

Lecture 24 – “The Inextinguishable Blaze”: The Evangelical Revival in Great Britain

“Just as it is an impertinence to criticize a foreign country where one possesses as yet only a tourist’s knowledge of it, before one has learned to know its people, to speak their language, or to become at home in their surroundings; so, we must in imagination become the friends and neighbours of our forefathers before we are entitled to dogmatize about them.” A. S. Turbeville

“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” 1 Corinthians 1: 30—John Wesley’s favorite text

Background Reading

Gonzalez, ch. 23, pp. 209-16

Prayer

From John Wesley

“Pardon, O gracious Jesus, what we have been; with your holy discipline correct what we are. Order by your providence what we shall be; and in the end, crown your own gifts. Amen.”

“The Inextinguishable Blaze”: The Evangelical Revival in Great Britain

I. The Social and Religious Situation in England at the Beginning of the 18th Century

A. Social chaos

1. William Hogarth (1679-1764)
2. Probability of a “French Revolution”

B. Religious decline: The vanishing Gospel

French philosopher Montesquieu (about 1730): “There is no religion in England. If anyone mentions religion people begin to laugh.”

1. Church of England

“This ‘Latitudinarian’ party had learned at least one lesson from the Civil War [of the 1640s], and that was to ask no questions and to rock no boats. With but few exceptions, the church wallowed in weary indifference for almost a century, until the appearance of the Evangelical Revival” (Allen C. Guelzo, *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom: The Irony of the Reformed Episcopalians*, 6).

2. The Dissenters

What happened to the Puritans after the religious settlement of 1688?

“In [ecclesiastical conflict] there is now a period of necessary, unsparing, strong resistance against what aims to desecrate God’s covenant. But afterwards, when victory has been gained, there is a time of rest and peace, and of quiet work for God’s kingdom amid the struggle against sin and distress and misery. And how often it is seen that men who in this first period nobly persevered and were full of the Holy Ghost, in a succeeding period of rest and peace lost spirit, visibly weakened, and abandoned their former spiritual viewpoint” (Abraham Kuyper, *To Be Near Unto God*, 545).

Some exceptions: Isaac Watts (*Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 1707); Philip Doddridge (*Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*)

II. The Overlapping Circles of Revival

A. The Moravians

1. January 1, 1739—“Pentecost at New Year”
2. Fetter Lane Society
3. Leaders—Benjamin Ingham and John Cennick

4. “The consequence of their exceptional evangelistic effort lay in the contribution they made to the life of every Christian communion...” (*The Inextinguishable Blaze*, 161).

B. John Wesley and the Methodists

1. Wesley’s life and work (Read “From the *Journal*”)

a. Samuel and Susanna Wesley

“Mr. Wesley’s habits of order, perseverance, and determination, came to him as his mother’s dowry” (Charles Spurgeon).

b. “The Holy Club”

William Law’s *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*—“He...is devout who lives no longer according to his own will or the way and spirit of the world, but to the sole will of God; he considers God in everything, serves God in everything, makes all the parts of his common life aspects of his worship by doing everything in the name of God and according to such principles as are conformable to His glory.”

c. Wesley in Georgia

“He had preached morality; he had preached against drunkenness; but no drunkards had become sober; he had preached with all his might about leading a religious life and being much in prayer, but nobody had prayed the more; he had earnestly exhorted men to flee from the wrath to come, but he had not told them where to flee to” (Charles Spurgeon).

d. “My Heart Strangely Warmed”

May 24, 1738—“In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a Society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle 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 had saved me from the law of sin and death.”

e. “The World is my Parish” (Read “The Almost Christian”)

John Wesley’s diary entry on June 28, 1774 (his 72nd birthday): “This being my birthday...I was considering, How is this, that I find just the same strength as I did 30 years ago? That my sight is considerably better now, and my nerves firmer than they were then? That I have none of the infirmities of old age, and have lost several I had in my youth? The grand cause is, the good pleasure of God, who doth whatsoever pleaseth Him. The chief means are: (1) My constantly rising at 4 a. m. for about 50 years; (2) My generally preaching at 5 in the morning, one of the most healthy exercises in the world; and (3) My never travelling less, by sea or land, than 4,500 miles a year.”

