



The Wesleys: A New Piety

Charles Wesley

“Arise My Soul Arise”

- “I have a record,” said a Wesleyan missionary laboring in the West Indies, “of two hundred persons, young and old, who received the most direct evidence of the forgiveness of their sins while singing ‘Arise, my soul.’ The conversion of the greater number of these persons took place while I was a missionary abroad.” Ira David Sankey, *My life and the story of the Gospel hymns and of sacred songs and solos*, (Philadelphia, Sunday School Times Co, 1907), p. 115.
- According to Charles Wesley’s hymn “Arise My Soul, Arise” what is the ground for our confidence? On what is your own confidence based?



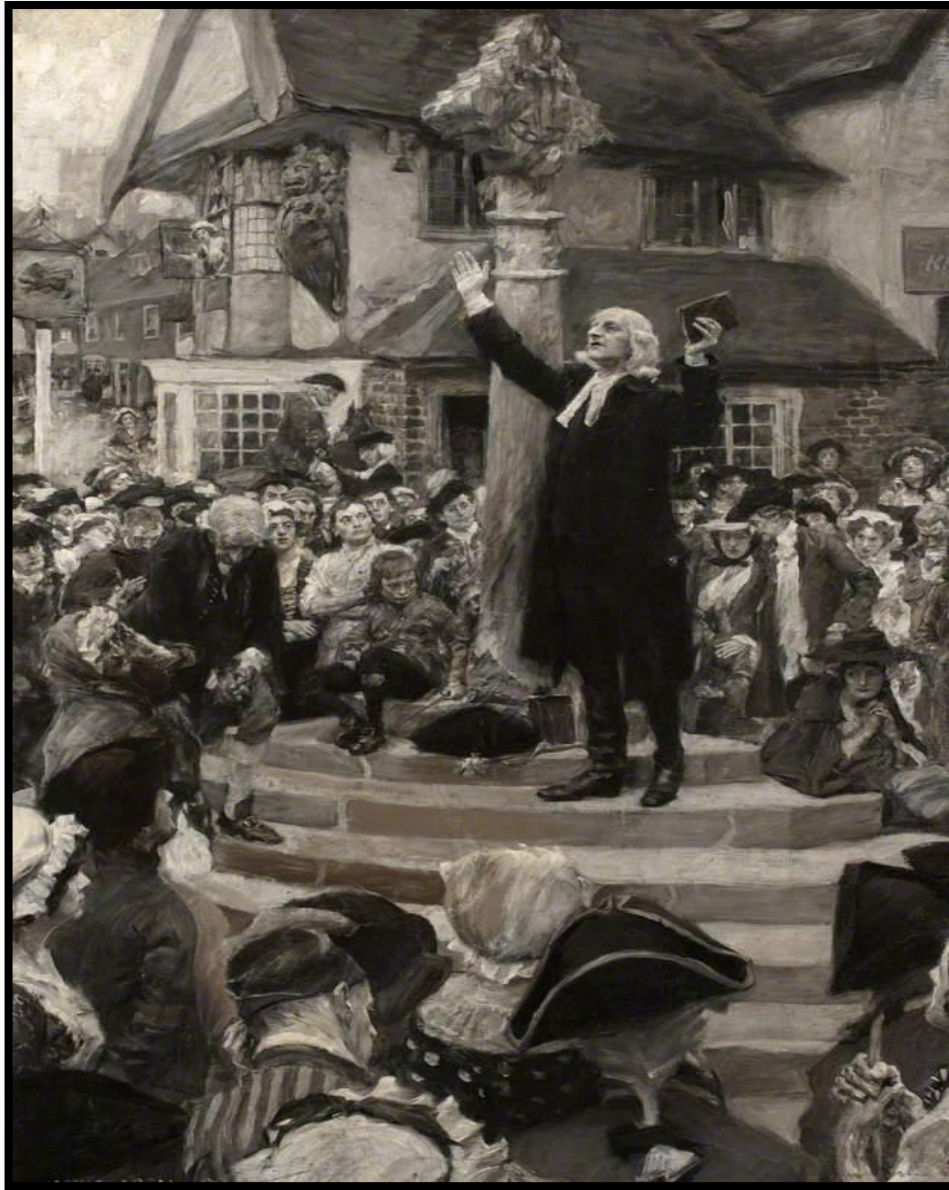
DID
YOU
KNOW?

