

CHAPTER NINE: AWAKENED FAITH AND A LASTING PEACE

As the French suffered through their revolution, England was undergoing quite a different kind of transformation. To better understand this dramatic change, we need to step back to the beginning of the eighteenth century and view the England of that day. In the early 1700's, the British were reacting to the earlier Puritan morality. Little was sacred and depravity was seen in every area of life.ⁱ

England Before Wesley

At that time prostitution was widely accepted and even protected by the government, with even churches serving as houses of ill fame between Sundays (half of the churches in some areas). Sons of the wealthy prided themselves in their many sexual exploits, while the books, plays and songs of the time were immoral and perverted even by today's standards. We are told that when adulterers were successful in dramas, the audience rose to applaud them.

Social conditions were dismal, as 75% of children died before the age of five (this was reduced to 32% in the next century, largely as a result of the Wesleyan revival). Profanity and obscenity were common among most men and many women, as cheap music halls (much like today's bars and taverns) helped cause a breakdown of the family. Gambling was common, with hundreds of men going to prison for their debts, leaving their families without support. Racial injustice abounded through the heavy slave trade while pollution was a constant problem--they dumped their garbage on the street, and horses have their own peculiar form of pollution.

The clergy ignored vices and gave anemic sermons--one observer stated he couldn't see any difference between them and Confucianists. Many never attended church; the shabby were not wanted, while the rich had no sense of social responsibility (they were more concerned with

“looking out for number one”). Corruption was widespread (as seen by the South Sea Bubble), even extending to the obtaining of church offices. A French philosopher concluded in 1728, “In England there is no religion and the subject, if mentioned in society, evokes nothing but laughter.”ⁱⁱ

Crime was a growing menace, while the powerful were allowed to circumvent the law. The police system was a farce; the rich could buy their way out while the poor were brutalized--much like today, when white-collar crime is the most costly to the country, yet those criminals are the most able to afford good lawyers and endless appeals. Violence was the norm, with ten to fifteen public hangings daily, attended by large crowds (not unlike our love of TV violence).

Wesley: The Intellectual Revivalist

In the midst of this society, Wesley took part in a little “prayer cell” while attending Oxford. Wesley was later influenced by the pietist movement from Germany, which emphasized prayer circles, Bible reading, and discussion groups held in homes. He was also influenced by Butler and Warbuton who wrote in defense of orthodoxy and against deism, not unlike Josh McDowell and Francis Schaeffer do today. These writers played the philosopher’s own game and defeated them using their own rules. Both the “warm heart” of the pietists and intellectual credibility of personal faith were required before widespread revival could come, led by Wesley who included both in his ministry.

While his emphasis upon person piety is well-known, fewer are aware of Wesley’s scholarship. He authored 319 publications in his lifetime,ⁱⁱⁱ many of them while riding on horseback between evangelistic meetings, including a set of commentaries and even a medical textbook! One of the greatest qualities of the man was his reaching the common person with

intellectual thought, but at the same time emphasizing practical applications. He also practiced his faith by founding a school, clinics, a refuge for widows and orphans, and many other charitable organizations. Nearly all that he earned was given away (unlike some prominent TV evangelist we need not mention by name).

What a contrast the Wesleyan revival was to what took place in France during their Revolution. The guillotine was the French instrument of reform, while the mourner's bench was the English instrument of reform. The French denied God, sought a utopia, and got Napoleon, while the English affirmed God, sought something less than perfection, and overwhelming changes for the better resulted. The French sought freedom from any absolute base for law, while the English sought freedom under God's law (a la Blackstone). As the scripture clearly teaches, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you."

Results of the Wesleyan Revival

The whole story of the Wesleyan revival and its consequences have been overlooked by recent historians because of ignorance and sometimes an anti-Christian bias. The revival was responsible for some of the greatest social reforms in history.^{iv} Unfortunately this doesn't fit many people's assumptions, and therefore it is easily disregarded.

