, the son of Charles I, returned from exile to become Charles II. From the beginning of 1661, throughout his reign, punitive and vicious anti-puritan legislation reached the Statute Book. These included measures such as the Corporation Act, The Act of Uniformity, The Conventicle Act, The Five Mile Act, etc. These stabbed at the heart of Puritan legislation, religion, education and culture. Nearly one fifth of all British clergy—those who opposed the Act of Uniformity—were expelled from the Church of England. In their stead, cavalier place seekers were installed. The overall result was the near extinction of biblical thinking and conduct amongst most clergy. In next to no time, the dead hand of worldliness had settled upon the Church.

Charles' brother, James II succeeded him and largely because of his adherence to Roman Catholicism (in breach of the constitution), he was forced to abdicate. William of Orange then became the King. During his reign but *not* according to his wishes, occurred the *second* reason for Britain's spiritual and moral decline, namely the expulsion of Non-jurors, that is over 400 Anglican clergy who refused the Oath of Allegiance to William which, when we take into account Charles II legislation meant that the Church was bereft of prophets and priests, and therefore pluralists, time-servers, place-seekers and moderate men occupied their places.

The *third* reason for Britain's degeneration was the suppression of Convocation, whereby Anglican bishops and clergy were forbidden officially to meet together to deliberate on ecclesiastical matters, a state of affairs that persisted until the middle of the 19th Century, with the result that, with little correction, encouragement on accountability, many clergy behaved autonomously.

These three reasons tragically helped to paganize the 18th Century Church and people. They were the direct contributors to the spiritual and moral stagnation which Bishop Berkeley deplored. There is one more factor which must not be overlooked, namely the influence (towards the end of the 17th Century and through the 18th Century) of the Enlightenment—of Deism or natural religion.

A national Church publicly muzzled, with its prophetic and priestly wings clipped, was in no position to refute Deists and skeptics Religion was squeezed into a formalized straight jacket. The *inevitable* progression took place: from Deism to rationalism to skepticism to cynicism. With Christian *Truth* undermined, Christian *Morality* could find, save in all but a few places, *no* foothold.

The strangulation of Puritanism and the suffocation by Deism had tragic consequences that expressed themselves during the first half of the 18th Century. *First*, by and large the clergy of the Church of England were corrupted and that corruption then spread from top to bottom of the populace. A succession of archbishops and bishops lived luxuriously, neglected their duties, unashamedly solicited bishoprics and deanery for themselves and their families. Parish clergy followed suit. Queen Anne partly, and the first two Georges wholly, filled their courts with courtiers who flouted levity and practiced vice. Numbers of Christian students at Oxford and Cambridge were sent down because of their zeal in universities unworthy of the name, where Dons busied themselves in their books and undergraduates immersed themselves in sport, wine, women and song.

But, as in most situations, *all* was not lost, for God had a faithful remnant. Persecuted but persistent, evangelical clergymen such as Venn, Romaine, Grimshaw, Berridge, Fletcher, the Milner brothers, Jones, Newton, Simeon nailed their colours to the mast alongside—before the end of the Century—such laymen as Zachary Macaulay, Lord Teignmouth, the Thornton brothers, Charles Grant, William Wilberforce.

*Secondly*, a corrupt, even dead church darkened most aspects of English life. By the treaty of Utrecht in 1713, England had wrung from France and Spain the monopoly of the slave trade. The financial greed which it bred and fed, the brutalizing-of masters' and slaves' lives, the indignity of labour that it engendered, laid a curse on the economic and political life of the Century. Moreover the Industrial Revolution was gradually spreading and these attitudes and actions influenced many owners of mines, factories and mills in the treatment of their workers. The barbarities practiced in industry were bad enough, but those carried out on slave ships end then in plantations, chill one's blood. It is estimated that the number of negroes during this Century transported largely in British ships and largely from West Africa to America runs into millions. There was some slavery in England, too. And because of the enormous sums of money involved in the slave trade, there were repeated financial scandals, leading to loss and ruin, the chief of which was the South Sea Bubble. The results of dishonesty in turn fortifying more dishonesty.

