

William Wilberforce and the Abolition of the Slave Trade: Did You Know?

Little-known or remarkable facts about William Wilberforce and the Century of Reform

Richard V. Pierard

William Wilberforce regarded slavery as a national crime for which all Englishmen were responsible. In 1818 he wrote in his diary, "In the Scripture, no national crime is condemned so frequently and few so strongly as oppression and cruelty, and the not using our best endeavors to deliver our fellow-creatures from them."

Wilberforce and his friends engaged in an antislavery public opinion campaign unprecedented in English history. In 1814 they gathered one million signatures, one-tenth of the population, on 800 petitions, which they delivered to the House of Commons.

The English ruling classes viewed abolitionists as radical and dangerous, similar to French revolutionaries of the day.

Antislavery bills of one sort or another were defeated in Parliament for 11 consecutive years before the act abolishing the slave trade was passed in 1807.

Slave ship crews were often treated more cruelly than slaves. Slaves brought a profit, so there was incentive to ensure they were adequately fed and cared for. In fact, the death rate for crews was higher than that for slaves.

Wilberforce was one of five members of the Clapham Sect (the aristocratic circle of Christian activists) who held seats in the House of Commons who never lost a parliamentary election.

In the summer of 1833, Parliament passed the second reading of the Emancipation Act, ensuring the end of slavery in the British Empire. Three days later, Wilberforce died.

Evangelical abolitionists have received high praise from secular commentators. For example, nineteenth-century historian W. E. H. Lecky said, "The unwearied, unostentatious, and inglorious crusade of England against slavery may probably be regarded as among the three or four perfectly virtuous pages comprised in the history of nations."

Slavery wasn't the only social issue that troubled nineteenth-century British Christians. Between 1780 and 1844 they founded at least 223 national religious, moral, educational, and philanthropic institutions and societies to alleviate child abuse, poverty, illiteracy, and other social ills.

Among the religious and benevolent societies for impoverished or exploited women were

- Forlorn Females Fund of Mercy;
- Maritime Female Penitent Refuge for Poor, Degraded Females;
- Society for Returning Young Women to Their Friends in the Country;
- Friendly Female Society for the Relief of Poor, Infirm, Aged Widows, and Single Women of Good

Character Who Have Seen Better Days.

Books about discouraging social problems became best sellers. For example, in ***In Darkest England and the Way Out*** (1890), Salvation Army founder William Booth described England's "submerged tenth," trapped in vice, poverty, and godlessness, and explained his plan to end unemployment. The book sold one million copies.

In their efforts to reform society, many British evangelicals criticized such amusements as dancing, hunting, playing cards, theater going, reading novels, and even Handel's oratorios.

Some clergy in Victorian Britain gained notoriety for their political activism. Francis Close was called the "Evangelical Pope of Cheltenham" for his attacks on local horse racing. George S. Bull, an evangelical pastor in Yorkshire, was so active in the campaign to reduce children's work hours that he was labeled "The Ten-Hours Parson."

The evangelical faith and social concern that so permeated nineteenth-century England led French historian Elie Halevy to say evangelicalism made possible "the extraordinary stability which English society was destined to enjoy throughout a period of revolution and crises."

RICHARD PIERARD is professor of history at Indiana State University. He co-authored Two Kingdoms: The Church and Culture (Moody, 1993).

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 53: William Wilberforce: Fighting the Slave Trade

William Wilberforce and the Abolition of the Slave Trade: From the Editor - Fishing for Compassion

Fishing for Compassion

Mark Galli

Pessimism reigns, and for good reason. Inner cities are war zones. Pornography is manufactured unchecked. Blacks and whites stare at each other across the O. J. Simpson courtroom, each unable to fathom what the other is thinking. The prison population is exploding. The poor are getting poorer. The most helpless and powerless are aborted not just by the thousands but by the millions.

Depending on one's political views, the enemy is on the left-radicals ensconced in the universities and the nation's capitol. Or the enemy is on the right-the business class, sitting in plush offices of multinational corporations. In any case, despair is spreading: our culture is withering before our eyes, so the feeling goes, and there's not a whole lot we can do about it. Might as well go fishing.

In the early 1800s, Britain was a superpower rolling in wealth. Yet impersonal forces-specifically the Industrial Revolution and the international slave trade-conspired to destroy lives. The masses of England seemed doomed to perpetual poverty, and thousands upon thousands of Africans (and more each year) were locked in perpetual servitude. A lot of Britons looked at their world and then looked for their fishing poles.

William Wilberforce did not. Neither did Elizabeth Fry or Robert Raikes or Thomas Chalmers, among others-Christians largely forgotten in our day. Yet before the century ended, nearly everything they touched had improved: prisons, medical care, education, factory conditions, slums. And decades before Americans started shedding uncountable gallons of blood over slavery, the English had simply outlawed it.

If these Christians didn't bring in the kingdom of heaven, they did make England more just. And if they didn't solve every social problem (and certainly, like all successful reformers, they created a few along the way), at least they made life bearable for millions and saved the lives of millions more.

That is no small legacy. And it is a legacy that history shows we can hand on to our children, and to our children's children-as long we decide not to trade social compassion for a fly rod.

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The Best of Times, the Worst of Times

An introduction to the turbulent 19th century.

In the late 1700s, Britain became the most powerful nation on earth, an empire upon which the sun literally never set. Wealth poured in from colonies abroad and revolution in industry at home. Many of the destitute rose out of poverty and became members of the middle class. The rich grew vastly richer, enjoying lavish homes and extended cruises.

However, the Industrial Revolution also created a tyrant: the modern factory. Confined within its foul, noisy, and grim atmosphere, men, women, and children toiled 16 hours a day, six days a week. People flocked to cities to find work, and they crowded into dwellings thrown together by landlords who gave no thought for sanitation or safety or human decency. Many were forced to live in the narrow city streets. Overcrowding and lack of clean water produced cholera, typhoid, and tuberculosis.

Another rich source of income and human suffering was less apparent. Far from English shores, other men, women, and children were packed in ships and transported by the thousands to the Americas. There they tilled fields and picked cotton and did whatever else their masters demanded of them. They were bought and sold, bred and beaten, and put in chains if they proved unmanageable. The trade in human flesh made the good life possible for many a Briton.

Some didn't know, and others pretended they didn't know, about all these evils. Some argued the conditions were not all that evil. But others thought something ought to be done. They began by focusing their energies on slavery.

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The "Shrimp" Who Stopped Slavery

the most malignant evil of the British Empire ceased largely because of the faith and persistence of William Wilberforce.

Christopher D. Hancock

Today one of his full portraits hangs in a pub. Another in the same town, Cambridge, hangs in a hotel. Another still, in his old college, St. John's. In each he peers at the world quizzically through small, bright eyes over a long, upturned nose. He was said to be "the wittiest man in England, and the most religious" (Madame de Stael), and one who possessed "the greatest natural eloquence of all the men I ever met" (William Pitt). When he spoke, another quipped, "The shrimp became a whale" (James Boswell). Historian G. M. Trevelyan called this "shrimp" the primary human agent for "one of the turning events in the history of the world."

It's hard to imagine that this man, with the gentle grin and the small, twisted body could move the world in a new direction. Yet William Wilberforce did.

Born on August 24, 1759, the third child of Robert and Elizabeth Wilberforce grew up surrounded by wealth. The Wilberforces had settled in Hull, England, at the beginning of the 1700s and made their wealth in the booming Baltic trade. When William was 9, his father died. The boy was sent to stay with his childless aunt and uncle, who were "great friends of Mr. [George] Whitefield." They exposed their young charge to the evangelical preaching of John Newton, the ex-slave trader. Years later Wilberforce spoke of "reverencing him as a parent when I was a child." Newton's immediate influence, however, was short lived.

Fearing her son might be infected by the "poison" of Methodism, his mother brought him back to Hull and enrolled him at his grandfather's old school at Pockington near York. His education as a gentleman continued among the commercial "aristocracy." He learned to play cards and sing and developed his gift of witty repartee.

He later wrote, "I was naturally a high-spirited boy and fiery. They [his friends] pushed me forward and made me talk a great deal and made me very vain." His grandfather's death in November 1774 left him richer still and more susceptible to the temptations of plenty.

In October 1776, Wilberforce entered St. John's College, Cambridge. His three years there were pleasant but unproductive. He had "unlimited command of money" and little academic pressure from his tutor.

"As much pains were taken to make me idle as were ever taken to make anyone studious," he later complained. His intellectual aspirations were no match for his passion for socializing. His neighbor, Thomas Gisborne, later recalled, "When he [Wilberforce] returned late in the evening to his rooms, he would summon me to join him. ... He was so winning and amusing that I often sat up half the night with him, much to the detriment of my attendance at lectures the next day."

