

Topic 6: The Consolidation of the Revival in England, c.1745-70

i. Wesleyan Methodism, c. 1745-70

The key to Methodist expansion by the middle years of the century was itineracy. Although Anglican evangelicalism, parish-based and strongly establishmentarian, also became a recognizable entity at this time, it was the mobility of the travelling preachers and the flexibility of the societies that drove the Revival forward. The anomaly of John and Charles Wesley being stubbornly wedded to the Established Church while at the same time overseeing a potentially, and often actually, dissident religious movement, was not lost on many observers. Field preaching, 'enthusiasm', extra-parochial gatherings, the shunning of 'carnal' clergy and a blithe disregard for episcopal authority, was highly alarming, and not only to the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Folk memories of the Great Rebellion a century before were all too easily stirred by this exuberant and populist religious expansionism. Although still nominally a High Churchman, John Wesley, always the more pragmatic of the brothers, had moved to a much more 'low church' view of sacramental ministry which held that bishops and presbyters shared the same orders though they fulfilled different functions. (This would open the way for him, decades later, to ordain his own presbyters and bishops). Charles was less enamoured of this change of opinion, and following his marriage to Sarah Gwynne, daughter of the Breconshire magistrate Marmaduke Gwynne in 1749, was not only less inclined to itinerate but became more critical of the influence of the travelling preachers of whom there were now over four score. The more power the preachers took for themselves, the more was the potential for usurping the brothers' authority over the movement. Charles' fear especially, was that they would 'demand the right to administer the sacrament and to press for separation from the Church of England' (Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791*, p. 400). His vision, to have some pliant bishop ordain the more loyal preachers in order to serve the societies, was clearly utopian. Whereas there were some bishops sympathetic to the evangelical clergy, they could hardly sustain a double loyalty to both irregular Methodism *and* to the Established Church. (For the brothers, Dissent was never an option. John's criticism towards one of his preachers who had sought ordination in 1753 as an Independent minister, was withering: 'Did God design that this light should be hid under a bushel? In a little, obscure, Dissenting meeting house?' quoted in R. Tudur Jones, *Congregationalism in England, 1662-1962*, p.151). After much debate, the Conference of 1755 renewed its allegiance to the mother church, but the anomaly of perpetuating a parallel movement with an ever deepening separate identity, did not

subside. For simple souls (and popular preachers) with less sophistication (or duplicity?) than Oxford fellows, a national church whose clergy were so often worldlings and whose preaching lacked evangelical content and saving efficacy, was hardly worth preserving. Secession was not only justified but would allow the Methodist movement to maximize its effect. Although still nominally devoted to the Established Church, these tensions would persist throughout the middle decades of the century.

If Charles settled down to a quieter life following a blissfully contented marriage to Sarah Gwynne, John's ultimately unhappy marriage to a widow, Mary Vazeille, in 1751, did nothing to curtail his incessant travelling. Always fascinated by religious phenomena, he was open to the possibility that some of his followers had reached an advanced state of holiness bordering on sinless perfection. Despite his long settled evangelical convictions, his youthful zeal for the consecrated life as a member of the Holy Club in Oxford had never abated, while increasingly widespread revivalistic activity had led more and more converts to make excessive claims for the sanctifying effect of the Holy Spirit in their lives. By the 1760s he was formulating a two stage model of spiritual initiation; the initial grace of conversion and a subsequent, often instantaneous infilling of the Spirit producing full consecration or 'Christian perfection'. This theory was the result of his observations and pastoral work among the Methodist converts rather than having had 'the direct witness' or 'the second blessing' himself. After 1758 a growing number of Methodists laid claim to this experience in which they were 'cleansed from all unrighteousness', and in 1759 and 1760 the Conference debated thoroughly the whole question of Christian perfectionism - a concept which was anathema to all Calvinists. Although expressing himself very cautiously, Wesley's *Thoughts on Christian Perfection* (1759) which expounded the relevant scriptural data ('be you perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' Mat. 5:48 etc.), showed that he was not averse to the possibility, within the Christian scheme, that some individuals could achieve the fully consecrated life.

However measured Wesley's strictures were, in the hands of less disciplined people fired by Pentecostal zeal, the danger of fanaticism was obvious. Although there were isolated accounts of extravagant claims from different parts the country, the most damaging occurrence took place in the Foundery, the nexus of Wesleyan activity in the capital. The claims centred upon George Bell, a former soldier, and Thomas Maxfield, one of John Wesley's ordained assistants whom the leader and the Foundery faithful held in great esteem. In March 1761, three years after being converted, Bell maintained that he had achieved full consecration and sinless perfection. Inaugurating a powerful charismatic ministry of healing, he soon gathered a devoted