*Thirdly*, other evils flourished. In politics, nepotism, place-seeking, bribery were the order of the day especially at election times. For the first half of the Century, the Prime

Minister, Robert Walpole, epitomized the management of men, means, money and manipulation of laws, their administration or the penal system. Britain at this time, more than at any other, was two nations—the rich and the poor. The laws were devised largely to keep the poor in their place and under control. Thus to steal a sheep, to snare a rabbit, to break a young tree, to pick a pocket for more than one shilling, to grab goods from someone's hand and run away with them were hanging offences; executions at Tyburn at London were known as Hanging Shows. They occurred regularly and drew huge crowds. As for existence in jails, the transportation to Australia of both sexes, and of children, the flogging of women, the pillory and branding on the hand—the horrors continued unabated.

*Fourthly*, The strangulation of Puritanism and the suffocation of Deism had further inhuman consequences, in the treatment and mortality of children. Their death rate tells its own tale, but only for London are authentic statistics available. These show that, for example, between 1730-1750, 3 out of 4 of all children, born to all classes, died before their 5th birthday. James Hanway, the Christian friend of parish and pauper children, produced scores of statistics, pamphlets, preserved in the British Museum library, revealing his investigations into the treatment and death-rate of the parish infant poor—death occurring time after time because of murder and the practice of exposing newly born babies to perish in the streets, as well as the placing of unhappy foundlings with heartless nurses, who let them starve, or turned them into the streets to beg or steal.

A civilization is rightly judged by the way it treats people and when people are treated inhumanly they resort to desperate measures to survive. So, *Fifthly*, it is not for nothing that the 18th Century in England is known as the 'Gin Age'. The bestiality practiced upon children was often the result of drinking deep, fiery, poisonous gin which outrivalled beer as the national beverage. Hogarth's pictures, far from being caricatures, are realistic glimpses of the country's plight Lecky defined the national gin-drinker's drunkenness as *the* "master curse of English life between 1720-1750". And of course the inevitable evils followed: poverty, violence, prostitution, murder. The cardinal cause of social disintegration and degeneration during those thirty years, that extended up to the upper classes as well, was the liquor trade, with its daily disruption also of the nation's workaday life.

*Sixthly*, Another desperate measure for survival encouraged by alcohol, was the perverted conception of sport, which, like alcohol, brought attendant evils in its train, such as further coarsening of the personality, cruelty and gambling. The baiting of bulls, bears, badgers and dogs, with the fireworks attached to them, were typical of the Third and Fourth Decades of this Century, most of such tortures taking place in public house grounds, in a village green, or in village church grounds or Cathedral doses. Often to provide greater excitement, these animals were baited to death. Other forms of 'sport' were cock-fighting—this was universal—with metal spurs. Many 18th Century clergymen bred fighting cocks and had church bells rung to honour a local winner.

The setting of trained dogs on ducks in lakes was another favourite recreation, as well as fox hunting. Cudgel play and pugilism—boxing without gloves—for men and women,

which sometime went on for hours, was another sport, while prize fights between famous male bruisers who battled bare-fisted, attracted mobs of 12,000 or more.

*Seventhly*, as a concomitant of these brutalising activities but extending into other areas also, gambling was, for all classes, a national obsession, bringing appalling ruin to thousand upon thousands. A further interest in London and other big cities, was immorality as sport, from court masquerades to fornication in daylight on the village green, or selling one's wife by auction at a cattle market. By the same token, much literature was frankly obscene. Lecky, writing of the Theater, remarks that "The profligacy of the theatre during the generation that followed the Restoration, can hardly be exaggerated." An assize Judge asked, "How (else) comes it to pass that no sooner is a playhouse opened in any part of the kingdom, than it at once becomes surrounded by a halo of brothels?"

Finally, a word about ignorance, lawlessness and savagery. Until the advent of the Sunday School movement towards the end of the Century, little or no provision was made for the free education of the poor, except the church system of Charity Schools. They were invariably a farce, most teachers being half illiterate. Millions of English people at this time had never set foot in any kind of school, but those of school-leaving age were usually apprenticed, often sold to masters and frequently viciously treated.