Interesting and Unusual facts

- The Wesley brothers never hitched a ride from college—they walked the 150 miles to Epworth instead.
- The grumpy Samuel Johnson (1709 -1784) had mixed feelings about the Wesleys. He knew John at Oxford, and said of him, "John Wesley's conversation is good, but he is never at leisure. He is always obliged to go at a certain hour. This is very disagreeable to a man who loves to fold his legs and have out his talk, as I do."
- Charles could sympathize with today's caffeine addicts. In 1746 he tried to give up tea, but writes, "my flesh protested against it. I was but half awake and half alive all day; and my headache so increased toward noon, that I could neither speak nor think. ... This so weakened me, that I could hardly sit my horse."
- Though the Methodists earned early acclaim for their ministry to marginalized groups such as prisoners, orphans, and the sick, they later became so unpopular that even these doors closed to them. As John recorded in his journal for February 22, 1750, "So we are forbid to go to Newgate [a prison], for fear of making them wicked; and to Bedlam [an asylum], for fear of driving them mad!"

Interesting and Unusual facts

- After increasingly severe earthquakes in England on February 8 and March 8, 1750, a self-proclaimed prophet predicted another quake in April that would destroy half of London. The city went berserk. Charles wrote 19 hymns on the subject and published a sermon called "The Cause and Cure of Earthquakes." On the foretold night, John reported, "Places of worship were packed, especially the chapels of the Methodists." Nothing happened.
- In 1753, John became so ill that his doctor thought he would die. Just in case, John penned this epitaph:
 - Here lieth the Body
of John Wesley
A brand plucked out of the burning:
who died of a consumption in the fifty-first year of his age,
not leaving, after his debts are paid,
ten pounds behind him: praying,
God be merciful to me, an unprofitable servant!
- John, whose mother had called him "a brand plucked out of the burning" after he was rescued from a house fire in 1709, resolved to cheat death again. Two days after he wrote the epitaph, he made himself a poultice of brimstone (sulfur), egg white, and brown paper, which immediately relieved his pain. He recovered and lived another 38 years.



April 2, 1739

A Strange New Thing

- It was Monday, April 2, 1739. The city was Bristol, a rapidly growing seaport on the west coast of England.
- On that day a strange man did a strange thing. The man was short, slightly under five feet five inches, and wiry.
- What he did was even more provocative. To preach outdoors was unheard of. If it did occur, it was considered seditious.
- Something new and something very important for the history of Christianity was taking place.
- John Wesley described it in his journal:
 - At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city, to about three thousand people. The Scripture on which I spoke was this (is it possible anyone should be ignorant that it is fulfilled in every true minister of Christ?): “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

The Wesleys

John Wesley (1703-91)



Charles Wesley (1707-88)



The Wesleys

- In several important ways the Wesleys were the most effective *proponents* of the Reformation's basic message two centuries since Protestantism began.
- In other ways, they were *adapters* of the Reformation message.
- In both preserving and adjusting the message of the Reformers, the Wesleys kept alive the message of God's grace and greatly broadened its outreach.
- "But their adjustments to Protestant traditions were— along with the innovations of their fellow Anglican George Whitefield (1714-70)— probably the most important single factor in transforming the religion of the Reformation into modern Protestant evangelicalism" (Mark Noll).
- These adjustments made to Protestantism continue to influence Christianity in Britain, America, and elsewhere in the world that evangelicals have carried the gospel.
- John Wesley was not so much an innovator as a gifted organizer. He expanded on field preaching as a great organizer of itinerant, outdoor evangelism.