Today we preach love, brotherhood, forgiveness, sin and so on from our pulpits, yet it is far too easy to stay with pious generalities which get easy "amen's" from the congregation. When the pastor starts preaching specifics, people get angry and wonder why the man "stopped preachin' and went to meddlin'." Wesley was not afraid to confront the issues of his time. It is sad when liberal atheists are more concerned about poverty, racism and other problems in our world than is the church. In fact the church may be segregated by income and race than any other

major institution in society. Revival must begin in the church.

The pattern for such renewal is apparent in Wesley's approach: he began with personal salvation, then involved his followers in small class meetings where utter honesty and personal accountability were required between brethren. Not only were these important, but also social involvement was underscored. Followers of Wesley were instrumental in improving prison conditions, making advancements against poverty and hunger, decreasing child labor, improving working conditions, and eventually abolishing slavery. The "Clapham Sect," the political arm of the Wesley revival, helped to accomplish many of these social reforms. So great was Wesley's impact that some believe that his revival saved England from a French Revolution.

The Abolition Movement

The movement against slavery was primarily the result of efforts of fervent Christians who had been touched by the Wesley's revival (either directly or through the corollary ministries of George Whitefield and former slave trader John Newton). We take freedom from slavery for granted in the West, but it still exists in much of the world, including the Middle East and the virtual slavery in Soviet prison camps. A history professor from the University of Leningrad, writing in one of those camps, stated there are more slaves today than ever before in the history of the world.^v

The abolition movement began when Granville Sharp took pity on an African slave who had been beaten and left to die by his master. He nursed the slave back to health and got him a job. When the old master saw the slave and demanded his return, Sharp went into battle against slavery. He studied English law for two years, as he held down another job, and finally took another case to court in 1772. As the result of that case slavery ended in England,^{vi} though not in

the British Colonies.

Unfortunately that move did not solve all of the difficulties. Former slaves had no work, and thus quickly became a social problem. Then someone came up with a solution--send all of the former slaves back to Africa. Freetown in the Sierra Leone peninsula was located because someone thought that good land was available for raising crops, and 350 blacks were selected for the first voyage.

When they arrived there was catastrophe because they knew nothing about farming, the soil was unproductive, and the former slaves were culturally British, not bushmen. Another thousand slaves came from America in 1791, blacks who had fought for the British during the American revolution. Somehow the colony survived, in spite of French attacks and all their other problems.

It might be noted that this idea is still advocated by a few extreme right wing groups. What is overlooked is that sending blacks back to Africa is like American Indians demanding that whites return to Europe. The United States is physically and culturally home to a wide diversity of races.

In England the anti-slavery activists now began working to eliminate slavery in the British colonies, which had been untouched by the earlier ruling. Many Quakers joined the battle in fighting slavery in the West Indies as well as the slave trade.

One wealthy aristocrat, William Wilberforce, became a Christian under Wesley's influence, and attempted to convince Parliament to outlaw slavery in the colonies. A brilliant orator,^{vii} he made a speech each year to the legislators, presenting new evidence against slavery, and then calling for abolition. And every year his motion was defeated. He always "kept his

cool” and never got bitter, even though he undoubtedly was frustrated. Wesley encouraged Wilberforce in his battle, and the last letter Wesley wrote was to Wilberforce, supporting his cause.^{viii}

Finally, after many years, those against slavery were able to get a piece of legislation through Parliament in 1807. The bill outlawed the slave trade, but did nothing for those who were already slaves. It also did not forbid foreign ships from selling slaves to the colonies, and even the prohibition of British slave trade was not enforced. But at least it was a step in a better direction.

Slaves suffered endlessly during this time. For example, the captain of the slave ship Zong pushed 150 sick slaves overboard to collect insurance on them. Slave ships were wretched and suicide among slaves was common. Only three out of every ten slaves survived the trip from Africa to the colonies.