Wilberforce graduated the same year as the hard-working William Pitt (future prime minister). Their friendship grew throughout 1779. Together they watched Parliament from the gallery and dreamed of political careers.

In the summer of 1780, the ambitious Wilberforce stood for election as a Member of Parliament (MP) for

Hull. He was only 21, and one of his opponents had powerful supporters. His chances of winning were slim.

In the campaign, Wilberforce relied on his charm, energy, tact, and powers of persuasion, and in the end, he secured as many votes as his opponents combined. He was to remain an MP, for various constituencies, for another 45 years.

"The first years I was in Parliament," he later wrote, "I did nothing-nothing that is to any purpose. My own distinction was my darling object." He frequented the exclusive clubs of St. James and acquired a reputation as a songster and wit who was professionally "careless and inaccurate in method." His fertile mind flitted from topic to topic. His early speeches, though eloquent, lacked focus and passion.

Starting in 1784, however, all that changed.

Birth of a Christian politician

In 1784, after his election as the mp for Yorkshire (one of the most coveted seats in the House of Commons), Wilberforce accompanied his sister Sally, his mother, and two of his cousins to the French Riviera (for the sake of Sally's health). He had also invited Isaac Milner, tutor at Queens' College, Cambridge, an acquaintance. Though friends counted "Wilber" both religious and moral, had he known that Milner's huge frame housed both a fine mathematical brain and a strong "methodistical" [evangelical] faith, it is unlikely he would have invited him. The combination was unimaginable in an English gentleman!

Milner's clear thought and winsome manner were effective advertisements for "serious" Christianity. Wilberforce had the quicker tongue, Milner the sharper mind. As they journeyed, they debated the evangelicalism of Wilberforce's youth.

Over the next months, Wilberforce read Philip Doddridge's *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (1745) beside an open Bible. His reading and conversations with Milner convinced him of wealth's emptiness, Christianity's truth, and his own failure to embrace its radical demands. Outwardly he looked ever confident, but inwardly he agonized. "I was filled with sorrow," he wrote. "I am sure that no human creature could suffer more than I did for some months."

He considered withdrawing from public life for the sake of his faith. He confided in his friend Pitt, now prime minister. Pitt told him not to withdraw. With "ten thousand doubts," he approached John Newton. The aging saint advised him, "It is hoped and believed that the Lord has raised you up for the good of his church and for the good of the nation."

Wilberforce's unnatural gloom finally lifted on Easter 1786, "amidst the general chorus with which all nature seems on such a morning to be swelling the song of praise and thanksgiving." He believed his new life had begun.

His sense of vocation began growing within. "My walk is a public one," he wrote in his diary. "My business is in the world, and I must mix in the assemblies of men or quit the post which Providence seems to have assigned me." He also increasingly felt the burden of his calling: "A man who acts from the principles I profess," he later wrote, "reflects that he is to give an account of his political conduct at the judgment seat of Christ."

Finding his purpose

His diary for the summer of 1786 charts his painful search for greater discipline and a clearer vocation. He flitted between humanitarian and local causes, between parliamentary and national reform. He studied to correct his Cambridge indolence. He practiced abstinence from alcohol and rigorous self-examination as

benefit, he believed, a "serious" Christian.

After one dinner with Pitt, he wrote in his diary about the "temptations of the table," meaning the endless stream of dinner parties filled with vain and useless conversation. "[They] disqualify me for every useful purpose in life, waste my time, impair my health, fill my mind with thoughts of resistance before and self-condemnation afterwards."

In early 1786, Wilberforce had been tentatively approached by friends who were committed abolitionists. They asked him to lead the parliamentary campaign for their cause. Even Pitt prodded him in this direction: "Wilberforce, why don't you give notice of a motion on the subject of the slave trade?" But Wilberforce hesitated.

The slave trade in the late 1700s involved thousands of slaves, hundreds of ships, and millions of pounds; upon it depended the economies of Britain and much of Europe. Few were aware of the horrors of the so-called "Middle Passage" across the Atlantic, where an estimated one out of four slaves died.

Some Englishmen, including John Wesley and Thomas Clarkson, had taken steps to mitigate the evil. Yet few in England shared the abolitionists' sense that slavery was a great social evil. Some presumed that slaves were a justifiable necessity or that they deserved their plight.

For Wilberforce light began to dawn slowly during his 27th year. His diary for Sunday, October 28, 1787, shows with extraordinary clarity the fruit of prolonged study, prayer, and conversation. He realized the need for "some reformer of the nation's morals, who should raise his voice in the high places of the land and do within the church and nearer the throne what Wesley has accomplished in the meeting and among the multitude."

He also summed up what became his life mission: "God Almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners" (i.e., morality).

Later he reflected on his decision about slavery: "So enormous, so dreadful, so irremediable did the trade's wickedness appear that my own mind was completely made up for abolition. Let the consequences be what they would; I from this time determined that I would never rest until I had effected its abolition."

Enormous foes

Wilberforce was initially optimistic, naively so, and expressed "no doubt of our success." He sought to stem the flow of slaves from Africa by international accord. The strength of his feelings and the support of prominent politicians like Pitt, Edmund Burke, and Charles Fox blinded him to the enormity of his task.

From his deathbed, John Wesley wrote him, "I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy, which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you?"

In May 1788, Wilberforce had recovered from another of his periodic bouts of illness to introduce a 12-point motion to Parliament indicting the trade. He and Thomas Clarkson (whom Wilberforce praised as central to the cause's success) had thoroughly researched and now publicized the trade's physical atrocities. But Parliament wanted to maintain the status quo, and the motion was defeated.

The campaign and opposition intensified. Planters, businessmen, ship owners, traditionalists, and even the Crown opposed the movement. Many feared personal financial ruin and nationwide recession if the trade ceased. Wilberforce was vilified. Admiral Horatio Nelson castigated "the damnable doctrine of Wilberforce

and his hypocritical allies." One of Wilberforce's friends wrote fearing he would one day read of Wilberforce being "carbonadoed [broiled] by West Indian planters, barbecued by African merchants, and eaten by Guinea captains."

Wilberforce's spirit was indomitable, his enthusiasm palpable. As the slave owners' agent in Jamaica wrote, "It is necessary to watch him, as he is blessed with a very sufficient quantity of that enthusiastic spirit, which is so far from yielding that it grows more vigorous from blows."

The pathway to abolition was fraught with difficulty. Vested interest, parliamentary filibustering, entrenched bigotry, international politics, slave unrest, personal sickness, and political fear-all combined to frustrate the movement. It would take years before Wilberforce would see success.

Prime minister of philanthropy

The cause of the slaves was not Wilberforce's only concern. The second "great object" of Wilberforce's life was the reformation of the nation's morals. Early in 1787, he conceived of a society that would work, as a royal proclamation put it, "for the encouragement of piety and virtue; and for the preventing of vice, profaneness, and immorality." It eventually became known as the Society for the Suppression of Vice. Enlisting support from leading figures in church and state-and King George III-Wilberforce made private morality a matter of public concern.

Laws restricting drinking, swearing, and gaming on Sundays were enforced. "All loose and licentious prints, books, and publications" were suppressed, including Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*. Wilberforce was criticized for his "priggish" concerns, yet John Pollock, a recent biographer, wrote, "The reformation of manners grew into Victorian virtues and Wilberforce touched the world when he made goodness fashionable."

It has been estimated that Wilberforce-dubbed "the prime minister of a cabinet of philanthropists"-was at one time active in support of 69 philanthropic causes. He gave away a fourth of his annual income to the poor. He also gave an annuity to Charles Wesley's widow from 1792 until her death in 1822. He fought the cause of "climbing boys" (chimney sweeps) and single mothers. He sought the welfare of soldiers, sailors, and animals, and established Sunday schools and orphanages for "criminal poor children." His homes were havens for the marginalized and dispossessed.

Targeting the powerful as the agents of change, Wilberforce made common cause with Hannah More, the evangelical playwright, whose *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great* appeared in 1787. "To expect to reform the poor while the opulent are corrupt," she wrote, "is to throw odors [perfume] on the stream while the springs are poisoned."

Clapham, a leafy village south of London, became a base for a number of these influential people, who became known as the "Clapham Sect." These bankers and diplomats, legislators, and businessmen shared a commitment to a godly life in public service. Their "vital" and "practical" Christianity expressed Wilberforce's vision of an integrated evangelicalism committed to a spiritual and a social gospel. The group's reputation for philanthropy and evangelical fervor spread. Warned one politician, "I would counsel my lords and bishops to keep their eyes upon that holy village."

Wilberforce's public struggles and success must be set against the background of his private joys and pains.