“Peace to his ashes, death to his errors, life to all the truth he preached, and may the blessing of God make any one of us but a tenth as earnest as he was, and a tenth as useful” (Charles Spurgeon).

2. Wesley’s doctrine

a. Arminian theology

b. Entire sanctification

Martyn Lloyd-Jones: “The trouble with John Wesley was that he was too logical...he took certain statements and pressed them to their logical conclusions irrespective of other statements in the same Scriptures” (*Puritans*, 310).

3. John and Charles Wesley’s Hymns

Verse four of Charles Wesley’s “And Can It Be That I Should Gain”—

“Long my imprisoned spirit lay
 Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
 Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
 I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
 My chains fell off, my heart was free,
 I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.”

4. The Methodists

- a. Society gathered at the Foundery in Moorfields, London, in 1739
- b. Ordination of Thomas Coke by John Wesley in 1784

C. George Whitefield and His Associates

1. George Whitefield

“Leuconomus (beneath well-sounding Greek)

I slur a name a poet must not speak

Stood pilloried in Infamy's high stage,

And bore the pelting scorn of half an age...”

(Description of opposition to George Whitefield [Greek=Leuconomus] in William Cowper's poem, “Hope”)

“Though not the first in order, if we look at the date of his birth, I place George Whitefield first in the order of merit, without any hesitation. Of all the spiritual heroes of a hundred years ago none saw so soon as Whitefield what the times demanded” (Bishop J. C. Ryle).

2. Lady Huntingdon (Lady Selina Shirley) (1707-1791) and “the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion”

“She devoted herself, her name, her means, her time, her thoughts to the cause of Christ. She did not spend her money on herself; she did not allow the homage paid to her rank to remain with herself; she passed these on, and offered them up to Him from whom her gifts came. She acted as one ought to act who considered this life a pilgrimage, not a home...” (John Henry Newman).

3. Whitefield and Wales (*see point D*)

4. Whitefield and Scotland

a. Ralph Erskine and the Associate Presbytery

George Whitefield: “If the pope himself would lend me his pulpit, I would gladly proclaim the righteousness of Jesus Christ therein.”

b. William McCulloch and “the Cambuslang Work” (1742)

c. Lady Glenorchy (1741-86)

5. Whitefield and America (*see Lecture 26*)

D. The Welsh

1. The Leaders

a. Griffith Jones (1683-1761)—“the morning star of the revival”

b. Daniel Rowland (1713-90)—the great preacher

George Whitefield was “the greatest English preacher who has ever lived. You notice my emphasis! I say the greatest ‘English’ preacher....There was a contemporary of his 200 years ago who, I am glad to note, even Bishop Ryle...has to grant and to admit was the equal of Whitefield....Daniel Rowland” (Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Puritans*, 104).

c. Howel Harris (1714-73)—the superintendent of Trevecca College

d. William Williams (1717-91)—the hymn writer

2. The role of George Whitefield

3. The Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church

Howel Harris in 1743: “Blessed be God, we move daily nearer towards an Evangelical order. As we are not turned out of communion in the National Church yet, and as we meet the Lord there, we think it would be running before the Lord now to separate ourselves. But such as labour among the lambs, and such as join themselves to us, are now brought under discipline and better order than we have been. Many thousands, I believe, will at the Last Day bless God for this outpouring of the Spirit among us.”

E. The Anglican Evangelicals

1. Samuel Walker of Truro—“Prophet of Evangelicalism in the West”
2. William Romaine (1714-95)—Leader in London
3. William Grimshaw (1708-63)—“Apostle of the North” (Haworth in Yorkshire)
 “When I die, I shall then have my greatest grief and my greatest joy: my greatest grief that I have done so little for Jesus, and my greatest joy that Jesus has done so much for me.”
4. John Berridge (1716-93)—“Apostle of the Cam and Fen” (East Anglia)
 To Lady Huntingdon: “A robe I must have, of one whole piece, broad as the law, spotless as the light, and richer than an angel ever wore—the robe of Jesus.”
5. Henry Venn (1724-97)—Clapham (London), Huddersfield (Yorkshire), and Yelling (East Anglia)
 To his son a year before he died: “I have to tell you, and would if it were with my last breath, that I can wish for nothing more than I now find Christ is to me.”
6. John Newton (1725-1807)—Olney and St. Mary Woolnoth
 - a. *Cardiphonia*
 - b. Friendship with William Cowper (1731-1800)
 - c. The Olney Hymns
 - d. Second generation Anglican evangelicals—John Venn, Daniel Wilson, Charles Simeon, William Wilberforce
7. Hannah More (1745-1833)
 “While we would with deep humility confess that we cannot purchase heaven by any works or qualifications of our own, and gratefully acknowledge that it must be purchased for us by ‘Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in his blood,’ yet let us remember that we have no reason to expect we could be capable of enjoying the pleasures of a heaven thus purchased without first being heavenly-minded....A Christian’s piety [does not] consist in living in retreat and railing at the practices of the world while perhaps her heart is full of the spirit of that world at which she is railing. It consists in subduing the spirit of the world and opposing its practices even while her duty obliges her to live in it” (Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education*).

