

# No Other Foundation: A History of the Church, part 4

## To the Ends of the Earth -- The Gospel and the Modern Age, 1700-2000

- Abridged Version -

By Dr. Michael A. G. Haykin

By 1700 biblical Christianity was fairly well established in western and northern Europe and the Atlantic seaboard of N. America . But around that time there arose a great challenge in the form of what is called the Enlightenment. The 18 th century is often termed the Age of Reason, so called because many of the intellegentsia of Europe viewed their day as one of unparalleled advances in the realms of science, worldview, and philosophical thought. Although the term "Enlightenment" did not come into vogue until the following century, they regularly invoked the image of light when speaking of their age. The Anglo-Irish philosopher George Berkeley (1685-1753), for instance, spoke of "that ocean of light, which has broke in and made his way, in spite of slavery and superstition." [1] The English poet Alexander Pope (1688-1744), thinking of the revolutionary contributions that Isaac Newton (1642-1727) had made to the understanding of the universe, proudly declared:

“Nature and Nature's laws lay hid in night. God said, let Newton be! and all was light.” [2]

Despite the biblical allusion of this couplet, the light in which Pope and other Enlightenment advocates reveled was the light cast by human reason after it had been freed from what they considered the murk of religious dogma, superstition, and tradition. This naïve trust in the "omnicompetence of human reason" [3] is clearly antithetical to orthodox Christianity that affirms the ultimacy of divine revelation.

Not surprisingly this era saw the acceleration of a massive attack on the verities of the Christian faith, something that has persisted down to the present day. And one of the central truths of the Christian faith that came under heavy attack was the doctrine of the Trinity. As a result of these Trinitarian controversies one of the main denominations in the 18 th century, the English Presbyterians, succumbed completely to these attacks and by the middle of the century were virtually all Unitarians.

### 18th Century Moralism

The early 18 th century also saw a reaction to what was regarded as the "enthusiasm" of the Puritans. Anglican churchmen increasingly regarded any vital, warm-hearted piety with suspicion. The worldview of the first half of the eighteenth century gloried in reason, moderation and decorum. The Anglican preaching of the day dwelt largely upon themes of morality and decency and lacked "any element of holy excitement, of passionate pleading, of heroic challenge, of winged imagination." [4] The Christian life was basically defined in terms of a moral life of good works. Spiritual ardour was regarded with horror as "enthusiasm" or fanaticism. The ideal of the era is well summed up by an inscription on a tombstone from the period: "pious without enthusiasm." [5]

Yet this age in which human reason was set up on a pedestal, and moralism basically preached from the pulpits there came heaven-sent revival--revivals associated with Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), George Whitefield (1714-1770), and the Wesley brothers, John (1703-1791) and Charles (1707-1788).

Various streams of revival:

- Moravians
- New England
- England :
- George Whitefield (1714-1770)
- John and Charles Wesley

- Scotland
- Welsh Methodism: Howel Harris (1714-1773) and William Williams (d.1791)

Marking this revival was great hymns of the faith. E.g. Joseph Hart (1712-1768), whose hymns are marked by a passionate love for Christ:

Come, ye sinners, poor and needy,  
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;  
Jesus ready stands to save You,  
Full of pity, love, and power: He is able,  
He is willing; doubt no more.

Now, ye needy, come and welcome;  
God's free bounty glorify:  
True belief and true repentance,  
Every grace that brings you nigh, Without money,  
Come to Jesus Christ and buy.

Let not conscience make you linger,  
Nor of fitness fondly dream;  
All the fitness He requireth is to feel your need of Him:  
This He gives you--  
'Tis the Spirit's rising beam.

Come, ye weary, heavy-laden,  
Lost and ruined by the Fall;  
if you wait until you're better,  
You will never come at all:  
Not the righteous--  
Sinners, Jesus came to call.

View Him prostrate in the garden,  
On the ground your Maker lies!  
On the awful tree behold Him,  
Hear Him cry before He dies,  
It is finished!  
Sinner, will not this suffice?

Lo, the incarnate God, ascended,  
Pleads the merit of His blood;  
Venture on Him, venture wholly,  
Let no other trust intrude:  
None but Jesus  
Can do helpless sinners good.

Or John Newton's Amazing Grace . Or William Williams' hymns, of which Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said: "In his hymns you have an incomparable blend of truly great poetry and theology." Read "O'er the gloomy hills of darkness."

O'er the gloomy hills of darkness,  
Cheered by no celestial ray,  
Sun of Righteousness, arising,  
Bring the bright, the glorious day.  
Let the morning

Of Thy blessed Gospel dawn.

Kingdoms wide that sit in darkness,  
Grant them, Lord, the glorious light;  
And from eastern coast to western  
May the morning chase the night  
And redemption,  
Freely purchased, win the day!