Proclaiming Emancipation

After years of work, in 1833 a final bill of emancipation passed and the following year took effect,^{ix} freeing the slaves in the colonies (although some were forced to work to gain their freedom and it was not legally obeyed in all cases). Wilberforce did not live to see the final fruit of his labors, but he did see the bill before it passed and was assured it would be enacted as he lay on his deathbed.

Some have wondered how the British were able to free their slaves decades before the Americans, and yet do so without the bloody civil war we suffered. Perhaps the key was that British slave owners were reimbursed for their slaves, in some cases with labor by the former slaves. This helped them cover most of their loss. It is tragic that the Americans failed to follow

the example of the British--paying for every slave in the southern states would have cost much less than the Civil War,^x and we would have been spared the loss of life and bitterness that also resulted.

A Poor Law

In 1795 the British attempted an experiment in Christian socialism, called the "poor law."^{xi} This popular experiment was socialism at its best--with a thoroughly Christian base, provided by the Wesleyan revival. Surely, it was thought (as it is today by some), if you cleanse the human nature through salvation, socialistic principles will work.

In essence the new poor law stipulated that if a person made half a living, the government would provide the other half. If the person made one-fourth the minimum, the state provided three-fourths. To use modern language, they implemented a "guaranteed minimum income" or a "negative income tax" advocated by some yet today. Similar assumptions are behind welfare and food stamps (the more you work, the less money you get or the more costly the stamps).

Humanitarians applauded it as an act of mercy; the ultimate form of welfare had been found.

In the long run the results were ghastly. Little by little people stopped working and began living off the government. Eventually the poor law had to be abolished. With the colossal failure of Christian socialism, might there be a better alternative?

One Hundred Years of Peace

The Victorian era has been subjected to tremendously negative bias by historians, and most people think of the supposed excesses of modesty. While there was some excessiveness in this respect (particularly in the late nineteenth century), even this is suspect as noted by the title of a recent article "Those Sexy Victorians."^{xii} Some of us would prefer a bit more modesty

instead of the continual diet of fornication and adultery given us by modern television, movies and books!

The standard account was that the Victorian era was intolerant and most people were narrow-minded. This is contradicted by an obvious fact of history--Karl Marx wrote during this time in England because the rest of Europe wouldn't tolerate him.

What were some of the positive aspects of the Victorian era? Perhaps most important, according to Karl Polanyi, was that "the nineteenth century produced a phenomenon unheard of in the annals of western civilization, namely, a hundred years of peace..."^{xiii}(from 1815--Napoleon's Waterloo to 1914--the beginning of World War II). While many texts focus on the Crimean War and Franco-Prussian War,^{xiv} these were short and less destructive than wars before or since then; generally this was a time of peace for Europe. England was particularly free of war, in part because of their Christian faith and the responsible social action it produced.

This was a time of great optimism, reflected in their post-millennial theology. As it was commonly expressed, "every day in every way the world is getting better and better." In reality, the world was getting better for them.

Improvements included the abolition of slavery and the new Sunday school movement, which reached the slum children with the Gospel, reading and writing skills, and Christian morality. By the way, Sunday school lasted twelve hours on Sunday, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Evangelization in the inner city and political action for the poor were common, as factory conditions improved. The ease of travel throughout the world (no visas or passports were required) aided the missionary activity to other countries, as alcoholism declined. We are told that three books were on nearly every family's bookshelf: The Bible, Pilgrim's Progress, and

Foxe's Book of Martyrs.

As a well-known British publication summed up the century near its end, "Britain as a whole was never more tranquil and happy. No class is at war with society or the government; there is no dissatisfaction anywhere, the treasury is fairly full and accumulations of capital are vast." What a contrast to modern America!