J. C. Ryle summed up the theological principles of the Evangelical Revival in England under five points—

1. The “absolute supremacy” of the Bible “as the only rule of faith and practice, the only test of truth, the only judge of controversy”
2. The corruption of human nature by sin
3. The centrality of the atonement of Christ as the theological remedy for this condition
4. The necessity of an “experimental knowledge of Christ crucified and interceding,” to be applied by “the inward work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of men”
5. The requirement of a serious, holy life as “the only certain evidence of a man’s spiritual condition”

Questions from Class

What is Socinianism?

Why is Whitefield not as well known as Wesley?

Did Whitefield stay in the Church of England all of his life?
 Why did the Puritans decline so precipitously?
 Is there any record of debate between Calvinists and the Wesleys?

For Further Study

- **Cambridge and the Evangelical Succession* by Marcus L. Loane
 Chapters on William Grimshaw, John Berridge, Henry Venn, Charles Simeon, and Henry Martyn
- **Christian Leaders of the 18th Century* by J. C. Ryle
 The stories of Whitefield, the Wesleys, Walker of Truro, Hervey of Weston Favell, Rowlands of Llangetho, Romaine of Blackfriars, Venn of Huddersfield, John Berridge of Everton and their contemporaries and colleagues. By the Bishop of Liverpool.

A. Except for the Puritan epoch, no period in English history was so productive in writings on the Christian life than the time of the Evangelical Revival, and no period surpassed it in the production of first-rate hymns. Study these Hymns of the Evangelical Awakening. One of the greatest English hymn writers, Isaac Watts (1674-1748) was born into a Puritan-Huguenot family. As a youth he came under the influence of some of the great Puritans still alive. Watts became a nonconformist minister, serving the church at Mark Lane in London. His sermons were appreciated for their sound and solid content and his educational and philosophical writings were highly popular in his day. He is best remembered today for his hymns which he wrote to reinforce the central message of his sermons.

“Come We Who Love the Lord.” What do you think Watts had in mind in the second verse?

“Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun.” Watts's great missionary hymn before the rise of the modern missions movement.

The Wesley's were also noted hymn writers, especially Charles. Charles Wesley's great hymns include “Lo! He Comes with Clouds Descending,” the less well-known “Pilgrim Song,” “Soldiers of Christ Arise,” (twelve verses!) and the incomparable “And Can It Be.” Where is Wesley's Arminianism in the last of these hymns?

Augustus Toplady's “Rock of Ages” completes this short selection of 18th century English hymns. Note the Reformation and Calvinistic themes set forth in this beautiful hymn.

B. Philip Doddridge (1702-51) was one of the relatively few evangelical and orthodox Presbyterian ministers in England during the first half of the 18th century. (Most Presbyterians had drifted into Unitarian and Socinian beliefs.) On Christmas Day in 1729 he began his ministry at Northampton, where he served as pastor and teacher in his theological school for the rest of his short life. Doddridge's preaching and pastoral counsel was greatly valued by Lady Huntingdon. He was a friend and associate of Isaac Watts. His major work, *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (the plan of which was suggested to him by Watts) was to be a key instrument in the conversion of William Wilberforce in 1785.

Read a few pages from Doddridge's *Rise and Progress* as found in *A Burning and a Shining Light: English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley*, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey (Eerdmans, 1987), 182-89. Notice the rich practicality of Doddridge's spiritual counsel. Like the Puritans he probes attitude, motive, and conduct in investigating the life of the Christian. Do you find this kind of writing helpful? Why or why not?