As for lawlessness: thieves, robbers, highwaymen, footpads abounded throughout the length and breadth of the land; as Horace Walpole observed in 1751, "One is forced to travel, even at noon, as if one were going to battle."

As far as savagery is concerned: consider the plundering of shipwrecked vessels, lured by false signals on to rocks, to the indifference shown to the drowning sailors. This was a regular activity along the whole coastline of the British Isles.

Into this spiritual and moral quagmire stepped John Wesley: born June 28th 1703; in a Lincolnshire country rectory; one of a family of 19 children; he narrowly escaped death as a little boy when one night the Rectory caught fire and was burnt to the ground; went to Charterhouse School and up to Oxford where his intellectual gifts led to his being elected a fellow and tutor of Lincoln College; devoutly religious, he, and others, ministered as best they could to the poor and downtrodden; and for being devout they were despised by their contemporaries.

After a few years, he was ordained in the Church of England with his brother Charles and sailed to the United States. That was a calamitous time for him and others. On returning to England much heart searching ensued and it was not until he talked in London with some Moravian Christians that he knew that he was not a Christian himself.

Attending a Moravian service on May 24, 1738, Wesley as he described it "felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ; Christ died for my salvation and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine ... I testified openly to all there what I now ... felt in my heart". John Wesley was at last converted; and as in every

conversion, God began to warm his heart, unify his personality, multiply his sympathies, sharpen his critical faculties, and clarify his life's purpose.

He at once began to declare the "glad tidings of salvation" in prisons, workhouses and whatever churches would open their pulpits to him and they were few and far between.

A year later—April 2, 1739—is a date of great significance for England and the English speaking world because Wesley, in response to George Whitfield's invitation, arrived in Bristol and was convinced of the need for field-preaching, by Whitfield, as the most likely means of reaching the greatest number of people, especially the working class, then, as now, virtually untouched by the established Church. So, the following day, despite his misgivings, but encouraged by Whitfield's example, Wesley aged 36, preached his first open-air sermon, and unknown to either of them, the Great Awakening, the Evangelical Revival was born. It was to be reared for many years in an atmosphere of insolence, contempt, abuse and violence.

"That Methodist", "that enthusiast" was described also by Anglican clergy as "that mystery of iniquity", "a diabolical seducer, and impostor and fanatic". For three decades magistrates, squires and clergy turned a blind eye to the constant drunken and brutal attacks by mobs and gangs on Wesley and his supporters. They endured physical assault with missiles of various kinds; frequently bulls would be driven into the midst of congregations, or musical instruments blared to drown the preacher's voice. Time after time, the Wesleys and Whitfield narrowly escaped death, while several of their itinerant preachers were attacked and their houses set on fire. Hundreds of anti-revival publications appeared as well as regular inaccurate and scurrilous newspaper reports and articles. And the virulent attacks, not surprisingly, came from the clergy.

After a few years, Wesley wrote a pamphlet in which he declared that "It is the plain old Christianity that I teach", wanting to set out his wares in plain, rational, and Scriptural terms. His paramount purpose was to make men and women conscious of God. He was fully aware of the many and varied powers of evil and corruption, of the rusty ecclesiastical machinery, and knew, now, what God's purpose was for him: to point men and women to God through Christ. This, in turn, would reclaim their homes, towns and country from paganism. Wesley's central understanding of Christianity was individual redemption leading to social regeneration. He believed that the main purpose of the Bible is to show sinners their way back to God by the atoning sacrifice of Christ. This and this only he preached. But he understood also that social changes are an inevitable by-product and a useful piece of evidence of conversion. Therefore, because of the preaching, the high moral principles enshrined in Scriptures slowly began to take root in people's minds. Wesley knew that God's Word calls for the salvation of individual souls but also gives us firm ordinances for national existence and a common social life. Under God, this was his goal, and he never lost sight of it. Converted people joined other converted people in what Wesley called Societies. He regarded all his services as supplementary to regular Church of England services. He remained a Church of England clergyman for most of his life—his brother, Charles, remained one for all of his life.

John Wesley's break with the Church of England occurred much later, when he began to ordain ministers in what became known as the Methodist church.