Repeal of the Corn Laws

The prosperity and influence of England was spurred during this time by a major economic move, the repealing of certain laws which forbid the importing of grain. This decision in part stemmed from the thinking of Adam Smith, who in 1776 had written his classic Wealth of Nations. In that book Smith suggested that the best economic policy was to eliminate duty and restrictions on trade and commerce, and instead allow the law of supply and demand to set prices unencumbered by government controls. Thus the government would be limited in its influence upon economics, although Smith was careful to include an emphasis upon morality and justice.^{xv}

Some have responded to Smith by claiming he promoted greed and selfishness by his emphasis upon individualism. In practice just the opposite tends to occur, free enterprise did not invent greed, it only found a way to tame it.^{xvi}

From a Christian perspective, a minimum of government interference in economics is the lesser of two evils. People are sinful, with or without government involvement. Big government, led by sinful leaders, have more power to use their greed in socially damaging ways, compounded by Lord Acton's formula. Enlightened self-interest (an assumption of behavioral psychology, it might be noted) is to be preferred to collectivized greed, particularly when the self-interest is tempered by Christian ethics.

Thus in 1846, in the wake of a terrible potato famine in Ireland,^{xvii} the British decided to eliminate the trade restrictions on grain (“corn” was their equivalent term). Eventually, nearly all restrictions on British trade with other countries were lifted, and England prospered as never before. Other European countries followed England’s lead and also prospered. England became the greatest nation on earth as a result, as well as a center for world banking. And instead of dying, the poor ate well because food was cheap. The death rate is generally related to the price of food.^{xviii}

We must give due credit to the wealthy aristocrats who voted for the repeal and stood to lose from the repeal. Why did they take such an action? Because they realized it was the right thing to do; it would lessen both poverty and hunger. The moral consciousness had been stirred by the Wesleyan revival, a morality which required obedience to God even though it might mean fewer profits. Christian free enterprise not only worked, it worked very well indeed.

One wonders why the United States did not also lift its tariffs and restrictions. Discontent with taxes got the country started in the first place, while unfair taxation of the southern states helped produce the Civil War. Actually in 1791, Alexander Hamilton (Washington’s Secretary of the Treasury) wrote a report which put us on the road to our complicated system of trade restrictions, which were intended to be temporary.^{xix} It is a matter of biblical principle: “do unto others as you would have them do to you.” When we restrict and tax imports, other countries respond in kind and the economies of both nations are needlessly hurt as a result. Yet during the mid 1800’s America prospered because England and much of Europe followed good economic policies.^{xx}

Industry’s Growing Pains

The European burst of free enterprise helped to produce a revolution of production during the nineteenth century, often called the Industrial Revolution. Several writers at the time described horrible conditions which attended this revolution of the economy, including the literary giant Charles Dickens and political writer Karl Marx

While there was some truth in a few of their accusations--examples did exist--we need to remember that they undoubtedly spoke of isolated cases, which were more likely to sell books than describing what people typically saw every day. Not above exaggeration to make a point,^{xxi} they were probably like today's journalists in realizing that the sensational is what sells. Our equivalent today is the newscaster who briefly reports on an increased employment rate, then gives in depth treatment to one person that is an exception to that general trend. The audience too often goes away with the impression that things are worse when actually they are better!

Perhaps the most vivid criticism against the industrial revolution was the problem of child labor. Yet one can make a case that child labor was in part a success story--previously such children would have starved to death rather than work in a factory. Eventually, through continued prosperity and the work of Lord Ashley, a devoted Christian and fan of Wesley, even child labor conditions improved and finally ended.

Certainly there was a period of "tooling up" during the industrial revolution, when machines are first purchased and profits go for machinery rather than better working conditions.^{xxii} This is a difficult phase, but in the long run it produces greater prosperity--part of the reason for our wealth today is because of the sacrificial "tooling up" of the last century.

One group of the time, the Luddites, criticized the reduction of the labor force due to the increase in machinery. Since machines increased productivity and thus were thought to decrease

the number of jobs, workers mobbed the factories. We hear the same cry about automation today, most notably in the automobile industry (despite the fact that our foreign competition can produce a better car for less money in part due to automation).