The public man's private side

Wilberforce's health was blighted by weak and painful eyes, a stomach prone to colitis, and a body that for many years had to be held upright by a crude metal frame. In his late 20s, he already wrote from his sickbed, "[I] am still a close prisoner, wholly unequal even to such a little business as I am now engaged

in: add to which my eyes are so bad that I can scarce see to how to direct my pen."

His gloomy doctor reported, "That little fellow, with his calico guts, cannot possibly survive a twelve-month."

He did, though in the process he became dependent on small doses of opium, the nearest thing to an effective pain killer and treatment for colitis known at the time. Wilberforce was aware of opium's dangers and was not easily persuaded to take it. After taking it for some time, he noticed that omitting his nighttime dose caused sickness, sweating, and sneezing in the morning. Opium's hallucinatory powers terrified him, and the depressions it caused virtually crippled him at times.

His notebooks contain anguished prayers: "I fly to thee for succor and support, O Lord, let it come speedily. ... I am in great troubles insurmountable by me. ... Look upon me, O Lord, with compassion and mercy, and restore me to rest, quietness, and comfort in the world, or in another by removing me hence into a state of happiness." In his later years, he showed the long-term effects of opium use, particularly listlessness and amnesia.

His marriage to Barbara Spooner, in 1797, brought him much joy. On the other hand, the financial ineptitude of his oldest son in 1830 (reducing his parents to a peripatetic existence in their children's homes) and the death of his second daughter in 1832 caused his final years to be overshadowed by grief and poverty. (In time three of his four sons became Roman Catholics, one an adversary of Lord Shaftesbury, Wilberforce's successor in many ways).

Wilberforce's life was not without criticism. Some see in his sons' five-volume *Lifemuted* praise of both his evangelicalism and his parenting. Opponents of abolition bitterly denounced both his character and his cause. A Wimbledon man, Anthony Fearon, attempted blackmail (causing Wilberforce to write, "At all events, he must not be permitted to publish"), but the precise grounds are not known.

Through all this, Wilberforce drew spiritual and intellectual strength from the Bible and the Puritans (such as Richard Baxter, John Owen, and Jonathan Edwards), and built his evangelical faith on a mildly Calvinist foundation.

Philip Doddridge's *Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* continued to shape his spirituality: daily self-examination, and extended times of prayer, regular Communion and fasting, morning and evening devotions, and times of solitude. He also paid careful attention to God's providential provision in his life, the needs of others, and his own mortality.

For all of Wilberforce's appeal to "real" and "vital" Christianity, especially in his best-selling *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System ... Contrasted with Real Christianity* (1797), he did not embrace a dull, joyless legalism. His personality alone was too lively for that. As he once wrote to a relative, "My grand objection to the religious system still held by many who declare themselves orthodox churchmen ... is that it tends to render Christianity so much a system of prohibitions rather than of privilege and hopes ... and religion is made to wear a forbidding and gloomy air."

Vocal until death

It is hard to comprehend the extent of Wilberforce's labors and scope of his achievement.

He contributed to the Christianization of British India by securing chaplains to the East India Company and missionaries to India. He worked with Charles Simeon and others to secure parishes for evangelical clergy, thus shaping the future of the Church of England. He helped form a variety of "parachurch" groups: the Society for Bettering the Cause of the Poor (1796), the Church Missionary Society (1799), the British and

Foreign Bible Society (1806), the Africa Institution (1807), and the Anti-Slavery Society (1823).

But his greatest legacy remains his fight against the slave trade, which frustrated him for years. As early as 1789, he achieved some success in having 12 resolutions against the trade passed—only to be outmaneuvered on fine legal points. Another bill to abolish the trade was defeated in 1791 (by 163 to 88) because a slave uprising in Santo Domingo made MPs nervous about granting freedom to slaves. Further defeats followed in 1792, 1793, 1797, 1798, 1799, 1804, and 1805.

But Wilberforce persisted, and finally, on February 23, 1807, a political ruse by Lord Grenville's more liberal administration (pointing out that the trade assisted Britain's enemies) secured its abolition by 283 votes to 16. The House cheered. Wilberforce wept with joy.

Wilberforce became a national hero overnight, and his opponents sharpened their knives. Lord Milton Lascelles spent no less than £200,000 to fight (unsuccessfully) against Wilberforce in the election in 1807.

The next issue was ensuring that the abolition of the slave trade was enforced and that eventually slavery was abolished. This last goal took another 26 years, and Wilberforce's health prevented him from continuing to the end. At age 62, he turned over parliamentary leadership of emancipation to Thomas Foxwell Buxton.

But Wilberforce continued to play a role. In 1823 he published ***An Appeal to the Religion, Justice and Humanity of the Inhabitants of the British Empire on Behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies***. Three months before his death he was found "going out to war again," campaigning for abolitionist petitions to Parliament. He declared publicly, "I had never thought to appear in public again, but it shall never be said that William Wilberforce is silent while the slaves require his help."

On July 26, 1833, the final passage of the emancipation bill was insured when a committee of the House of Commons worked out key details. Three days later, Wilberforce died. Parliament continued working out details of the measure, and later Buxton wrote, "On the very night on which we were successfully engaged in the House of Commons in passing the clause of the Act of Emancipation ... the spirit of our friend left the world. The day which was the termination of his labors was the termination of his life."

Parliament overruled family preference and designated Westminster Abbey as the place for both his funeral and memorial. Parliamentary business was suspended. One MP recalled, "The attendance was very great. The funeral itself, with the exception of the choir, was perfectly plain. The noblest and most fitting testimony to the estimation of the man."

It is right that Wilberforce is remembered in a church; he was a churchman through and through. But the places where his portrait hangs in Cambridge are in their own ways also fitting. His walk was indeed in the world, though not of it.

Christopher Hancock is vicar of Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge, England, and associate professor of systematic theology at Virginia Theological Seminary.

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William Wilberforce and the Abolition of the Slave Trade: A Gallery of Aristocratic Activists

The Clapham Sect was one of the most elite and effective bands of Christian social reformers—ever

Bruce Hindmarsh

When after much struggle and effort, the abolition bill passed in 1807, William Wilberforce said to his friend Henry Thornton, "Well, Henry, what shall we abolish next?"

The comment illustrates Wilberforce's innate optimism, but the "we" also reveals something. Though he was probably the greatest social reformer of the 1800s, he never worked alone.

When he was converted to evangelical faith in 1785, Wilberforce soon found himself at the center of a group of well-connected and well-heeled individuals. This group, called the Clapham Sect, combined their considerable talents, religious zeal, and optimism in a concerted campaign of national reform. And in large measure, they succeeded.

Here are some of the leading members and what they accomplished as individuals and as a group.

Henry Thornton

(1760-1815)

Financial genius

Whenever a new cause was championed by the Clapham friends, and a society organized to carry it out, Henry Thornton was the one who gave practical business advice and financial support. He was almost sure to be asked to be the treasurer.

After his conversion, Wilberforce had retreated to the mansion of Henry's father, John Thornton, who lived in Clapham. Wilberforce soon became fast friends with Henry. Henry purchased his own house at Clapham in 1792, and he and Wilberforce lived there together as bachelors for five years. Later, when each had married and established his own family, they lived as neighbors on the same estate. It was around Wilberforce and Thornton that the "sect" gradually formed.

Henry, like his father, was a highly successful merchant banker. He had a superb mind for abstract economics, and his business savvy was matched by a liberal generosity. He gave away six-sevenths of his income before he was married and more than a third of it afterward. Probably his greatest personal efforts were expended in directing the affairs of the Sierra Leone Company, a Clapham-inspired enterprise to establish a colony of freed slaves in West Africa.

Thornton was a Member of Parliament for many years, but he never neglected his domestic duties. He conducted regular family worship, and a volume of his family prayers was published after his death.

Granville Sharp

(1735-1813)

Self-taught radical

Unlike most of his younger friends at Clapham, Granville Sharp had no inherited wealth and had to work to support himself. But work seemed to come easy to Sharp. While working away at law, he taught himself Hebrew so he could defend Christianity to a Jew, and then Greek, to oppose an infidel skeptic.

Sharp was older than most of the other associates of Wilberforce and more loosely associated with Clapham. But he had pioneered in the early efforts against slavery and helped recruit Wilberforce to the cause.

When Wilberforce was still a child, without any legal training, Sharp had single-handedly overturned the legal opinion of the majority of the most eminent judges in England. Sharp happened upon a slave in London who had been cruelly beaten and abandoned by his West Indian master. Sharp took up the slave's case and achieved, in this case and others, many legal precedents, including the famous 1772 ruling which essentially declared that any slave who set foot in English territory had become free.