John Wesley's life was a triumph of God's grace. Under physical attack and vituperation thousands of times, never once did he lose his temper. He was prepared to endure a blow if the dealing of it would diffuse the hysteria. When struck by a stone or cudgel, he would wipe away the blood and carry on preaching. He loved his enemies and, do what they would, they could not make him discourteous or angry. It is no exaggeration to say that John Wesley—and all these things were true of Charles and Whitfield also—instilled into the British people a new and Christian conception of courage. His tranquil dignity, absence of malice and anger, and above all, the evidence of God's Holy Spirit working in his life, eventually disarmed his enemies and won them for Christ.

The effect of this erudite Oxford don's preaching—whose speech was always classical English and whose bearing was that of a Christian gentleman—was invariably extraordinary. Gradually, soldiers, sailors, miners, fishermen, smugglers, industrial workers, thieves, vagabonds, men, women and children listened intently, in apt reverent attention, removed their hats and knelt, often emotionally overcome as he pointed these thousands upon thousands to God's grace. For over fifty years, to such drink-sodden, brutalized and neglected multitudes, Wesley held out the Word of Life.

In May 1739, the cornerstone of the first Methodist preaching house was laid in Bristol; Kingwood School and the London foundry were opened; and soon preaching houses were springing up all over the country, including Scotland and Ireland, while in America the progress of Evangelical revival under, among others, Finney, was phenomenal: George Whitfield courageously crossed the Atlantic thirteen times before he died in 1770.

From 1739 to his death in 1791, Wesley was indefatigable. His energy was prodigious. He got up each morning at 4 and preached his first sermon most mornings at 5. He and his itinerant preachers divided each day into 3 equal parts: 8 hours for sleeping and eating, eight for meditation, prayer and study, and eight for preaching, visiting and social labours. He organized hundreds of local Methodist societies after each place he visited; established and kept an eye on Kingwood School; opened the first free medical dispensary for the poor, a rheumatism clinic in London, and wrote a treatise on medicine; prepared and preached at least 45,000 sermons; travelled a quarter of a million miles on horse back, in all weather, night and day, up and down and across England on roads that were often dangerous and sometimes impassable; during which time he composed his commentary on the Bible verse by verse, wrote hundreds of letters, and a daily journal from 1735 to the year before his death in 1791; and he also wrote some of the 330 books that were published in his lifetime. He composed English, French, Latin, Greek and Hebrew grammars; edited, for the general education of his preachers and congregations, many books which became the 50 volumes of his famous Christian library. This cultured man, keen theologian and esteemed intellectual, warned his preachers that one could "never be a deep preacher without extensive reading, *any more than a thorough Christian*". Every preacher was made a distributor and seller of books and was expected to have mastered their contents. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says of Wesley, in this

regard, that "No other man in the 18th Century did so much to create a taste for good reading and to supply with books, at the lowest prices." His book, *'Rules For A Helper'* suggests the same cultural influences that he diffused: Never be unemployed for a moment; believe evil of no one; speak evil of no one; a preacher of the Gospel is the servant of all; be ashamed of nothing but sin; be punctual; you will need all the (common) sense you have to have your wits about you."

We have seen that Wesley understood that individual conversion must lead to changes in society, and this was hammered home in different ways. Thirteen years *before* the Abolition Committee was formed, he publishes his *"Thoughts upon Slavery"*, a graphic, vehement and penetrating treatise denouncing this vicious horrid trade" as a national disgrace. He kept up his attack on slavery until the end of his life, the last letter he wrote being to Wilberforce. By the same token, he deplored the stupidity and futility of war, especially Britain's war with the American colonies. He frequently wrote and spoke about the use and abuse of money and privilege. He wore inexpensive clothes and dined on the plainest fare, not spending more than £30 a year on his personal needs. But his clothes were spotless, his shoes always shined and he never wore a wig. He publicly and repeatedly questioned why food was so dear and himself gave the answer: immense quantities of corn were consumed in distilling; and on humanitarian and social grounds, he pleaded for the abolition of spirituous liquors for use as beverages.