band of followers. With signs and wonders abounding, Bell manifested messianic traits: ‘His followers thought themselves restored to the purity of Adam and Eve and incapable of falling. They professed gifts of healing, attempting to give sight to the blind and to raise the dead; and they believed they were exempt from death itself’ (Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, p. 338). Not being present at the Foundery to observe what one onlooker described as ‘scenes of the most diabolical frenzy’, John Wesley could not exert control. When he did return to London, he was characteristically indulgent towards Bell’s claims of divine blessing though urging him to curb his excesses. Charles, on the other hand, found the whole matter intolerable, concurring with a correspondent: ‘This kind of rhapsody and wild ranting can never be from the Spirit of Christ and therefore must be a grievous offence to every serious mind who wishes well to religion’. It was only when Bell announced that the date of the eschaton, namely 28 February 1763, had been revealed to him, that John finally took action and expelled him and his followers from fellowship. ‘The reproach of Christ I am willing to bear’, he stated on 22 December, ‘but not the reproach of enthusiasm’. But by then the damage had been done. As Bell’s followers gathered in feared expectancy of the end of the world, their leader had been incarcerated for inciting civil unrest. Following his release and the dispersal of his disciples, he forsook religion for radical politics and thereafter passed into obscurity. Methodism’s reputation had, however, been seriously tarnished: ‘It was about this time that Hogarth’s savage cartoon of *Credulity, Superstition and Fanaticism* appeared, attacking the Methodists among others’ (Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 340).

If Bell was clearly unbalanced, Thomas Maxfield was a much more substantial figure. Converted under Wesley’s ministry in 1739, he had been appointed one of the lay leaders at the Foundery in 1742 where he was admired widely, not least by Susanna Wesley and Selina, countess of Huntingdon. Ordained into the Anglican ministry in 1747, he was allowed to assist Wesley in London and was appointed chaplain to the Countess of Huntingdon. By 1761 he too had begun propagating Christian perfection, and despite his exceptional ministerial gifts, had fully supported Bell’s divisive extravagances. Increasingly critical of Wesley, he led a secession from the Foundery in April 1763. Some 175 dissatisfied members left with him crying ‘Blind John is not capable of teaching us; we will keep to Mr Maxfield!’ Now free to promote perfectionism in its most uncompromising mode, he remained an independent preacher at the Snow’s Field Chapel in the vicinity of Moorfields until his death in 1784. Although there was some talk of reconciliation, indeed Wesley visited him during his last illness and was even invited to preach in his chapel, nothing came of it. In fact, the perfectionist

controversy of the 1760s like the predestinarian debates of the 1740s and the concurrent Moravian schism, showed how essentially fissiparous the Revival was. Despite the controversy, however, the 1760s would witness further Methodist growth and the movement's increasing expansion and consolidation.

As the movement passed into its third decade, any losses in London were more than offset by evangelistic successes in other parts of the country, from Cornwall at one end to Northumberland and County Durham at the other. By 1767, when detailed statistics were first recorded, Wesleyan Methodism possessed 41 circuits, over a hundred itinerant preachers and 26,000 band or society members. Conference had established itself as the governing body of what was now coming to be called 'the Connexion'. John Wesley's authority still reigned supreme, but his preachers contributed to an increasingly buoyant and energetic movement with an ever stronger corporate identity. The building of meeting houses was going on apace, while the doctrinal consensus of justification by faith, Christ's atoning death for all and not just for the elect, the efficacy of the New Birth, the witness of the Spirit and, despite everything, the ideal of scriptural perfection, bound preachers and members tightly together. Wesley's astoundingly prolific pen not only served to defend the Methodist cause from detractors without, but provided his preachers and the faithful with guides to scripture, Christian doctrine and spirituality: 'He valued conciseness and plain language, and much of his output consisted of extracts from, or condensations of, other men's works, not always acknowledged. His *Christian Library* (1749–55) included condensed versions of devotional classics both Catholic and Protestant' (Henry Rack, 'John Wesley', *ODNB*). An equally potent identifying factor was the hymns of his brother Charles. Beginning with *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742) and culminating with *Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (1780), Charles' unique genius provided verse for ordinary people which manifested the wonder of salvation and the unspeakable joy of the new life in Christ (see Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver Beckerlegge (eds), *The Works of John Wesley 7: A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*).

By the late 1760s Wesleyanism was, on the whole, flourishing. The situation, however, was not nearly as prosperous for English Calvinistic Methodism and those who looked to George Whitefield for guidance and inspiration.

ii. Calvinistic Methodism, c. 1745-70

a. Whitefield's absences

‘It was into a Calvinistic Methodist movement straining under ... many pressures that Whitefield stepped on his return from the American colonies in July 1748’ (Jones, Schlenther and White, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811*, p.83). During his absence, leadership of the English movement had been thrust, almost fortuitously, on Howell Harris. Whitefield’s links with Harris, and with Wales, went back to March 1739 when the two men had met for the first time in Cardiff, before progressing together to Bristol and to London. The connection had been cemented in November 1741 when Whitefield had married Harris’ former fiancé, the widow Elizabeth James from Abergavenny, and further when the English revivalist had been appointed moderator of the first joint association between English and Welsh Calvinistic Methodism, at Watford, Caerphilly, Glamorganshire, in January 1743. Although Whitefield had left the Tabernacle society in John Cennick’s care when he had sailed for America in October 1744, during his visits to London Harris had won the trust of the members due to his superior leadership skills and more effective pastoral abilities. Unbeknown to Harris, Cennick was being drawn towards Moravianism, and by September 1745 he had repudiated Calvinism in favour of general redemption. He and his followers would secede from the movement before the end of the year. The situation had become perilous: ‘Harris was left with little choice but to take on the leadership of the English movement, but he agreed to do so only until Whitefield had returned from America, or an alternative leader could be found’ (Jones et al, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811*, p.73). Loath to relinquish his leadership of the Revival in Wales, while in London Harris enlisted a small band of younger preachers including James Beaumont and Herbert Jenkins (both Welshmen), and Thomas Adams and James Relly, to assist him. The situation was unsatisfactory at best. Tensions both at the Tabernacle and further afield persisted, though Harris did his best to alleviate these problems while at the same time seeking to re-establish fraternal links with the Wesleys. Whereas in Wales it was the angularity and imperiousness of his character which was most often apparent, it was his diplomatic skills, his tact and efforts at reconciliation which gained him the most plaudits among the Methodists in England during these years.