Sharp had his share of eccentricities. He rose at dawn to sing Psalms in Hebrew to the accompaniment of his harp. He was also keenly interested in the prophetic parts of Scripture. He once gained an audience with the prominent statesman Charles Fox and proceeded to explain to him why Napoleon should be identified with the "little horn" in Daniel 7.

His political views were more radical than those of most Claphamites, but with them he ardently supported many religious and philanthropic causes. The Sierra Leone experiment was begun at his initiative. He was also one of the founders of the Sunday School Society, the Bible Society, and the Society for Promoting the Conversion of Jews.

John Venn

(1759-1813)

Addicted to doing good

John Venn once lamented that a drawback of entering heaven might be the lost opportunities to do good: "There will be no sick to visit, no naked to clothe, no afflicted to relieve, no weak to succor, no faint to encourage, nor corrupt to rebuke or profligate to reclaim."

In 1792, through the patronage of John Thornton, Venn became rector of the parish church in Clapham. He quickly became a spiritual guide to the group, joined in their deliberations, and even led several causes.

Venn set up one of the first organized systems of parish visitation, conducted confirmation classes, and formed the Society for Bettering the Conditions of the Poor. With friends he financially supported six local schools and took pride that every child in Clapham could receive a free education—an unusual achievement in that day. He saw to it that the parish was vaccinated against smallpox, having his own family vaccinated first as an example.

On the national scene, Venn was the prime mover behind the Church Missionary Society. As founding chairman in 1799, he set it on its influential course as a thoroughly Anglican and evangelical enterprise in foreign missions.

Hannah More

(1745-1833)

"Petticoat bishop"

Because of Hannah More's determined religious activism, one of her opponents once called her "a bishop in petticoats."

Although she lived far from Clapham, in Somerset, More had the closest of links with Wilberforce, Thornton, and their friends. As a young woman, More moved in some of the most fashionable intellectual circles in London, and included the actor David Garrick and Samuel Johnson among her friends. She soon earned a reputation as a successful poet and playwright. After becoming a "serious" Christian in the 1780s, she sought to win her high society friends to her views. She took pen in hand, and her *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great* (1788) became a best seller.

Yet More's most significant work was as an educator and writer on behalf of the lower classes. Prompted by Wilberforce, she and her sister began to work among the poor in the Mendip Hills, south of Bristol. With financial help from Thornton, she soon had over 500 children organized in schools across an area of some 75 square miles. This became the most well-known venture in religious and popular education supported by the Clapham Sect.

More believed the laboring classes needed inexpensive and edifying material to read (among other reasons, so they would not become engrossed in irreligious and politically inflammatory tracts). So she wrote a series of *Cheap Repository Tracts*, which sold at a penny or half-penny a piece and were subsidized by Thornton. Within a year, over two million had been sold.

Zachary Macaulay

(1768 -1838)

Walking encyclopedia

If any of the Clapham Sect were in doubt about a fact or figure, they used to say, "Look it up in Macaulay." Such was Zachary Macaulay's reputation for doing research.

Macaulay, as an estate manager in the West Indies, quickly became disgusted with Jamaican slavery. He returned to England in 1792- only to be selected as the Clapham choice to turn around the fortunes of Sierra Leone. For six years as governor, his administration was plagued by threats of insurrection, harassment by slave-trading interests, and marauding French squadrons before he could bring some order and prosperity to the colony.

He did not seek the most comfortable means to return to England. He somehow talked his way onto a slave ship-to collect eyewitness evidence of the horrific conditions of the Middle Passage from Africa to the West Indies.

In England Macaulay became a one-man research department for all Clapham causes, and especially for the cause of abolition. With an almost photographic memory, he tirelessly gathered facts, sifted evidence, digested parliamentary papers, and submitted all to powerful analysis. It became a dictum that Macaulay could be quoted verbatim on the floor of the House of Commons without fear of contradiction.

His energies were not exhausted by the antislavery cause. He was the first major editor of the influential *Christian Observer*, which began in 1802 and quickly became the chief organ of Anglican evangelical piety. He was a member of 23 philanthropic and religious societies and on the governing committee of nine.

Democratic paternalists

The list of influential Claphamites could easily be expanded to include James Stephen, Charles Grant, and John Shore. There was also the indefatigable Thomas Clarkson, one of the key, if forgotten, British abolitionists. He once searched systematically through every ship in England, port after port, in order to find a sailor whom he thought could provide evidence against slavery. (Clarkson found him in the 57th ship.) At Cambridge there was the knot of students and clergy who surrounded the famous preacher

Charles Simeon. They embodied the Clapham Sect's attempt to "evangelicalize" the Church of England from within.

In spite of the profusion of good people and good works, the Clapham Sect has received criticism, some of it just. To be sure, they were paternalists. Hannah More once said of her poor students, "They have so little common sense, and so little sensibility, that we are obliged to beat into their heads continually the good we are doing to them."

Aghast at the irreligion and violence of the French Revolution, the well-to-do at Clapham abhorred many democratic reforms. They supported several repressive measures designed to stave off revolution by keeping political agitators in check—including the Peterloo Massacre in 1819, a violent breakup of a mass meeting about parliamentary reform in which 11 people died.

The Clapham Sect has also been criticized for being more concerned for moral reform among the poor than the rich. One critic said Wilberforce's Society for the Suppression of Vice should be renamed "The Society for the Suppression of Vice among Those with Less Than £500 a Year."

Yet the views of the Clapham Sect were more liberal than was typical for people of their station. Wilberforce often rebuked the sins of the rich and powerful. His friendship with William Pitt, the prime minister, was strained by Wilberforce's public denunciation of dueling (a "sin" of the aristocratic class) in the wake of Pitt's well-known duel with a political enemy.

Moreover their religious and humanitarian ideals helped bring about a more egalitarian society. The message of salvation for all, the rhetoric of antislavery, and the call for individual responsibility helped move England toward democratic reforms.

The Clapham Sect pioneered techniques of mobilizing public opinion that have become commonplace in democracies. They exploited the media outlets of the day: lectures, billboards, newspapers, and pamphlets. They made effective use of voluntary societies and unprecedented use of petitions to exert public pressure on Parliament.

Wilberforce and his colleagues were remarkably shrewd and skilled in tactical politics, that is, "networking." Nobody could gladhand at a dinner party as did Wilberforce. While keeping a reputation for unsullied integrity, and establishing their independence from vested interests and partisan loyalties, the "Saints" happily cooperated where they could and built limited coalitions. They once noted they were happy to work with the celebrated orator Richard Sheridan, "whether [he was] drunk or sober."

The Wilberforce Sect?

If Wilberforce never worked alone, the Clapham Sect couldn't work without Wilberforce. When Wilberforce died in 1833, the group lost its animating center. The causes he and his friends had championed would go on, and the moral and spiritual influence they exerted would continue to be felt, but the Clapham Sect would be no more. It was a phenomenon of one generation. This was a "sect" that gathered less around Clapham than it did around Wilberforce himself.

Bruce Hindmarsh is a visiting research fellow at Oxford University and author of John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition (Oxford University Press, 1996).

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A Long Reach

The Clapham Sect's impact in India—and the world.

Bruce Hindmarsh

The Clapham Sect was not satisfied to reform Britain but also any place Britain touched, beginning with India.

Since 1613 the East India Company, a privately owned stock company, had done business in India and the Far East on behalf of Britain. It was company policy not to interfere with the beliefs and practices of the people with whom they traded. But by the late 1700s, this policy was being challenged, most prominently by Charles Grant.

Grant (1746-1823) had been known for his profligate lifestyle while he worked his way up the corporate ladder in India. After he lost two children to smallpox, he underwent a religious conversion. He became increasingly appalled by such Indian customs as exposing the sick, burning or drowning lepers, and sati, the ritual burning of widows. He was also dismayed by the immorality and indifference of British rulers in India.

Grant believed Protestant missionaries could help. But in order to gain passage to countries in the Far East, and to enjoy protection while there, missionaries needed licenses from the East India Company which the company refused to give. It feared missionary attempts to reform the host country would incite revolts and thus harm the company's bottom line.

Grant continued to rise in prominence in the East India Company, and he eventually returned to England to become chairman and director of the company in 1805, as well as a Member of Parliament. He found allies in the Clapham Sect, for whom the Christianizing of India had become a cause second only to abolition.

In 1793 the Claphamites had tried but failed to alter the charter of the East India Company to allow for missionaries. They were able, though, to get evangelicals, such as Henry Martyn, appointed as East India Company chaplains, who in fact did missionary work as well.

In 1813, when the company's charter came due for renewal, the Clapham forces were prepared. They mobilized public opinion, securing a half million signatures on petitions. They used their considerable political skills in and out of Parliament. Grant, Wilberforce, and their friends overturned the vested interests of the company and gained a "Missionary Clause" in the new charter.