He supported fair prices, a living wage, honest and healthy employment for all. There is no question but that Wesley was more familiar with the life of the poor than any other public figure of his age. Constantly moving all over Britain, he could and did sense the mind of the people as no king or statesman was able to do. He ceaselessly called upon the rich to help the poor, and to his thousands of followers he gave this warning, "Give none that asks relief an ill word or an ill look. Do not hurt them."

Like Dickens after him, Wesley put certain aspects of the Law in the stocks, holding them up to public ridicule. In this regard he attacked smuggling but considered that in most cases the representatives of the Law were more criminal than the imprisoned smuggler. He strongly campaigned against bribery and corruption at Election times and the scandal of pluralities and sinecures in the Church of England. He fearlessly criticized aspects of the penal system and prisons (paving the way for John Howard and Elizabeth Fry), depicting prisons as "nurseries of all manner of wickedness". He campaigned against the near-medieval practice of medicine and for funeral reform.

In addition to Wesley's wide interests, concerns and activities which we have noted, should be added his practical interest in the potential uses for electricity; vocational training for the unemployed; raising of money to clothe and feed prisoners and to buy food, medicine, fuel, tools for the helpless and the aged; the founding of a Benevolent Loan Fund and the Stranger's Friend Society. He believed in God-given nature and, therefore, the nobility of work and the qualities such engendered.

Nor must we forget that the Evangelical Revival caused the masses of England to sing. His poet brother, Charles, whose fame as a preacher is still overshadowed by his fame as

a hymn-writer, wrote the words of 8-9,000 poems many of which became hymns. John taught the people to sing. Many hymns were set to popular tunes of the day; they paved the way for the sermon and presses home its message. And thousands of those who sang that, "Their chains had fallen off and their hearts were free," were singing not only about their salvation.

Moreover, the Great Awakening gave to the entire English-speaking world, its richest heritage of poetic and sacred songs and an understanding of hymns as literature, as history, as theology. Other exceptional poets and hymn-writers also emerged during this period and during the 19th Century—Cowper, Watts, Newton, Toplady, Bishop Heber, Bonar, Mrs. Alexander and Frances Havergal. But Charles' hymns, praise and prayer—like the metrical version of the Psalms of David in Scotland—sank deeply into the subconscious life of the nation.

Likewise, Wesley, Whitfield and their associates revitalized and reinforced the truths of the conservative theology of Biblical Christianity and, therefore, of Presbyterianism. This was an enormously important contribution. The Bible, that during the 18th Century had been a closed book to Englishmen as much as it had been in Chaucer's day, became *the* Book of Books. Britain was saved from lapsing into infidelity.

John Wesley died as he had lived from his conversion. For 53 years, he had faithfully preached that men need and are saved only *by faith* in Christ, but the corollary of that was that they would be judged by *works*—by how they live. He often prayed, "Let me wear out, not rust out. Let me not live to be useless." Until a week before his death, when fever incapacitated and forced him to take to his bed, he had in his 88th year, continued to preach, write, supervise and encourage. He died on the morning of March 2nd 1791, and no sooner was his spirit released than those who had come to rejoice with him "burst into an anthem of praise. "No coach, no hearse were needed for his funeral, for he had given instructions that six poor men, in need of employment, be given a pound each to carry his body to the grave."

It is given to few people, as it was given to John Wesley, to see the reward of their labours. In the first decades of his ministry, his arrival or that of his followers in any town and village was the signal for a violent popular uprising. But for the last ten of his 88 years, it is no exaggeration to say that Wesley was the most respected and loved figure in the Kingdom. After his death, he was immortalized by thousands of portraits, his likeness on teapots and crockery, and busts in every conceivable medium.

An extreme Calvinist once asked George Whitfield, "Do you think we shall see John Wesley in heaven?" Whitfield replied, "I fear not. No. He will be so near the throne and we at such a distance, that we shall hardly get a sight of him."



## **AFTER WESLEY**

We have seen something of what England was like before Wesley. Now briefly, let us look at what it was like after him. What were some of the results of the Evangelical Revival, the Great Awakening? It was a watershed from which issued many streams.