As for Whitefield, it seemed that he had lost interest in the English work. Thoroughly absorbed with the progress of the Great Awakening in the colonies, he seemed content to allow others to take full responsibility for the movement which had inaugurated less than a decade earlier. What drew him back was not principally the need to reinvigorate a flagging movement, but the possibility of being appointed chaplain to the countess of Huntingdon. Selina (1707-

91), daughter of Earl Ferrers, had married the 9th earl of Huntingdon in 1728, and after a decade of living the aristocratic life to the full, had become disenchanted with its worldliness. Drawn to evangelical religion and intrigued by the concept of perfectionism, she became a follower of the Wesleys, though by 1743 she had switched her allegiance to Whitefield and embraced his doctrinal scheme. Widowed in 1746 at the age of 39, she inherited responsibility for her late husband's estates, but became best known as a religious personality in her own right. From her estate in Leicestershire and her fashionable salons in Chelsea and Bath, she networked among the aristocracy inviting them to listen to invited preachers and heed the gospel call. A regular attendant at the Tabernacle, she persuaded Howell Harris to share the evangelical message with select groups of her titled friends in the drawing-rooms of her various residences. As it would transpire,

George Whitfield was the strongest religious influence on the countess ... during her long life ... The heady doctrine of predestination ... offered the perfect vehicle to drive her sense of personal destiny – combined with her natural sense of position. Calvinism provided her with a secure belief in election to a pivotal place in pursuing England's redemption (Jones et al, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811*, pp. 112-3).

This development, however, would come to fruition a decade or so later. As for Whitefield in 1748, flattered by her attention and impressed by her friendship with Frederick, Prince of Wales, he responded readily to the offer of serving as her chaplain. He also gave credence to the possibility of being awarded a bishopric through her influence on John Potter, Archbishop of Canterbury. Unfortunately, deference soon degenerated into sycophancy. (He wrote, jarringly, in May 1755: 'Tears trickle from my eyes whilst I am thinking of your ladyship's condescending to patronize such a dead dog as I am'. Wesley would hardly have grovelled so obsequiously). But at least the revivalist was back at the helm and attempted to reanimate a movement that had stagnated in his absence. The task would not be easy: 'Six months after his return in 1748 he observed that where before 20,000 people would come to hear him in the open air, now there were not more than a hundred' (Boyd S. Schlenther, 'George Whitefield', *ODNB*). Nevertheless he redoubled his efforts in preaching, exhorting and organizing, and slowly much of the lost ground was regained. The Calvinistic movement, however, was dealt a grievous blow when Harris, who retained his popularity in London, forfeited his colleagues' loyalty by his spectacularly unwise relationship with the so called 'prophetess', Madam Sydney Griffith of Cefnamwlch, North Wales. Whitefield promptly dismissed him from membership of the Tabernacle in 1750, ostensibly for sympathy with the Moravians and Wesley though fear

of incipient scandal was the real reason for Whitfield's summary act. Although the 'Madam Griffith' debacle would have its most damaging effects in Wales (see Geraint Tudur, *Howell Harris: from Conversion to Separation, 1734-50*, chapter 8), it impacted England as well: 'These events really marked the end of an era in the development of Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales' (Jones et al, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811*, p.88).

b. Whitefield and the Countess of Huntingdon

By then the Countess of Huntingdon was becoming an increasingly dominating figure within the movement, in fact 'she was a kind of godmother to the whole Revival' (Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 284). Hearing that more and more clergymen, not necessarily connected to Wesley's connexion or to Whitfield's network, were being won over to evangelical faith, she courted them assiduously in what would become a concerted campaign to spread gospel religion throughout the land. As an establishment figure, it is hardly surprising that she was wholly committed to the Established Church. The dissident tradition of Protestant Dissent with its overtones of rebellion and political upheaval was wholly alien if not abhorrent to her. Yet by persuading sympathetic bishops to ordain evangelical preachers and otherwise support gospel clergy who were already in holy orders, she sought to complement the popular preaching which was being undertaken by the peripatetic revivalists and to bolster her own missionary work among the privileged at the same time. Like Whitefield, John Berridge, the evangelical incumbent of Everton, Bedfordshire; William Romaine, rector of St Anne's, Blackfriars, and St Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe in the city of London; John Fletcher, curate of Madely, Shropshire, were appointed her personal chaplains, while she secured parochial benefices for many other revivalist clergymen. Whereas some of these were not averse to itinerant preaching, they were, on the whole, much more wedded to the structures of the Established Church and heedful to its laws and discipline. They were also, for the most part, Calvinists. (Fletcher, a close companion of the Wesley brothers, was an exception). As her appointed chaplains, they were expected to preach regularly to her titled friends, but by erecting chapels on her property (which were open to gathered congregations and exempt from episcopal jurisdiction) she sought to extend their ministry to a wider public. The first chapel was opened at her Brighton home in 1761; the next, a much grander edifice, at Bath in 1765, and the third at Tunbridge Wells in 1769:

Although she undoubtedly believed that she remained a faithful Anglican, this programme of chapel building ... was the first, the most decisive, and the most visible stone and mortar step towards her final separation from the Church of England twenty years later (Jones et al, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811*, p.116).

In 1770, however, the Countess was still seen to be a champion of evangelical religion within the Establishment, and (notwithstanding her genteel relations with Wesley's movement), a staunch defender of the Calvinist faith.

If Calvinistic Methodism in Wales and Wesleyanism in England were succeeding, despite all setbacks, in winning the poor for Christ, and Selina's vision (though not nearly so successful) was to secure the conversion of the titled rich, Whitefield was keen to broaden the base of his activities by attracting those who were neither titled nor economically disadvantaged. In the wake of a renewed fervour ('I have not known a more considerable awakening for some time', he wrote from London in 1750: 'The Lord comes down as in the days of old, and the shout of the king is amongst us'), the Moorfield's Tabernacle was enlarged, though his dream was to extend Methodist influence to include the aspiring middle classes. In 1756 he built a second London meeting house, at Tottenham Court Road, to cater for a higher class of auditor than was typical at Moorfields. Nearer to the west end, and to the theatres to which he had been drawn as a youth and whose insidious decadence he feared and (perhaps subconsciously) still found attractive, his aim was to make the Calvinistic faith count beyond the bounds of the poor and dispossessed. By now he was much more measured in his criticisms of the clergy than he had been in the past, and more judicious generally. He had stamped out antinomian excesses in the Tabernacle almost immediately having returned to London in 1748, and despite the fact that he was regularly being mocked and lampooned in the press and by his alter egos on the stages of Drury Lane (see Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*, chapter 13), his status within the religious world had become secure.

George Whitefield's forte, and great delight, was to preach. Each year was taken up with preaching meetings, mostly within those areas where Calvinistic Methodism had already put down roots: London, Gloucester, Bristol and the West Country (and South Wales, though he was only partially successful there due to the language barrier), but he would also cross over to Ireland and regularly visit Scotland as well. Unlike Wesley, or Howell Harris and Daniel Rowland (and even Lady Huntingdon), he was a poor organizer, and lacked the patience to nurture the movement or care, minutely, for its practical needs. And always there was the lure

of America. The Georgian orphan house still demanded his attention, and he yearned for the revivalistic vitality that he had helped engender beyond the Atlantic: ‘Whitefield never lost interest in the American colonies. They dominated his conversations outside the pulpit and engaged his deepest loyalties’ (Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, p. 216). No sooner had his area connexions in England been revived than he would leave for extended (and highly charged) preaching missions in South Wales and Scotland, and thereafter sail for America. He spent between October 1751 and April 1752 in the colonies, and he was there again for nearly a year, from early 1754 to the following spring. Although highly stimulated by these visits, each crossing took its toll, and after returning from his next visit, between 1763 and 1765, the fifty-one year old Whitefield was described as looking like ‘an old, old man’. Despite a marked diminution in his health (his wife died on 9 August 1768 and was buried at the Tottenham Road Chapel: unlike Charles and Sarah Wesley, their marriage had been strained), he eagerly resumed his preaching activities. After having defended six students who had been expelled from St Edmund Hall, Oxford, in 1768, for their evangelistic activities (*A Letter to the Reverend Dr Durrell, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford: occasioned by the late expulsion of six students from Edmund-Hall*), he preached at the opening of the countess’s Trevecca College, on 24 August 1768, and again at the opening of her Tunbridge Wells chapel in July 1769. By then a concerned John Wesley feared that his fellow revivalist was ‘sinking towards death’, but this did not prevent Whitefield from leaving for America one last time. After arriving in New England in August 1770 he preached almost daily for the next two months. Following a two-hour sermon in the Presbyterian Church, Newburyport, Massachusetts, on 30 September 1770, he passed away, apparently from angina pectoris. He was fifty-five at the time, and was buried beneath the church’s pulpit. The sense of loss was palpable, not only in American but among his co-religionists at home:

Again and again in the work of the Revival in Britain, [it was] he [who] had taken the costly initiative, created the daring precedents, those ‘irregularities’ without which the Evangelical Revival must have been stifled at birth. And wherever he preached, men and women were converted (Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791*, p. 469).

In a magnanimous eulogy preached at the Tottenham Court Chapel on 18 November, Whitefield’s erstwhile rival, John Wesley, praised the younger man’s achievements. Despite all their doctrinal differences, they shared both friendship and a common evangelical faith:

I have frequently thought that this of all others, was the distinguishing part of his character. How few have we known of so kind a temper, of such large and flowing

affections. Was it not principally by this, that the hearts of other were so strangely drawn to him? (quoted in Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, p. 286).