Thus the precedent was set for missionaries to go not only to India and China but anywhere Britain had an international presence. And in the 19th century, that meant a lot of the world.

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William Wilberforce and the Abolition of the Slave Trade: Christian History Timeline

The Christian History Timeline by Sarah Williams

Sarah Williams

World Events

1776 American colonies declare independence

1783 William Pitt becomes the British prime minister; war with colonies ends with British defeat at Yorktown

1789 French Revolution begins

1806 185 ships carry 43,755 slaves to America

1807 U.S. abolishes importation of slaves

1811 London becomes first city with more than 1 million; disease, overcrowding, and crime are rife

1815 Wellington defeats Napoleon at Waterloo; France agrees to abolish slave trade; Portugal follows suit

1819 Peterloo Massacre: 11 die in a violent breakup of a mass meeting about parliamentary reform

1820 Spain becomes last major European power to abolish its slave trade

1837 Victoria becomes queen of Great Britain (reigns until 1901)

1845-46 Potato blight leads to famine in Ireland; 1 million people die and thousands emigrate to America

1848 Marx's Communist Manifesto

1848-49 Revolutions sweep Europe; cholera epidemic kills 14,000 people (10,000 in London) and precipitates municipal sanitation.

1853-56 Britain, France, and Piedmont defeat Russia in the Crimean War

British Reform

1772 Slavery abolished in England

1780 Robert Raikes founds the first Sunday school

- 1788** Hannah More's *Thoughts on the Manners of the Great*
- 1821** Elizabeth Fry establishes the British Society for Promoting the Reformation of Female Prisoners
- 1828-29** Various parliamentary acts open political offices to non-Anglicans
- 1831** Lord's Day Observance Society founded
- 1833** Lord Althorp's Factory Act mitigates child labor
- 1842** The Mines Act abolishes all female labor in the mines
- 1844-47** Factory acts reduce daily work hours to 6 for children and 10 for adults
- 1860** Florence Nightingale's *Notes on Nursing*
- 1864** Shaftesbury introduces measures to forbid the employment of boys under 10 as chimney sweeps
- 1867** Thomas Barnardo (1845-1905) opens his first children's home in London slums
- 1869** Debtors' prisons abolished
- 1870** Foster's Education Act promotes a national system of elementary education
- 1871** Removal of religious tests at Oxford and Cambridge allows Nonconformists to attend
- 1872** Licensing Act controls the sale of alcohol
- 1875** Artisans Dwellings Act aims to provide better houses for the poor
- 1878** William Booth (1829-1912) founds the Salvation Army

William Wilberforce

- 1759** Born in Kingston-upon-Hull, Yorkshire
- 1768** His father dies; sent to live in Wimbledon with an aunt and uncle
- 1776** Studies at St. John's College, Cambridge (until 1780)
- 1780** Elected Member of Parliament (MP) for Hull
- 1784-85** Experiences a deep conversion
- 1784** Becomes MP for Yorkshire
- 1787** Helps found Society for the Reformation of Manners
- 1789** Introduces his first bill to abolish the slave trade

1796A *Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians ...* is published

1797 Marries Barbara Spooner

1804 Helps found the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Church Missionary Society

1807 British Parliament abolishes slave trade

1813 Helps convince Parliament to permit missionaries to India

1822 Helps form the Anti-Slavery Society

1823 Launches campaign for emancipation of slaves

1825 Retires from the House of Commons

1833 Emancipation Act is passed: all slaves in the British Dominions granted freedom; Wilberforce dies and is buried at Westminster Abbey

Sarah Williams is a research fellow in the department of theology at the University of Birmingham, England. She is author of the forthcoming, Religious Belief and Popular Culture: 1880-1939 (Oxford).

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Greatness Upon Greatness

Lord Shaftesbury and William Gladstone, like Wilberforce, had Christ in their hearts and politics in their blood.

Kevin Charles Belmonte

When William Wilberforce died in 1833, one of those who attended his funeral was Anthony Ashley Cooper, later Lord Shaftesbury. In the words of biographer John Pollock, "Thus the two crusades and the lives of two great social reformers touched briefly and symbolically ... an end and a beginning."

A few weeks earlier, William Gladstone, newly elected Member of Parliament and future prime minister, met Wilberforce for the first time. Thus Pollack could have written about **three** great reformers' lives touching briefly. For if Wilberforce was the greatest Christian politician of his era, Shaftesbury and Gladstone were the greatest of theirs.

Cold home

Unlike Wilberforce, Shaftesbury was a devout Christian when he became a Member of Parliament in 1826. He felt God had called him "to devote whatever advantages He might have bestowed ... in the cause of the weak, the helpless, both man and beast, and those who had none to help them."

He didn't receive this faith from his parents, though. Born the son of the sixth earl of Shaftesbury, he was raised in a home devoid of parental affection. Virtually all he knew of love he experienced through the kindness of a maid named Maria Millis. It was to her that he later traced the beginning of his evangelical Christianity.

Two years into Parliament, Shaftesbury commenced his efforts to alleviate the injustices caused by the Industrial Revolution, which included acts that

- prohibited employment of women and children in coal mines,
- provided care for the insane,
- established a ten-hour day for factory workers,
- outlawed employing young boys as chimney sweeps.

Privately he promoted the building of model tenements (on his own estate) and "ragged schools" for waifs. For years he served as president of the British and Foreign Bible Society. He ardently supported the London City Mission, the Church Missionary Society, and the Young Men's Christian Association. He was associated with 33 philanthropic organizations in his life.

His commitment to spread the gospel led him to start a movement to hold religious services in theaters and music halls. Controversy ensued, forcing him to defend the movement in the House of Lords against charges that Christianity would be compromised if it were associated with scenes of frivolous entertainment.

His brother's keeper

The driving force of all this social activity was his faith. Some of the more important guiding principles expressed in his writings include:

1. **"By everything true, everything holy, you are your brother's keeper."**
2. **"Creed and color, latitude and longitude, make no difference in the essential nature of man."**
3. **"Social reforms, so necessary, so indispensable, require as much of God's grace as a change of heart."**
4. **"What is morally right can never be politically wrong, and what is morally wrong can never be politically right."**
5. **"No man ... can persist from the beginning of his life to the end of it in a course of generosity, [or] in a course of virtue ... unless he is drawing from the fountain of our Lord himself."**

Though he had high ideals, as a legislator, Shaftesbury was a realist. He often agreed to compromises to win some ground for his causes. For example, he wanted the Board School curriculum to include Bible teaching: "The teaching of the Bible," he argued, " ... should be essential and not an extra." The problem was how exactly to teach it-by which denomination's interpretation? Since church groups were unable to agree on a syllabus for religious instruction, a compromise was reached: the Bible would be taught but not according to the formularies of any church. Shaftesbury considered such teaching "a meager, washy, pointless thing," but it was better than no Bible instruction at all.

Shaftesbury's lifelong commitment to the welfare of his fellow Britons was once described as "his hopeless pertinacity." He was pertinacious-but hopeless, no.

Holy politics

For William Gladstone, service in political life was a "most blessed calling." He once said to Queen Victoria, "My political or public life is the best part of my life: it is that part in which I am conscious of the greatest effort to do and avoid as the Lord Christ would have me do and avoid."

He was raised in an evangelical home, and as a young man, he dedicated his life to Christ. Before embarking on a political career, he seriously considered taking holy orders. But when he entered Parliament in 1832, he never looked back. His political career lasted over 60 years.

He served as president of the board of trade, secretary for the colonies, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and for four different terms, the prime minister. Among his many achievements, he

- disestablished the Church of Ireland to free Roman Catholics from having to pay taxes to the Anglican church,
- supported an Irish land act that protected the peasantry,
- achieved important reforms-competitive admission to the civil service, vote by secret ballot, abolition of sales commissions in the army, educational expansion, and court reorganization.

He was disliked by Queen Victoria and had many political rivals, including the great Benjamin Disraeli. Over many years, Gladstone gradually abandoned the traditional Tory beliefs on the importance of rank and privilege-beliefs Disraeli ardently championed. As their differences widened, Disraeli's antipathy for Gladstone increased.

When Gladstone became Chancellor of the Exchequer, Disraeli (the previous chancellor) refused to give him the traditional robes of office. Gladstone repeatedly asked for them, and Disraeli repeatedly sent evasive responses. The robes never were sent, and today they are displayed in Disraeli's one-time home, Hughenden Manor.