The *First* thing to note is that the faithful, tiny remnant of Evangelical Clergy in the Church of England was increased *to* the extent that the dominant religious influence inside and outside the Church of England at the close of the 18th Century, was that evoked by the Evangelical Revival. Under its influence, *Nonconformity*, too, again became a power in the land. This was even more so, especially under Whitfield's influence in Scotland. Moreover, the later Oxford Movement may be seen as a result of the Evangelical Revival.

*Secondly*, A further fruit of Wesley's work was the conversion of William Wilberforce, Lord Shaftsbury and others and the development of the Clapham sect, so called because they lived around Clapham Common, South East of London. This group of Evangelical Christians included businessmen, bankers, politicians, Colonial governors, members of Parliament, whose ceaseless, sacrificial labours benefitted millions of their fellows at home and abroad.

*Thirdly*, Consider a further result of a people finding its soul—the numbers of literary men and women whose writings give evidence of their possessing a Christian perspective: poets such as Blake, Wordsworth, Browning, Tennyson, and later Kipling and Masfield; novelists like Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontes, Stevenson—all these and others owed much to the purging and ennobling influence of the Evangelical Revival.

*Fourthly*, Peruse the lives and labours of the social emancipators during the 19th Century—There is time to mention only a few of their names: Wilberforce and Clarkson—slavery abolished; Lord Shaftsbury, Sadler—industrial emancipation, Elizabeth Fry, John Howard—prison reform; Plimsoll—ships' safety regulations; Hannah More, Robert Raikes—Sunday Schools established.

*Sixthly*\*, The 19th Century preaching tradition was nourished by the Revival: Moody, Spurgeon, Nicholson, Ryle, Handley Moule, James, Danny, Knox, Chavass, and others were mighty expository preachers of the Bible, which the Great Awakening had not only opened up to the masses but had once again made into the Book of Books for the Anglo-Saxon peoples.

Charles Simeon, Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, was vicar for over 50 years of Holy Trinity Church, and in the face of sustained opposition, was enabled to introduce

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\* There is no *fifthly* in the original source; it jumps from *fourthly* to *sixthly*.

Evangelicalism into the University life, and to his life and work the various Christian Unions, now affiliated to UCCF<sup>25</sup> may be traced. Moreover, his training of young men as preachers made a valuable contribution to evangelical worship in the 19th Century. He established what has proved to be a lasting Evangelical tradition at Cambridge University.

*Seventhly*, Examine the splendid world missionary endeavour that inevitably resulted, associated with the names, among others, of Coke, Asbury, Carey, Livingstone, Moffat, Henry Martyn, Morrison, Paton and Mary Slessor. When the work of the Evangelical Revival had become established, many missionary societies were formed, all within a few years of each other—the Baptist Missionary Society, The London Missionary Society, The Wesleyan Mission Society, The Church Mission Society, The British and Foreign Bible Society, The China Inland Mission. That missionary spirit stirred up thousands of Christian young men and women to go to the uttermost parts of the world, often at great personal cost and sacrifice, and serve people who could not repay anything to them. That same missionary spirit also moved millions of people, who could not go overseas, personally, to assume a moral obligation for the welfare of others; to pray and to give generously. Over time that missionary spirit transformed the very character of the way in which the British administered their colonies. This becomes obvious when we contrast the altered British colonial administration with that of the other European powers or with the way native rulers administered their own kingdoms.

*Eighthly*, The lives of politicians were affected. Burke and Pitt were better men because of their Evangelical friends. They helped redefine the civilized world as those parts of the world where morality plays as significant a role in state policy and administration as do pragmatic politics and practical economics. Perceval, Lord Liverpool, Abraham Lincoln, Gladstone, the Prince Consort, among others, acknowledged the influence of the Great Awakening. Moreover, it can be shown that the Evangelical Revival, *beginning among the outcast masses*, was the midwife for the spirit and character and values that have created and sustained free institutions throughout the English speaking world.

England, after Wesley, saw many of his Century's evils eradicated, because hundreds of thousands became Christians; their hearts were changed, as were their minds and attitudes, and so the society, the public realm, was affected.