The Wesleys

- Wesley also made doctrinal as well as practical changes in the Protestant heritage. As an Arminian, unlike the Reformers, he held that God by his grace restored free will to lost humanity.
- John and Charles Wesley also taught that believers could lose their salvation by deliberate, unrepentant sinning. In addition, they taught that Christians should strive to reach a place of “Christian perfection.”
- This perfection did not mean an absolute sinlessness, but it did mean that Christians could expect to be free from every conscious sin in thought, word, and deed.
- They also placed great stress on the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Important as the Wesleys’ adjustments to Protestantism were, they also mark an important turning point in church history because of how much of the Protestant heritage they retained.
- They maintained secure ties to the Protestant Reformation as they vigorously reaffirmed the central message of Protestantism: *sola gratia, sola fide, sola Scriptura*—salvation was by grace alone through faith alone as communicated with perfect authority in the Scriptures.

The Conversion of the Wesleys (1738)

IHS.

THIS TABLET IS ERECTED TO THE GLORY OF GOD
IN COMMEMORATION OF THE EVANGELICAL CONVERSION OF THE

REV. JOHN WESLEY, M.A.,

ON MAY 24, 1738.

(THE SITE OF THE MEETING-ROOM OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY
WAS PROBABLY 28 ALDERSGATE STREET),

AND OF THE

REV. CHARLES WESLEY, M.A.,

ON MAY 21, 1738.

THE SITE OF THE HOUSE IS NEAR ST BARTHOLOMEW'S HOSPITAL,
(Nº12 LITTLE BRITAIN).

ERECTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL METHODIST HISTORICAL UNION.

MAY 24, 1926.

Conversion of Charles Wesley

May 21, 1738



- On May 17, 1738 in London at the home of William Holland, Charles and Holland began reading together Luther's commentary on the Book of Galatians.
- They found the volume "nobly full of faith."
- Four days later, Charles finally could say, "I now found myself at peace with God, and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ."
- He further sighed: "He loved me and gave himself for me."
- Charles Wesley wrote the hymn "Where shall my wondering soul begin?"

Conversion of John Wesley

- John Wesley had recently returned from a failed missionary trip to America.
- Although already known for his “methodical” approach to doing good, he still lacked the assurance of God’s forgiveness.
- Then a week after his brother’s experience, John also was given a new sense of God’s grace.
- He writes, “In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society [meeting] in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the *Epistle of the Romans*...I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for my salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.”

May 24, 1738



A Mother's Response

- Susanna Wesley was not quite sure what to make of her sons' heart-warming conversion experiences. She wrote to Charles, "I think you are fallen into an odd way of thinking. You say that till within a few months you had no spiritual life, nor any justifying faith. Now this is as if a man should affirm he was not alive in his infancy, because when an infant he did not know he was alive. All, then, that I can gather from your letter is that till a little while ago you were not so well satisfied of your being a Christian as you are now."

Spreading the Message of Grace

- From their conversion, the message of God's grace formed the heart of the Wesleys' ministry.
- In a era when Britain enjoyed virtually no reliable roads, John Wesley traveled constantly to spread the good news of grace in Christ.
- After Aldersgate in 1738, his preaching tours took him about 250,000 miles (mostly on horseback), and he delivered 40,000 sermons (that is, an average of more than two a day).
- He preached these sermons in unfavorable conditions and often in the face of opposition—sometimes outdoors, usually very early in the morning or at twilight, frequently while being heckled by the mob or harassed by the elite.
- Only in his seventies did Wesley abandon his horse for a carriage.
- Only in his mid-eighties did Wesley give up preaching before dawn.
- Wesley gives an account of an early morning sermon at 82 yrs. old- Sept. 7, 1785: "Just as I began, a wasp, though unprovoked, stung me upon the lip. I was afraid it would swell, so as to hinder my speaking; but it did not. I spoke distinctly, near two hours in all; and was no worse for it."

Prolific Hymn Writer

O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing 141

Charles Wesley, 1739; alt. AEMOR: C. M.
Carl G. Gläser, 1828
Arr. by Lowell Mason, 1839

1. O for a thou-sand tongues to sing My dear Re-deem-er's praise,
2. Je-sus, the name that charms our fears, That bids our sor-rows cease;
3. He breaks the power of reign-ing sin, He sets the pris-oner free;
4. My gra-cious Mas-ter and my God, As-sist me to pro-claim,
The glo-ries of my God and King, The tri-umphs of His grace!
Tis mu-sic in the sin-ner's ears, Tis life, and health, and peace.
His blood can make the sin-ful clean, His blood a-vailed for me.
To spread through all the earth a-broad, The hon-ors of Thy name. A-MEN.