Whatever his defects of character – censoriousness and vanity being among them – he retained a genius for friendship (including, remarkably, with the religiously sceptical Benjamin Franklin) throughout his life. But his greatest contribution to the Revival was as an orator and evangelist on both sides of the Atlantic:

In many ways a puritan redivivus, George Whitefield re-energized the Calvinist message. Throughout his ministry, and since, the debate over his character and his contribution to Christianity has continued; yet for more than a generation his robust ministry and compelling passionate proclamation of the necessity of a new birth made him the eighteenth century's most sensational [English] preacher (Schlenther, 'George Whitefield', *ODNB*).

c. The Trevecca College

Three years before Whitfield crossed swords with his university's authorities for expelling the St Edmund Hall undergraduates (see Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791*, pp. 476-8), the Countess of Huntingdon was making plans for a training centre to provide evangelical preachers for the Established Church. A curious undertaking from the outset, it would draw on Moravians and extra-parochial itinerants (but not on avowed Dissenters) to train zealous preachers, hopefully to supply Church of England parishes throughout the realm. The Moravian Francis Okely, one of the original 'Cambridge Methodists' (see John Walsh, 'The Cambridge Methodists', in P. Brooks (ed), *Christian Spirituality: Essays in honour of Gordon Rupp*, pp. 249-83), who had been sounded out by the countess as a possible tutor, wrote to Howell Harris in April 1765, sharing the vision; 'You say well that there are schools and academies enough, both on the establishment and the Dissenting way, but a school of the prophets, that's the thing' (G. M. Roberts (ed.), *Selected Trevecca Letters, 1747-94*, letter 74, p. 102). Harris had been approached to provide land for the school, far enough away from centres of population not to be a distraction for the students but within close proximity of the home of one of Selina's trusted associates. After having withdrawn from the public sphere in 1750, the Welsh revivalist had poured his energies into developing a religious community at Trefecca, his Breconshire home, which contributed substantially to the local economy on the one hand and provided a bracing spiritual regimen for his converts on the other. (Madam Griffith, the cause of his dismissal from the leadership of the Welsh revival, had died in 1752 and memories of the schism had receded considerably by this time). The college, situated next door to Harris's Trefecca abode and sharing the same name, was opened in August 1768 with the countess present and Whitefield doing the honours. Among its first students were two of the expelled

Oxford Methodists and a handful of others sent for training by assorted clerics from the Calvinist network. The overseer, somewhat incongruously as doctrinally he was an Arminian, was the Shropshire clergyman John Fletcher.

The Trevecca College represented a new phase in the history of the Evangelical Revival. Long standing norms were being overturned while a fresh vision for the future was being instituted. For all Selina's putative influence in high ecclesiastical places, the St Edmund Hall incident had shown that the establishment and the ancient universities were inimical to the more zealous manifestations of the evangelical spirit. Even the Dissenting academies, which, since 1689, had nurtured a learned, Calvinistic ministry, disdained the disorder and lack of decorum which characterized popular evangelicalism. The Dissenting historians David Bogue and James Bennett, hardly knew what to make of the Countess's new school: 'A body of more injudicious Calvinists than England had ever before seen' (quoted in Jones et al, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811*, p.145). If the two universities and the Dissenting academies placed a premium on learning, the Countess's college existed to create preachers: 'It was as preachers of the gospel, not as men of learning that the Trevecca students were sent out to itinerate far and wide and bring light into the dark corners of the land and of lands across the seas' (Geoffrey F. Nuttall, 'The significance of Trevecca College, 1768-91', p. 289). Whereas the more prudent among the evangelicals harboured their doubts, Selina was adamant that it was zeal, not learning, which was needed among the people at large: 'Come, come, you are only going to a few simple souls: tell them concerning Jesus Christ, and they will be well satisfied'! During the college's twenty-four year existence at Trevecca (it would remove to Cheshunt in Hertfordshire in 1791), it would train some 200 students, only a handful of whom would be ordained into Anglican livings. The rest (which would be true of the Countess's Connexion generally) would contribute to the remarkable post-1770 expansion of Evangelical Dissent. According to G. F. Nuttall, the significance of Trevecca was three-fold: it was a new kind of institution, a pioneer in theological education, rising explicitly out of the Evangelical Revival; it became a model for ministerial training during the nineteenth century; that it prioritized the gospel rather than order or a specific churchmanship as such: 'With all their deficiencies they [sc. the students] preached the gospel and kept the flame of faith alive' ('The significance of Trevecca College', p. 303). This was hardly a negligible contribution. By 1770 the Evangelical Revival, both in its Arminian and Calvinistic guises, was still gaining ground.

iii. The Evangelical clergy

If both Wesley and Whitefield claimed that the world was their parish, by mid-century there was a growing number of evangelical clergy whose parish was their world. Although often termed 'Methodist', which had become a catch-all term for all who had been effected by, or were in sympathy with, the Revival, they owed little allegiance to either of the specific movements headed by the Wesleys or George Whitefield. Most had been converted independently of the Revival as such, usually through a spiritual crisis which occurred after they had already been ordained. They were not a homogenous group. Geographically dispersed, some would itinerate and others would not. Some actively disapproved of the anti-intellectual populism of the Methodist preachers. Most, but not all, were Calvinists. What characterized them all was a loyalty to the Established Church, its 39 Articles, discipline and structures, and a zeal for the conversion of their parishioners; they were committed to the renewal of the Church of England within their own parochial spheres.