The ideals that informed Gladstone's public philosophy were, like those of Wilberforce and Shaftesbury, rooted in Judeo-Christian morality. Among them, he believed:

1. **"The duties of governors [political officials] are strictly and peculiarly religious. ... Individuals ... are bound to carry throughout their acts the spirit of the high truths they have acknowledged."**
2. **Politics was a "most blessed calling," and Parliament a place where Christian principles could be applied to the "numerous measures of the time."**
3. **"The value of liberty [is] an essential condition of excellence in human things."**
4. **"Christianity [has] established the duty of relieving the poor, the sick, [and] the afflicted."**

Renaissance man

Gladstone's interests and gifts ranged beyond politics. He was a superb linguist and classical scholar. He was also a prolific author, frequently contributing to reviews and magazines. Articles on a variety of topics, including poetry, constitutional politics, economics, and church history, flowed from his pen.

He loved the outdoors and believed in vigorous exercise. Moreover, though great demands were placed upon him, he often made time for personal philanthropy. In later years, he wrote several works in defense of the Christian faith. He once publicly debated the famous agnostic T.H. Huxley over the creation narrative in the Book of Genesis.

"The grand old man" retired from political life early in 1894. He traveled widely and continued to write on a variety of subjects. Following his death in 1898, he was buried in Westminster Abbey. For all of the many tributes offered to his memory, perhaps the shortest and simplest was the most eloquent. He was, Lord Salisbury stated, "a great Christian man."

Like Wilberforce before them, Shaftesbury and Gladstone each held high views about the importance of public service in the name of Christ. In an age like ours, which is often cynical about the possibilities of politics, these three remind us of the tradition of Christian statesmanship.

Kevin Belmonte is a post-graduate student at the University of Stirling, Scotland. He is editor of a 1996 edition of Wilberforce's A Practical View of Christianity (Hendrickson).

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Urban Renewal: Saving the Slums

Christian ministry in the "pestilent heathen byways" of the inner city.

Donald M. Lewis

Victorian Britain witnessed urban growth unprecedented in human history. Nowhere was this more evident and alarming than in London, whose population grew from about 850,000 in 1800 to just under 5 million by 1890. The social costs of such rapid growth were paid in large measure by children of the poor and by women.

By 1850 over half of London's children were in the work force in order to keep their families from starvation, some beginning to work at the age of 5. In the building trades, they worked 52 hours a week in winter and 64 in summer. Domestic servants worked 80 hours a week year round.

Some children who couldn't find employment became "toshers"- scavengers who fought off rats in London's foul and collapsing sewers. Then there were the "mudlarks," who nourished themselves on scraps of bread from garbage heaps or on meat left on discarded bones.

Girls of 7 and 8 tramped the streets as vendors of watercress. Many would become tramps in another sense, moving on to a less reputable but more lucrative profession by their early teens. In 1857 The Lancet (Britain's leading medical journal), estimated that London had some 80,000 prostitutes, a huge portion of working-class females.

By the tens of thousands, the poor crowded into urban slums, where they were forced to rent space in overcrowded and overpriced tenements; some even paid for the privilege of inhabiting the crawlspaces under buildings. Until mid-century, they lined up at communal pipes once a week for their water, most of which came from the River Thames, which itself was one enormous open sewer.

Understandably such conditions were of enormous concern to social commentators, political activists, and British Christians.

Multifaceted missions

The most influential social reformer in Victorian Britain was the evangelical Lord Shaftesbury. He worked diligently in the 1840s with health reformers to secure a safe water supply; he lobbied for government regulation of lodging houses so the poor would not be taken advantage of by rapacious landlords; he campaigned to secure model lodgings for the disadvantaged, and harangued middle-class evangelicals into taking seriously the issues created by rapid urban growth.

Controlling laissez faire capitalism was considered only part of the answer. Well before Anglican ministers and Roman Catholic priests developed a reputation for inner-city ministry in the late 1800s, British evangelicals had already been at it. In the 1820s, the famous Scottish Presbyterian Thomas Chalmers developed a strategy to deal with rapid urban growth, based on his own experience in a Glasgow slum parish. He divided his parish into geographical sections and appointed an elder and deacon to oversee each; the elder focused on the spiritual needs of families, the deacon, on their physical and material needs. The method was adapted by "district visiting societies" throughout Britain and laid the groundwork for the rise of social welfare agencies.

By the 1830s, some evangelicals were adapting Chalmers's program to evangelistic ends. In 1835 the London City Mission was established to employ working-class men as evangelists in London's slums. The London City Mission was enormously successful by the end of the century; it had over 500 full-time workers in London. The "city missionaries" were evangelists, not social workers, but they enabled the poor to access private and public agencies that could address their physical needs.

London City missionaries gave social reformers like Shaftesbury and Edwin Chadwick tours of the slums, leading them by the hand through London's underworld. Eventually the London City Mission saw the formation of hundreds of slum congregations meeting in storefronts. Similar societies emerged, such as Ellen Ranyard's Bible Mission, which began in 1857 and employed working-class women as evangelists in London's slums.

Charitable giving also rose dramatically. Much of this money was channeled through hundreds of voluntary societies established to address specific social ills. These societies were normally organized, staffed, and managed by women, and much, if not most, of the funds were raised by women. The experience gained in these societies opened other doors of service and employment to women in the late 1800s. Most of these societies were distinctly Christian, and the majority were decidedly evangelical.

Forgotten evangelicals

Perhaps the most important aspect of the Christian response to the city has been one of the most ignored by historians: the one mounted by Christian churches themselves. Evangelical Anglican clergy were especially important because of Anglicanism's strength in urban areas. They developed a host of self-help schemes, including working-class savings plans ("savings banks") and "refuges" (shelters for the homeless).

When a hostile critic wrote attacking English evangelicalism in 1861, he had to acknowledge at least this much:

"It is to its credit that ... the evangelical clergy, as a body, are indefatigable in ministerial duties, and devoted, heart and soul, to the manifold labors of Christian love. The school, the savings bank, the refuge—all the engines of parochial usefulness—find in them, for the most part, hearty supporters and friends. When the history of the evangelical party is written, it will be told of them, that ... they ... worked manfully in the pestilent and heathen byways of our cities, and preached the gospel to the poor."

Donald Lewis is professor of church history at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada. He is author of *Lighten Their Darkness: The Evangelical Mission to Working-Class London, 1828-1860* (Greenwood, 1986).

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Medical Care: The Lady of the Lamp

Whether on her feet or from her sickbed, Florence Nightingale worked to save lives.

Kelvin D. Crow

When Florence Nightingale and her nurses showed up in the British war hospitals at Scutari, on the Crimean front, conditions were worse than they had heard: they witnessed filth, infection, disorganization, and an overwhelming case load. Shiploads of desperately needed medical supplies sat in the harbor while men died because some official had not filled out the proper forms. In this environment, 42 percent of the wounded never recovered.

It took all of Nightingale's training and dedication, and then some, to turn things around.

"God spoke to me"

Nightingale was born in Florence, Italy (hence her first name) in 1820 to an English family of ample means. She traveled and attended parties with the "chosen of society" on the family estate in Derbyshire. When she was 16, she received a divine call. "On Feb. 7th, 1837," she wrote, "God spoke to me and called me into his service."

The call was as mysterious as it was audible-what service? Seven years of uncertainty followed. Over family objections, she began "cottage visiting"-taking food and medicine to poor farmers who lived on the family's lands. Then she began to think about nursing; her family was scandalized. In the early 1800s, nurses were considered unskilled laborers and were reputedly drunken and promiscuous. Proper ladies kept a fine house, gave parties, and made brilliant conversation.

In 1844 American philanthropists Samuel and Julia Ward Howe (the author of "*The Battle Hymn of the Republic*") visited the Nightingale home. Florence asked them, "Do you think it would be unsuitable and unbecoming for a young Englishwoman to devote herself to works of charity in hospitals?"

Dr. Howe replied, "It would be unusual, and in England whatever is unusual is thought to be unsuitable. But I say to you, 'Go forward.' "

She later wrote, after that, "There never was any vagueness in my plans or ideas as to what God's work was for me."

That work did not begin for another nine years. Family objections had to be overcome. Meanwhile she studied nursing, first in books, then by visiting European hospitals, and finally by training at hospitals in Germany, England, and France. She was serving as director of a home for "invalid gentlewomen" when the Crimean War (1854-56) broke out.

When she heard about the deplorable conditions on the front, Nightingale took 38 nurses to see what she could do. She ended up organizing the barracks hospital, including a kitchen, laundry, and clean latrines. She opened windows to let in fresh air and provided supplies by cutting administrative red tape or buying them herself. She provided reading and recreation rooms for the patients, wrote home to their loved ones, and provided a safe way to mail their pay home. The soldiers adored her and christened her the "Lady of the Lamp," after the Turkish lantern she carried on her midnight rounds.

Her efforts brought remarkable results: the death rate dropped from 42 percent to less than 3 percent.