Fly abroad, eternal Gospel;  
Win and conquer, never cease.  
May Thy lasting, wide dominions  
Multiply and still increase!  
May Thy scepter  
Sway th' enlightened world around!

Let the Indian, let the Negro,  
Let the rude barbarian see  
That divine and glorious conquest,  
Once obtained on Calvary ;  
Let the Gospel  
Wide resound from pole to pole.

May the glorious day approaching  
Thine eternal love proclaim,  
And the everlasting Gospel  
Spread abroad Thy holy name  
O'er the borders  
Of the great Emmanuel's land.

### **The Missionary Movement**

Little wonder that singing such hymns like this would give rise to the missionary movement of the late 18 th and 19 th centuries. Out of these revivals there emerged serious efforts to evangelize the non-European world. Not that there had been no attempts before. Witness for example John Eliot (1604-1690), 'the Apostle to the Indians' and his mission among the Indians in Massachusetts , where he gathered converts into fourteen communities of "praying Indians" with a total population of 3,600. Yet, this was not widespread.

Real advance comes in the 18 th century: first, the Moravians, then the Baptist Missionary Society with William Carey (1761-1834), and in quick succession there arose a host of missionary societies on both sides of the Atlantic. One danger that arose by the mid to late 19th century was the linking of British missions with British imperialism.

But the gospel was planted in Africa and Asia , where it has borne such a harvest in this century, that African and Asian Evangelicalism is now outstripping transatlantic Evangelicalism in its growth.

### **Liberalism and Fundamentalism**

Another challenge during the 19 th century was a child of the Enlightenment: liberal theology. In the 19 th century, Germany was its homeland. Liberalism wasted virtually all of the seminaries in Germany and infected other parts of Europe . One of the earliest affected was Geneva . By 1815, the theological seminary of Geneva , founded by Calvin, was liberal. But God be thanked, God brought what is called Le réveil , the revival in which a number of key figures converted: Luois Gaussen, César Malan, Merle

d'Aubigné, and the greatest of them all, Adolphe Monod (1802-1856)--his classic work, *Les adieux* (recently published by Evangelical Press as: *Living in the Hope of Glory*, see p.49 of this work).

In other places though, Liberalism devastated the churches. E.g. England --the Downgrade controversy, which Spurgeon lost.

The battle in North America against liberalism resulted in the emergence of Fundamentalism among Presbyterians and Baptists. Methodists who had been the largest growing denomination in the 19<sup>th</sup> century largely succumbed to liberal thought.

- The battle among the Northern Presbyterians: Grehsam Machen.
- The battle among the Baptists of Ontario/Quebec and British Columbia : T.T. Shields (d.1955).

Fundamentalism preserved the gospel. We owe Fundamentalism a great debt.

An even greater debt was owed to those who instigated the recovery of Reformed theology in the 1950s. The key figure here was Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Never forget he was primarily an evangelist. The conversion of Staffordshire Bill as example.

### **Current Challenges**

- Postmodernity in the west: moral relativism; spiritual interest; desire for community; rejection of reason. Need for emphasis on vital piety but also biblical orthodoxy. Challenge within ETS, for example (Open Theism).
- Be inspired by men and women like William Carey, Hudson Taylor, and Elizabeth Eliot and seek to e-evangelize Europe and tracts of N. America, especially New England, Quebec, and dare I say Ontario.
- Islam. Brief history of interactions with Christianity.
- Persecution: the experience of Watchman Nee/Ni Tuosheng and his last words: "Christ is the Son of God. He died as the Redeemer for the sins of humanity, and was raised up from the dead after three days. This it he most important fact in the world. I shall die believing in Christ."

Notes:

[1] Cited Ulrich Im Hof , *The Enlightenment* , trans. William E. Yuill (Oxford/Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1994), 4.

[2] Cited Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment* (1968 ed.; repr. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1982), 38.

[3] Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology. An Introduction* (Oxford/Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1994), 81.

[4] Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England* (1961 ed.; repr. Grand Rapids/Cambridge, U.K. : William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1996), III, 73.

[5] J. I. Packer, "The Spirit with the Word: The Reformational Revivalism of George Whitefield" in W. P. Stephens, ed., *The Bible, the Reformation and the Church. Essays in Honour of James Atkinson* ( *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 105*; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 180-181; M. Dorothy George, *England in Transition. Life and Work in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1953), 65. For two excellent overviews of the state of Christianity in England at this time, see Wood, "Eighteenth Century Methodist Revival Reconsidered", 132-136; David Lyle Jeffrey, "Introduction" to his ed., *A Burning and a Shining Light: English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1987), 2-10.