Perhaps the senior of the 'Methodist' clergy was the larger-than-life William Grimshaw (1708-63) of Haworth, Yorkshire. A Lancastrian by birth and graduate of Christ's College, Cambridge, he was curate of Todmorden between 1731 and 1742 and thereafter perpetual curate of Haworth, a rural chapelry within the vast parish of Bradford. Awakened independently of the Methodists by reading the works of the Cromwellian puritan John Owen, his zealous preaching of justification by faith alone sparked a revival in his parish. By the early 1740s he began to itinerate, first within the bleaker parts of his upland charge, and then 'irregularly', further afield in other men's parishes, joining forces with the Methodists who were extending their cause throughout the west riding of Yorkshire. A stern disciplinarian in the mould of the early puritans, he would compel his recalcitrant parishioners to attend church services, sometimes with the use of a bullwhip!

If fierce, Grimshaw was not harsh, and as a pastor he blended authoritarianism with humility ... His church was packed and had to be enlarged. In his sermons he used homely metaphor and dialect terms and would name communicants affectionately at the altar ... Robust and compact, he drove himself hard on his Pennine journeys (John Walsh, 'William Grimshaw', *ODNB*).

It was not unusual for him to have hundreds at his communion services during the winters and over a thousand in the summer months. Although doctrinally a moderate Calvinist and conscientiously parish-based, he nevertheless assisted the Wesley brothers in supporting their preachers, attending quarterly meetings and overseeing the societies. Along with John and Charles, he was deferred to as a leader among the Yorkshire Methodists. By the late 1750s, however, he drew apart from the Methodists, perturbed by the move towards administration of

the sacrament by the non-ordained preachers. Very much a 'character', he died, aged fifty-four, in April 1763.

At the other end of the land, Samuel Walker (1713-61) of Truro became the focus for an association of gospel clergy in Cornwall. A native of Exeter, educated at Exeter College, Oxford, and ordained by the bishop of Exeter, between 1740 and 1746 he was vicar of Lanlivery, Cornwall, while also holding a curacy at Truro parish church. It was only after forsaking conventional religion for the evangelical faith that he resigned his Lanlivery charge to concentrate on his ministry in Truro, and soon a parish revival occurred. (The rector was an absentee, which gave Walker freedom to follow his own convictions). By 1740 some eight hundred people, virtually half the town's population, attended services, while Walker led parish prayers on weekdays and organized his converts into societies and bands. Among those converts were Thomas Haweis, Thomas Wills and George Burnett who would later become notable evangelical clerics in their own right. Unlike Grimshaw in the north, he disapproved of itinerancy or any other 'Methodistical' irregularity, and held tenaciously to the laws and discipline of the Anglican Church. He networked assiduously with other evangelical clergy, and formed a so-called 'clerical association' for fellowship and mutual support. Tensions with the non-resident incumbent, St John Elliott, forced him to leave his home in 1760, and he died, aged forty-seven, a year later.

Another of the early evangelical clergy was Thomas Adam (1701-84) of Wintringham in Lincolnshire. A Yorkshireman educated at both Oxford and Cambridge, he was ordained to his small Lincolnshire parish in 1725 and would remain there throughout his long life. It was in 1748, after twenty three years of conscientious if formal ministry, that he came to an evangelical breakthrough through intense prayer and wrestling with St Paul's letter to the Romans. Thereafter he corresponded with Walker of Truro and came to know other evangelical clergymen, a body which was expanding at the time. Though he drew crowds to his services, he had few converts and never witnessed revival. Like Walker, he was meticulous for Anglican discipline and disapproved of any irregularity, clashing with John Wesley on this topic. Fearing that Calvinism provoked antinomianism, or a downgrading of active morality, he came (untypically for an Anglican evangelical) to espouse Arminian views. His main contribution to the development of eighteenth century evangelicalism was as a correspondent, devotional writer and spiritual director. His *Lectures on the Church Catechism* (1753) which urged the need for a definite experiential conversion, were read widely and deepened the piety of many. He died in 1784, at the considerable age of eight-three.