Driven and doubting

After the war, the only thanks she accepted was the establishment of a fund to train nurses. Beset by nervous illnesses (now thought psychogenic), she retired to the life of an invalid.

Now she fought medical ineptness from her apartments, using her pen, prodigious knowledge, and influential friends as weapons. She spoke with the queen of her experience in Crimea and published the thousand-page *Hospital Administration of the British Army* (1857). She forced the creation of a commission on military health and helped found the army medical college (1859), the first military hospital (1861), and a permanent commission on health and sanitation (1862). She advised the American government during the Civil War, and both sides in the Franco-Prussian war. She wrote many books on nursing, the most famous being her ***Notes on Nursing*** (1860). In short, she transformed nineteenth-century nursing.

Nightingale, however, was not content in her accomplishments. Her notes and personal correspondence are filled with self-doubt and despair. She worked others as hard as she did herself. She demanded total devotion to the cause and accepted neither the demands of family life nor illness as excuses. She worked one close associate so hard that he died prematurely.

Though spiritually motivated, she was unconventional in her beliefs, emphasizing mystical devotion to a God of love and to the service of her fellow creatures.

She received many awards and honors. One correspondent once told her, "You might have been a duchess if you had played your cards better." He did not understand that she was more interested in making nursing a profession-and in saving lives.

Kelvin Crow is president of Education Support Services and contributor to the Historical Dictionary of the United States Army (Greenwood)

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

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Education: Classrooms in Hell

The first Sunday schools were not for respectable and well-mannered children of believers.

Kelvin D. Crow

One day in 1780, Robert Raikes's newspaper business took him to an impoverished suburb of Gloucester. He was shocked to see so many children "wretchedly ragged, at play in the street." He asked a local woman about this.

"On a Sunday you would be shocked indeed," she replied, "for then the street is filled with multitudes of the wretches who, released on that day from employment, spend their day in noise and riot ... cursing and swearing in a manner so horrid as to convey ... an idea of hell."

In 1700s England, it was generally agreed that something must be done about such children's poverty and ignorance. After his firsthand exposure, Robert Raikes figured out what to do.

Dandy reformer

He wasn't the first to try. In the 1700s, 1,500 charity schools had been established by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. Wesley and Whitefield had preached to the young. But most efforts were like the school conducted by Hannah Ball, a Methodist stalwart. She had worked "instructing a few of the rising generation in the principles of religion."

"They are a wild little company," she said, "but seem willing to be instructed."

Yet reformers faced several difficulties. Class separation kept the learned from the poor. Class condition was attributed to "breeding," which education could not change. Individual reformers worked alone, and the public had no appreciation of their success. Then there was the law: until 1779, it was illegal for non-Anglicans to start a school or teach.

Raikes (1735-1811) learned concern for the poor from his father, from whom he also inherited an influential newspaper. He was a bit of a dandy-walking about town in his wig and claret-colored coat, and carrying a gold snuff case. But he was also a committed member of the Church of England. "I see my own unworthiness more clearly, and with this plea, I go more boldly to the throne of Grace."

His first efforts to live out his Christian convictions focused on prison reform, but he then decided children must be put on the right path before evil habits were formed.

Immediately after his shocking encounter in the Gloucester slum, he hired four women to teach the children that next Sunday. After securing permission of the parents, Raikes sent 20 children to each teacher. School began at 10 a.m., let out an hour for lunch, then continued until 5 p.m. The children also attended an afternoon church service. The Bible was the basis of instruction. Raikes's announced purpose was to prevent vice and to encourage good work habits, and cheerful submission to God, the law, and their station in life.

In 1783 he wrote an article in his paper, without mentioning his own involvement, noting the success of these "Sunday schools." Readers were fascinated and asked for more information. Raikes provided

enthusiastic replies, which were printed and reprinted in publications across England. Other schools soon formed, and Raikes publicized their successes. He was soon able to document a national phenomenon.

His publicity campaign reached its zenith when he was summoned to an audience with the royal family. King George III wished that "every child in my kingdom should be taught to read the Bible."

Explosive growth

Sunday schools grew dramatically. In 1787, four years after his first article, there were 250,000 Sunday school students. By 1811 there were 500,000, and by 1831, 1.25 million students in England. Between 1830 and 1833, the population increased 24 percent, and Sunday school attendance increased 225 percent. In 1833 the government began subsidizing the schools. Sunday schools spread to the United States, Scotland, Ireland, and the continent.

Eventually children's education passed into the hands of the state, and religious instruction was eliminated. The Sunday school movement lost its zeal and went into a 50-year membership decline in the early 20th century. Today we see only its faded remnants in the mere hour spent with the clean and well-mannered children of believers.

But in its day, it was a remarkable institution. Adam Smith, author of the classic ***Wealth of Nations***, declared that no plan so promising for improving morals had been devised since the days of the apostles.

Kelvin Crow is president of Education Support Services and contributor to the Historical Dictionary of the United States Army (Greenwood).

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Civil Rights: Dismantling Discrimination

Key evangelicals who distrusted Catholics and Jews argued for their civil rights.

John Wolffe

On a gloomy March afternoon in 1829, 2,000 people crammed into the Assembly Hall in Edinburgh. They came in support of granting civil rights to Roman Catholics. But audience attention drifted after a series of tedious speeches by secular politicians. Then a clumsy, heavy-built, middle-aged clergyman rose to speak. The restless crowd was hushed, and within minutes, they were cheering wildly.

The uninspiring figure who produced such a remarkable effect was Thomas Chalmers, professor of divinity at Edinburgh University. Chalmers was no friend to Roman Catholic theology. In England and Scotland, he was a leader among evangelicals who in this age were decidedly anti-Catholic. Nevertheless he was convinced that religious error was no grounds for political disenfranchisement. Intolerance had become an "unseemly associate" of the Reformation, he argued. True Christianity could be spread only through preaching the Word of God, and political coercion was counterproductive.

At the time of Chalmers's speech, Anglicanism was the established religion in England, Ireland, and Wales (Presbyterianism was the established church of Scotland). Consequently, Catholics, Jews, and Nonconformists (Protestants who weren't members of the established church) were disadvantaged. In order to serve in Parliament, for example, Jews and Catholics were required to deny their faith. Nonconformists didn't have as many restrictions against them, but they were still the object of discrimination—they were excluded, for instance, from taking degrees at Oxford and Cambridge.

Speaking with strong feeling, Chalmers appealed to his audience, and through them to the politicians in London:

"Give the Catholics of Ireland their emancipation; give them a seat in the Parliament of their country; give them a free and equal participation in the politics of the realm; give them a place at the right ear of majesty and a voice in his counsels. And give me the circulation of the Bible, and with this mighty engine I will overthrow the tyranny of Antichrist and establish the fair and original form of Christianity on its ruins!"

Evangelical dilemmas

In the early 1800s, many evangelicals feared that civil toleration would only exacerbate the indifference to truth they believed infected England. But Chalmers, among others, championed a new idea: striving for political liberty and for spiritual truth need not be incompatible.

Nonconformists were the largest religious minority, and by the 1820s pressure from them was becoming irresistible. In 1828 the Test and Corporation Acts were repealed, thus guaranteeing their right to hold public office. (The attainment of full equality—in education, for example— would take much longer.)

Roman Catholics and Jews presented evangelicals with more painful dilemmas. Many evangelicals believed that tolerating those in religious error was the same as denying Christian truth. No one felt

this tension more than William Wilberforce. He loathed Roman Catholicism and believed its influence was essentially evil.

Nevertheless he had become convinced by 1813 that "persecution for religious opinions is not only the wickedest but one of the foolishest things in the world."

Jewish emancipation was also a thorny issue. Lord Shaftesbury, for instance, believed that the Jews were God's ancient chosen people and that their conversion was an essential prelude to the Second Coming. But he felt it would be a denial of Christian truth to allow them to become legislators for a Christian nation.

But other evangelicals, notably Robert Grant and Lord Bexley, believed Jewish emancipation was a matter of civil justice and a necessary preliminary to conversion.

Eventually, through the efforts of magnanimous evangelicals and tolerant liberals, Catholic emancipation was enacted in 1829, and Jewish emancipation in 1858.

John Wolfe is senior lecturer in religious studies at The Open University in Milton Keynes, United Kingdom. He edited Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain, 1780-1980 (SPCK, 1995).

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Prison Reform: Brutality Behind Bars

Women's prisons were hellish places before Elizabeth Fry started working there.

Danny Day

Today many people worry that our society is too lenient on prisoners. In the early 1800s, Elizabeth Fry worried about the opposite—and for good reason.

England's prisons were infamous for filth, brutality, and extreme suffering. The idea was to punish not to reform prisoners.