*Ninthly*, Thus in a direct line of descent came the following improvements: abolition of slavery and the Emancipation of the Industrial workers in England. I know I have done little justice to the enormous range of achievements by Evangelicals from Wilberforce to Shaftsbury—John Wesley's "spiritual sons"—each of whom honoured Wesley as the greatest man of his time. Then came—and all these movements were established in the first half of the 19th Century—Factory schools, Ragged Schools, the Humanising of the prison system, the Reform of the penal code, the establishing of the Salvation Army, The Religious Tract Society, The Pastoral Aid Society, The London City Mission, Muller's Homes, Fegan's Homes, the National Children's Home & Orphanages, the Forming of Evening classes and Polytechnics, Agnes Weston's Soldiers' and Sailors' Rest, YMCAs, Barnardo's Homes, the N.S.P.C.C., the Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, The RSPCA. The list is incomplete. Ninety-nine out of one hundred people behind these movements were

Christians, and all of these movements evidence the cause and effects: God's raising up of Wesley led to the Great Awakening of hearts, minds, consciences and wills.

Wesley's purpose under God has been achieved: to attack the root cause of spiritual atrophy and moral decay and purge the nation's soul. One cannot explain the transformation of 19th Century Britain until one can understand Wesley. (And the same applies to 19th Century America.) Under God, Wesley triumphed over the powers of evil because of the person he was, the truth of his message, his singlemindedness and the significance of his spiritual and moral stature.

Nevertheless, it has to be said that there were mistakes made, misunderstandings, friction, and discord were obvious, and people were hurt. Satan, terrified at what was happening, did his utmost to create confusion and at times he succeeded. But the wonder is how little he was able to do. It has been argued that Wesley's social achievements were merely palliative, and that he pointed folk to "another world" as the only God-given remedy for the ills of this life. However, Wesley knew that he was being true to God's commission in pointing men first to Christ and then to good works, which would not necessarily be measured by a subsequent generation.

As in the Reformation, but for different reasons and in different ways, John Wesley won England for Christ, for the Gospel and for sane Biblical religion. This country clergyman's son, slight in build, but with beauty and strength of features, was ardent, fearless, capable, immensely industrious, kind, humble, witty, courteous, highly intelligent, dexterous in reasoning, gracious in spirit and manners. His God-given gifts of character and mind enabled him to perceive that structures nor plans, however well-intentioned, do not generate truthful lives and bring about true changes in society. It is the Truth that reforms.

John Wesley's life under God gives the lie to the contemporary deterministic philosophy which asserts that history is 'made' by material conditions and institutions—that no longer is it formed by the character—words, thoughts, deeds—of men and women. If the deterministic view of history is true, then there is no doubt that the harshness of social, political and religious life had reached such a desperate state that the England of the 18th Century was destined to have a destructive revolution. Had there been no Evangelical revival, reforms could not have come to 19th Century England without a bloody uprising. In conclusion, England owes a great debt to the steadiness of the Methodists who were unmoved by the clamour of the mob orators urging violent change or revolution in the early decades of the 19th Century.

My final word is this: Although this spiritual and intellectual giant, John Benjamin Wesley, was God's man in the 18th Century, the real enlightening power did not lie in any human instrument at all. It lay in the Scriptures, once again opened up, free to all who would come to them to drink the water of life. Just as the study, dissemination and publication of Scripture brought life from the dead to Europe in the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, so did these same Scripture bring about the Evangelical Revival and the Great Awakening.

During the Great Awakening Wesley asked, “If sloth and luxury are not, what is the present characteristic of the English nation? It is ungodliness. Ungodliness is our universal, our constant, our peculiar character.” Is this not a word for *our* time?

Let the example of Wesley, Whitfield and their associates convict and encourage us: to make no compromise with the world, the flesh and the devil; to recognize idolatry in any form, as the rejection of God’s Word, is sin; and boldly say so; in our hearts to have the fear of God and no fear of man; to be men and women who carry Christ and are carried by Christ, wherever we go; for our hearts and minds to be steeped in the Word of God; our lives governed by it so that we can use it with powerful effect; so that contact with us will bring the needy to the gates of heaven. And let us in our generation fervently continue to pray for Revival.

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