The clergy connected with the Countess of Huntington, namely William Romaine, rector of St Anne's, Blackfriars, and St Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe in the city of London; John Berridge, of Everton, Bedfordshire and John Fletcher, of Madely, Shropshire (Martin Madan of the Lock Chapel was also within Selina's ambit), have already been mentioned. A contemporary of the Wesleys at Christ Church, Oxford, Romaine (1714-95) became a noted Hebraist. Following a series of incumbencies in London and the Home Counties he remained, according to his own account, 'a very vain, proud young man, who knew everything but himself, and was therefore very fond of himself'. Ambitious for clerical preferment and academic honours, he went through a spiritual crisis in which 'the Lord was pleased to let him see and feel the plague of his own heart'. This occurred c. 1749, independently of any formal Methodist or evangelical influence. Thereafter he was drawn into revivalist circles, firstly those of the Wesleys but he rapidly developed Calvinist principles. Appointed chaplain to Selina in 1755, he held lectureships in different London churches, which he packed out often with the 'ragged, unsavoury multitude' (much to the chagrin of his church wardens), before being granted the benefice of St Anne's, Blackfriars, linked with St Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe, in 1764. Until the arrival of John Newton to St Mary Woolnoth in 1784, he would remain the sole beneficed evangelical clergyman in the capital. His *Life of Faith* (1763), *Walk of Faith* (1771) and *Triumph of Faith* (1795) became staple reading for the evangelical faithful, and following Whitefield's death, he became Selina's senior chaplain.

Berridge (1717-93), like Grimshaw, was something of a 'character'. Although Selina's chaplain, he was never obsequiously deferential towards her: 'You threaten me, Madam, like a pope, not like a mother in Israel ... Verily you are a good piper, but I know not how to dance! ... My instructions you know, must come from the Lamb, not the Lamb's wife' (quoted in in Jones et al, *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales, 1735-1811*, p.151). A Cambridge man and fellow of Clare College, his spiritual rebirth occurred in 1757, two years after his being instituted into the college living at Everton, Bedfordshire. As with so many of the revivalist clergymen, it came through personal Bible study rather than listening to Methodist preaching. By 1760, he was drawing large crowds to his church and being forced to preach in the open air. He soon began itinerating in the surrounding villages, much to John Wesley's delight, while his powerful if homely preaching throughout the 1760s elicited emotional response from listeners. Although wedded to the Anglican Church, he had no qualms about serving in Whitefield's Tabernacle or in having fellowship with evangelical Arminians and pious Dissenters. For Wesley, Berridge was 'one of the most simple as well as the most sensible men.' Martin Madan (1725-90), educated at Westminster School and Christ Church,

Oxford, had been called to the bar in 1748 but forsook a career in the law on being convicted through the preaching of John Wesley. Coming under Romaine's influence he sought ordination, and was instituted to the cure of All Hallows, Lombard Street, in 1750. As a preacher he used all his talents as a barrister to plead the cause of Christ imploring listeners to be reconciled with God through the cross. As preacher at the Lock Hospital at Hyde Park Corner, he exercised a notable preaching ministry in the Westminster area. (As well as catering for patients, the hospital chapel attracted an eclectic congregation within the capital). As one of Selina's chaplains, Madan preached at the opening of her Brighton chapel in 1761. An accomplished hymnist, his *Collection of Hymns and Psalms* (1760) had gone into its thirteenth edition by 1790.

These men were only some of the evangelical clergy who would form the core of 'the evangelical party' within the Established Church. Like the Wesleys, James Hervey (1741-58) had been a member of the Holy Club in Oxford during the 1730s, and was later drawn to evangelical views. He succeeded his father to the benefice of Weston Flavell, Northants, in 1752, and unlike many of the more regular evangelical clergy, he had cordial relationships with nonconformists, Philip Doddridge especially: 'Though I am steady in my attachment to the Established Church, I would have a right-hand of fellowship, and a heart of love, ever ready, ever open, for all the upright evangelical Dissenters'. Best known for his literary works, *Meditations and Contemplations* (1746-7) and *Theron and Aspasio* (1755), he was one of the most widely read writers of the Evangelical Revival. After the death of Grimshaw, the evangelical baton in Yorkshire was taken up by Richard Conyers (1725-86), formerly of Jesus College, Cambridge, and rector of Hemsley. Converted on Christmas day 1758 two years after having been inducted to the living, he forged links with Whitefield and the Countess of Huntingdon. On hearing him preach during an Episcopal visitation in 1764, Robert Hay Drummond, archbishop of York, was appalled: 'If you go on preaching such stuff, you will drive all your parish mad. Were you to inculcate the morality of Socrates, you would do more good than canting about the new birth'. He took no notice and continued, in a highly effective manner, to preach regeneration and justification by faith. Like Grimshaw, he held prayer gatherings and cottage meetings in the scattered hamlets of his parish whose people welcomed him 'readily and cheerfully'. He had a monthly communion service with about 450 communicants, and in 1767 encouraged congregational singing by compiling a hymn book to replace the metrical psalms and paraphrases in worship. The Yorkshire connection was further strengthened in 1759 with the arrival of Henry Venn (1725-97), a late fellow of Queens' College, Cambridge, and formerly curate of the by then evangelical parish of Clapham, as vicar

of Huddersfield. Although still a rural parish, the textile industry was expanding with an influx of prospective workers into the area, most of whom were ‘utterly ignorant of the redemption that is in Christ’.

On Sundays at Huddersfield large crowds, many from a distance, soon filled the church to hear his sermons. He sought not only to teach them but also to train them as worshippers and communicants and to understand the prayer book. He twice delivered sermons explaining it, conducted courses of preparation before Holy Communion, introduced hymn-singing into the service, and catechized the younger members of the congregation. During weekdays he engaged also in open-air preaching and held services in private houses in the hamlets. In a letter written in 1762 to Lady Huntingdon he stated that during that year, apart from Sunday work, he ‘generally preached eight or ten sermons in the week in distant parts of the parish’ (Leonard Cowie, ‘Henry Venn’, in *ODNB*).