Let's assume for a moment the criticism of the Luddites was accurate (which is debatable).^{xxiii} New machines might reduce labor by, say, 500 workers, yet decrease the price of a product by 20 to 30%. The net result is that the decrease in price allows people to buy other things with the money they have left (or invest it in new companies).^{xxiv} The factory also makes more money so it can increase in size, creating more employment opportunities (usually upper level jobs, which pay better). The unemployed are a temporary problem, but the majority of consumers gain and eventually the unemployed can obtain better jobs, assuming they are willing to retrain. Few of us would want to return to the near universal poverty that existed before modern machinery!

Another complaint against the industrial revolution was the poor housing conditions for people. Certainly most accounts focus on the extreme exceptions, not the rule, but there was a problem. Why? Earlier in the century building materials had been used to fight Napoleon, creating scarcities.^{xxv} But we also need to realize that the slums tended to attract rough people,^{xxvi} admitted attractions by the co-founder of communism, Fredrick Engels. While Christians often ministered in the slums, their converts usually changed their spending habits (for example, saving instead of gambling and drinking) and soon had enough to leave the slums. Christianity has often served as a vehicle for vertical mobility.^{xxvii}

One last criticism should be explored. Marx and others stated that workers of the time were exploited by industrialists, and that work with machinery was (and is) demoralizing. While

there is a degree of truth to this argument, a good case can be made that machines should do the repetitive work that is so demoralizing. And perhaps we need to admit that some people work better with machines than they do with people. Certainly cruel bosses and others were thoughtless about their workers, but others were Christian or powerfully affected by Christian morality. We must not forget that the Clapham sect helped pass a number of factory reform acts of the 1830's and 1840's. Yes, there were some problems, but overall the living and working conditions for most people were improving.

Chapter Nine

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- i. The section compiled from Mary Tenney, *Living in Two Worlds*, Howard Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, and J. W. Bready, *Before and After Wesley*.
 - ii. Harold Nicolson, *The Age of Reason*, p. 381.
 - iii. Percy Boyling, *John Wesley's Chapel*, p. 6.
 - iv. Earle Cairns, *Saints and Society*, p. 43.
 - v. John Noble, *I Was a Slave in Russia*, p. 157.
 - vi. A vivid description of Sharp's work, written during his era, is found in Ralph Waldo Emerson's, *Essays*, pp. 834-835.
 - vii. Edmund Burke's description of Wilberforce, quoted in J. C. Furnas, *The Road to Harper's Ferry*, p. 354.
 - viii. J. W. Bready, *This Freedom--Whence?*, pp. 144-145.
 - ix. A graphic description of emancipation day is provided by Ralph Waldo Emerson in *Essays*, pp. 839-840.
 - x. H. U. Faulkner, *American Economic History*, p. 508.
 - xi. Herbert Spencer, *The Man Versus the State*, p. 25.
 - xii. Jody Gaylin, *Psychology Today*, Dec. 1976.

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- xiii. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, p. 5.
 - xiv. F. Roy Willis, *Western Civilization*, vol. 2, pp. 632-634, 650, 654-655.
 - xv. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, p. 65.
 - xvi. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, pp. 17, 57.

 - xvii. Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*, pp. 70-77.
 - xviii. Wrigley, *Population and Hunger*, p. 66.
 - xix. John Chamberlain, *The Enterprising Americans*, pp. 40-42.
 - xx. Ibid, p. 98.
 - xxi. Willis, op cit, pp. 669-670.
 - xxii. F. A. Hayek, ed., *Capitalism and the Historians*.
 - xxiii. Yale Brozen, *Automation and Jobs*, p. 3.
 - xxiv. W. E. Kuhn, *The Evolution of Economic Thought*, p. 333.
 - xxv. Hayek, op cit, pp. 43-52.
 - xxvi. Fredrick Engles, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England in 1844*, pp. 90-94.
 - xxvii. J. C. Furnas, *The Road to Harper's Ferry*, pp. 268-269.