The Poet of Christianity

Charles Wesley

- May 21, 1738 marked the real beginning of his mission as the singer of Methodism.
- Wesley was sometimes called "the poet of Methodism," yet this designation really defined him too narrowly. He could more rightly be called the poet of Christianity, since his hymns have enjoyed such widespread use among various denominations.
- Charles itinerated almost as actively as his brother for many years; on one occasion, he addressed crowds of 10,000 and 20,000 people.
- Wesley wrote 8,989 hymns (at least three times the output of poet William Wordsworth). Dr. Frank Baker calculated that Charles Wesley wrote an average of 10 lines of verse every day for 50 years!
- Wesley's hymns can be generally classified as hymns of Christian experience, invitation hymns, sanctification hymns, funeral hymns, and hymns on the love of God. In his hymns, he referenced all but 4 of the books of the Bible. He used more than 45 different meters. It has been said that Wesley's hymns clothed Christ in flesh and blood and gave converts a belief that they could easily grasp, embrace with personal faith, and if necessary, even die for.
- When English-speaking Christians gather to worship, the hymns that most powerfully invoke God's grace in Jesus Christ are hymns written by Charles Wesley.

A Pietistic Turning Point

- In short, the Wesleys and Methodism that followed represents a turning point in the history of Christianity because they renewed doctrines of God's grace that had grown stale in the English church.
- They applied these doctrines with a fresh vigor to forsaken sectors of the population, like the working classes of Bristol, whom the churches had passed by.
- The Wesleys' work of revitalization, in effect, created modern evangelicalism out of the legacy of Reformation Protestantism.
- This did not occur in a vacuum with the Wesley's and Methodists working alone.
- They were only the most visible English leaders in a more general movement of pietistic renewal that, beginning from the late seventeenth century, would eventually stretch from central Europe to North America.
- What they, along with other evangelicals and pietists, represented was a series of emphases that changed the face of Protestantism.