The comments of John Walsh are also apposite:

While many of the ‘regular’ clergy were open to Wesley’s criticism that they were hiding their light under a bushel by preaching to small rustic flocks, some of the evangelical parish clergy (notably in Yorkshire and London) drew enormous congregations – Venn had a constant 2000 in Huddersfield ... drawn mostly from the working classes. Here their impact was very similar to that of Methodism itself (‘Methodism at the end of the eighteenth century’, p. 291).

The one final and necessary name in this context is that of John Newton (1725-1807), curate of Olney, Bucks, and latterly rector of St Mary Woolnoth in the city of London. In his *Authentic Narrative* (1764), published when he was thirty-nine, he records what must have been one of the most remarkable conversion stories of the Revival. The son of a pious Dissenting mother and a seafaring father, he lost his mother and her religious influence as a child. His love for Mary Catlett, the daughter of a family friend (and later his wife), was thwarted when he was pressganged as a teenager, spending the next decade at sea. He relates his experiences as a common sailor and then a midshipman, his initiation into the slave trade and his accompanying moral and spiritual degradation. All the while he was conscious of his early Christian upbringing and his love for Mary, otherwise his religious apostasy was total. During an Atlantic storm in 1748 he called upon God for mercy, and through Bible reading and immersing himself in Thomas a Kempis’ *Imitation of Christ*, regained some semblance of order in his life. He returned to England a reformed man though not yet fully converted in an evangelical sense. Feeling himself as yet unworthy to propose to Mary, he travelled again to Africa as a ship’s mate, and it was during this voyage that he cast himself wholly on Christ and his atoning sacrifice, and experienced forgiveness and release from the burden of sin. He and Mary were married in February 1750.

As a married man Newton made three voyages, between 1750 and 1754, as the captain of a slave ship, not yet conscious of the enormity of slavery's evil. (It was only later, under the influence of William Wilberforce, that he would repent of his earlier attitudes and campaign vigorously for the trade's abolition: cf. *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade* (1787)). He retired from the nautical life in 1755 for an appointment as tide surveyor in Liverpool and there made the acquaintance of Wesley, Whitefield, Grimshaw of Howarth and Henry Venn as well as Dissenting ministers and evangelical laymen. Long having been 'a bondsman in the land of Egypt', he felt that he had a testimony to share and was drawn to ministry, not yet sure whether it would be in the Dissenting pulpit or within the Established Church. By now he was proficient, if self-taught, in Latin and Greek along with some Hebrew and Syriac – he had always been studious even as a seaman – and sought ordination by the bishops of London and Lincoln and the archbishop of York, to be turned down each time. Through the good offices of the evangelical nobleman Lord Dartmouth, he was finally ordained by the Bishop of Lincoln to the curacy of Olney, a village on the borders of Bucks, Northants and Beds. This occurred in April 1764; he was priested in June of the same year.

Olney, a community of some 2000 many of whom were involved in lace manufacture, had long been receptive to evangelical influences through lively Dissenting preaching as well as a gospel ministry in the parish church. Whitefield had visited in 1739, and Newton's predecessor, Moses Brown, had seen conversions among his flock. The ground had been well prepared for the usual accompaniments of an evangelical incumbency: cottage meetings, prayer gatherings, mid-week preaching services and religious societies. 'The most of God's people there were poor, afflicted, ignorant and illiterate', he reminisced, 'but they were taught of God before I saw them. I was their official teacher from the pulpit, but I taught them chiefly by what I first learned from them in the course of the week, by visiting them and conversing with them from house to house' (Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition*, p. 203). He would draw congregations of some 800 and a gallery had to be added to the church. As there was significant evangelical activity in neighbouring parishes, he did not feel the need to itinerate, though he was often invited to preach in other churches. This was itself a sign of the expanding influence of the Revival by the 1760s and 1770s. His relations with Dissenters were highly cordial, especially with the Independents in Olney itself. Spiritual work flourished: 'There seems something of a revival', he noted in his diary for 1771, 'Prayer meetings set up from house to house by the young people. I was at one of them last night and spoke'. These occurred spontaneously and were, to an extent, lay led. Newton was joined in the parish by the poet William Cowper, and they published together the *Olney Hymns*. He also commenced what

would become a very influential ministry through correspondence and letters of spiritual guidance.

John Newton and his fellow gospel clergy represented the way in which the Evangelical Revival had created not only Moravianism, Wesleyan Methodism and the Calvinistic Methodism of Whitefield and the Countess of Huntington, but was influencing increasingly the Church of England itself:

John Newton's life did not stand in any simple way for the course of evangelicalism in the established church, but none the less indicated how far the promotion of heart religion, Bible-centred piety and zealous holiness had come within the establishment. Antagonistic bishops still derided evangelicals as 'Methodists' or 'serious clergy', but it was not long until evangelicals were themselves becoming bishops (Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys*, p186).

A tremendous amount had happened between 1740 and 1770.

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