Pietism on the Continent

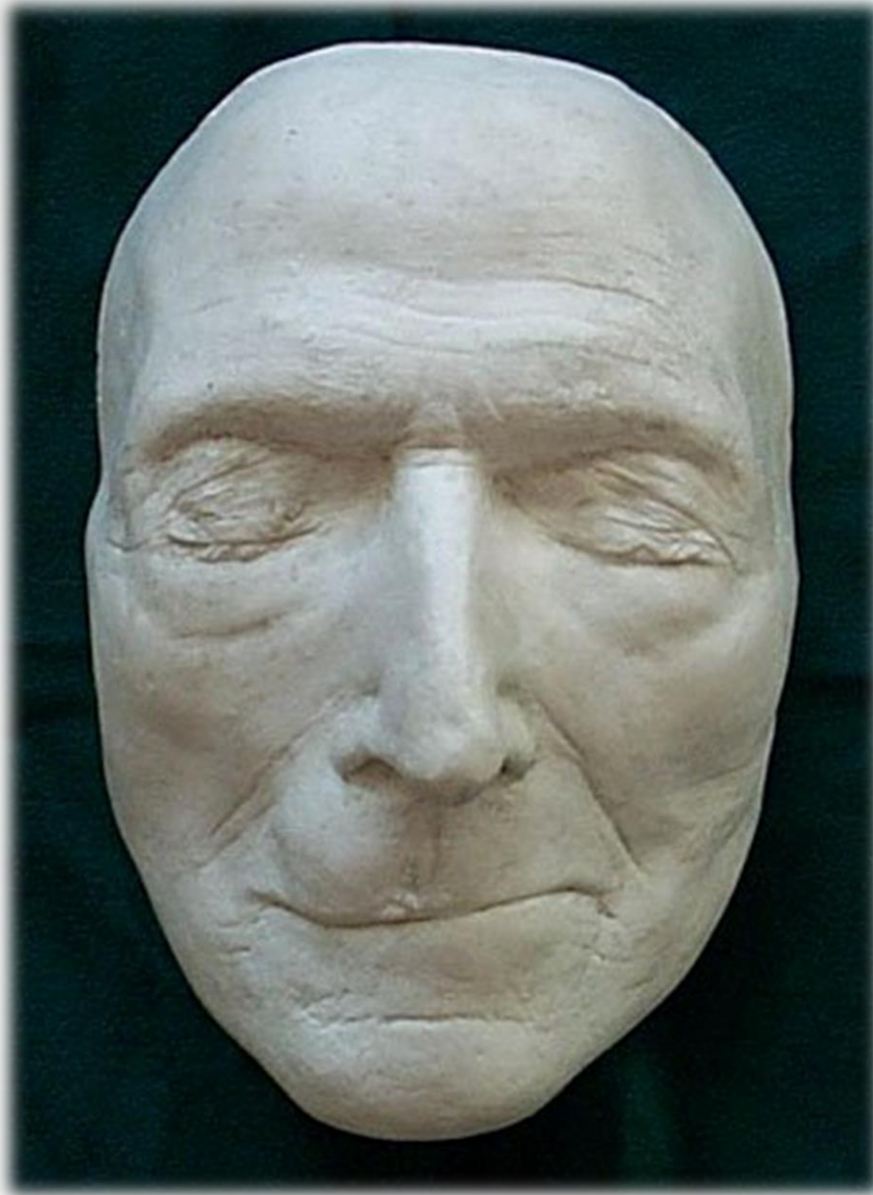
- The methodism of the Wesleys could be considered the British phase of a more general movement called Pietism in the Protestant churches of Europe.
- There are common connections and interests that linked pietists on the continent, evangelicals in Britain, and revivalists on the American frontier.
- Chief among these links was a common thirst for a more directly personal religion and common resistance to efforts by both Catholic and Protestant state-church regimes to exert tighter control over their local populations.
- As a response to the formalism and insincerity of church leaders in the 17th century, Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705) called for moral and practical reform in the churches in his famous *Pia Desideria* (The piety we desire). He is called the Father of Pietism.
- Spener's six proposals for reform: 1) a more extensive use of the Word of God; 2) called for a renewal of "the spiritual priesthood"; 3) an authentic practice of faith; 4) restraint and charity in religious controversies; 5) reform in the education of ministers; and 6) implored ministers to preach edifying sermons.

Evangelicalism & Pietism

- Evangelicalism in the English-speaking world and Pietism on the Continent together represented a strategic shift in Christian energy, direction, assumptions, and associations.
- In the 18th century, evangelicals and pietists were busy with two tasks. They were retrieving elements of the Protestant past- *sola scriptura*, an emphasis on grace, and the priesthood of all believers. They sought a more genuine Christianity or what at the time they called “true religion.” But they were also creatively interpreting those religious commitments in social circumstances.
- Pietism and evangelicalism were movements of Protestant renewal that responded to the weaknesses of the church and the changing realities of European politics, social, economic and cultural life.
- The ways in which pietists & evangelicals renovated the gospel message to the conditions in the 18th century were theological as well as social.
- They also responded to unique possibilities of their age by being much more active in cross-cultural evangelism than any Protestants had ever been before their time.

Evangelicalism & Pietism

- The missionary efforts of Spener, Francke, and the Moravians were major Protestant innovations.
- The zeal of the Wesleys, Whitefield, and a host of unsung methodist itinerants for carrying the gospel message to Britain's miners, soldiers, industrial workers, and others whom the established church ignored was the beginning of massive evangelical efforts at carrying the gospel to the unreached.
- There were many differences in these new forms of Protestantism (ex. Theology- they could embrace Lutheran, Calvin, Arminian and many other varieties).
- The important point to make about these differences is that they arose largely from efforts to shape inherited features of Christianity to the new realities defined by European social change and developments at the European state churches.
- Two shared and important convictions: 1) evangelicals & pietists were determinedly Protestant in their attachment to Scripture (the Bible was an indisputable anchor); and 2) they believed that true religion required the personal experience of God (the experiential character of faith was central).



A New Piety

- Do we have a *singleness of eye* and *tenacity of purpose*?
- How is our *diligence, self-denial* and *economy of time*?
- Are we willing to have a *versatile mind* and *ability*?