In the women's division, where Fry would direct her greatest reform efforts, inmates were usually crammed into one room: those tried and those awaiting trial, those guilty of misdemeanors and those guilty of capital offenses. Typically a woman's children would accompany her to prison. Thus a woman who, with her children, awaited her trial for stealing an apple lived in the same crammed space as a woman who may have been convicted of murder.

All basic human activities—eating, sleeping, defecation—were performed in the same confined area. Women and children lived in destitute poverty and obtained clothes, alcohol, even food by begging or stealing. Many women simply sat around in a drunken stupor stark naked.

Most prisoners who were not cared for by families or charities remained clothesless or starved to death. Children often remained in the prison until their mothers died or were executed. They clung to their mothers and watched as they were led to the gallows and hung.

Elizabeth Fry was one of the few who sought to do something about all this.

Render them peaceable

Fry was born Elizabeth Gurney, daughter of a wealthy Norwich banker. When she was 18, she heard a sermon by American Quaker William Savery, and she rededicated her life to Christ and became a Quaker. In 1800 she married Joseph Fry, and she eventually raised eleven children. Family responsibilities, however, did not dampen her conviction, inspired by her faith, that she was called to help the downtrodden.

During her life, Fry worked with the homeless and helped establish a school for nurses. But her greatest legacy was prison reform, and she began that work with almost daily visits to Newgate prison beginning in 1811.

In 1816 she founded a women's society, An Association for the Improvement of the Female Prisoners in Newgate. Its object was "to provide for the clothing, instruction, and employment of the women; to introduce them to a knowledge of the Scriptures; and to form in them, as much as possible, these habits of sobriety, order and industry, which may render them docile and peaceable whilst in prison, and respectable when they leave it."

Fry had six reform goals:

- 1. Women should be under the care and guard of other women.**
- 2. Little communication should be allowed between inmates, and then only at specified times to instill discipline and to discourage women teaching each other how to commit crimes once they were released.**
- 3. Inmates should not have to depend on family or friends for food or clothing.**
- 4. Inmates should work and be paid for it, the earnings going toward their support.**
- 5. Women should work and eat together but have some privacy and sleep separately.**
- 6. Religious instruction should permeate all efforts.**

Fry spent countless hours inside prison bars—in spite of the many warnings she was given about the danger. She taught women how to sew and quilt and how better to care for themselves and their children. She read the Scriptures daily to inmates and obtained Bibles for those who wanted them.

Fry also introduced education, discipline, and Bible instruction into the half-way houses released women would enter before they found jobs and fully re-entered society.

Dignitaries flock

Her efforts produced what seemed like a miracle: orderly, disciplined inmates who became known for their work ethic. So remarkable was the change at Newgate that local mayors, sheriffs, and aldermen visited Newgate and sought similar reform in their jails and prisons. Public interest was so aroused, Fry was invited to tell both the queen and the House of Commons about her work.

Her reform ideas spread. Dignitaries from all over Europe visited Newgate prison, and she was invited by many European governments to promote prison reform.

Danny Day is a freelance writer from Dixon, Illinois

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 53: William Wilberforce: Fighting the Slave Trade

Child Labor: White Slavery

Children were perhaps the most mistreated people in England.

Penelope Carson

Thousands of our fellow creatures ... are this very moment existing in a state of slavery." So wrote evangelical Richard Oastler in his damning indictment of 1830s Britain. He charged the nation with sacrificing its children at the altar of avarice. Thousands of children between the ages of 7 and 14 were daily being compelled to work in the Yorkshire worsted mills from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. with only one 30-minute break.

As this situation became known, Christians, especially a group of Yorkshire evangelicals, began campaigning vigorously for reform.

Industrial-strength exploitation

Young children had traditionally been employed in large numbers in agriculture and domestic work. But in the 1800s, they began working in stiflingly hot and unbearably noisy factories with their soulless discipline and order. There were no safety regulations, and financial penalties and beatings were imposed for the slightest slip or misdemeanor. Accidents and deaths were all too common.

Children were not, however, exploited only in England's "dark, satanic mills." They worked in gangs in the fields, often traveling miles in order to get to work. They were used in coal, tin, and copper mines, crawling on all fours like animals, pulling heavy loads. They also made bricks. The use of young boys as chimney sweeps is well known. Many returned from work with their arms and knees bloody, and deaths from suffocation in the chimney were not unknown.

Lace making provided employment for girls. Many started to learn at the age of 5 or 6. They worked in confined spaces, in suffocating heat in summer and miserable cold in winter. Payment in goods was a widely accepted practice, forcing the girls to use the employer's shop, paying high prices for inferior goods.

Evangelical reformers were particularly concerned about the immorality that such working conditions encouraged. There was little parental supervision and children of both sexes worked and sometimes slept in close proximity. Girls and boys in the mines were often lowered into mines together. Many of the girls worked naked to the waist alongside completely naked men.

Child prostitution occurred on a casual basis in most work places. For many young girls, it became a full-time job. The material benefits were often better than anything children could possibly earn otherwise.

Parents often had little choice over such cruel treatment of their children. They were in desperate need of more income. Financial needs dictated that children, if they were sent to school at all, were removed at an early age so they could add their pittance to the family earnings.

Orphans were in an even worse position. They became the property of their employer and were entirely dependent on his good will.

Long road to reform

In addition to Richard Oastler, evangelicals such as George Bull, an Anglican priest, and Michael Sadler, a Member of Parliament, also became outraged at all this. They made great sacrifices to bring about needed changes.

John Wood, a devout Anglican who owned the largest worsted mill in England, decided to lead by example. In 1825 he instituted a ten-hour day for his work force and built a church, vicarage, and school next to his factory. Even more sacrificing was Oastler: his campaigns for social reform eventually led to the loss of his job and four years' imprisonment for debt.

These reformers quickly realized that employers would have to be legally forced to look after the needs of children. However, Parliament was reluctant to interfere in the workings of the economy, and even parliamentary decrees had their shortcomings. An 1802 act prevented apprentices from working more than 12 hours a day; an 1819 act prevented the employment of children under the age of 9. But these acts achieved little because there was no provision for inspection and enforcement.

Reformers decided that progress would be made only with a highly organized public campaign. Committees and mass meetings were organized. Oastler's fearless oratory and his damning 1830 article, "Yorkshire Slavery," published in the *Leeds Mercury*, brought factory oppression to the notice of a wide public. Bull spoke at many meetings throughout the country and was a prolific pamphleteer. Sadler became the parliamentary leader early on, as did Lord Shaftesbury later.

Over the ensuing decades, legislation reduced the work day to ten hours for children, provided for at least some of their education, and most importantly, appointed inspectors to enforce various acts.

The tide of battle did not turn significantly, though, until the 20th century, when elementary education became free and mandatory for children 12 years old and younger.

Penelope Carson is a free-lance historian from the United Kingdom.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 53: William Wilberforce: Fighting the Slave Trade

William Wilberforce and the Abolition of the Slave Trade: Christian History Interview - Christian Clout Then and Now

What 19th-century British reformers teach us about Christian social action today.

interview with John Wolffe

Christians on the left and the right argue that more believers should attack today's social ills. They often point to William Wilberforce and other 19th-century British evangelicals as examples to imitate. So how relevant are these examples today?

To answer that question, Christian History editor Mark Galli interviewed John Wolffe, senior lecturer in religious studies at The Open University in Britain. John edited Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain, 1780-1980 (SPCK, 1995).

What rationale did British evangelicals give for getting involved in social reform?

First, there was the view associated with Lord Shaftesbury: social reform is a preparation for people's hearing the gospel. The preaching of the gospel is absolutely vital, but if people live below a certain level of human dignity or material comfort, they may not respond to the message. If people work 12 or more hours a day, six days a week, they're not likely to go to church on Sunday. They're going to stay in bed trying to recuperate.

Second, both Shaftesbury and Wilberforce believed that Britain was accountable to God for how it treated its weaker, less-privileged members. Wilberforce once said it would be "a strange exception to all those established principles [of] Divine Providence ... if national and personal prosperity were ... found to arise from injustice and oppression."

Were postmillennialists—who believe Christ will establish his kingdom after the world has been substantially improved—more likely to get involved in social action than were premillennialists?

Yes, broadly speaking, with a few striking exceptions. For example, Shaftesbury was a premillennialist. He was pessimistic about human potential. He believed that a direct and spectacular divine intervention of Christ at his Second Coming is necessary to save the world. But he also believed that intervention by the state through law was necessary to save people from the worst excesses of early industrialism. The world was vulnerable and under divine judgment. The Second Coming, which Shaftesbury felt was imminent, was a spur to swift action.

But Shaftesbury is untypical. The more common premillennialist view was that preaching the gospel should take priority, and nothing else ultimately matters.

Did evangelicals tend to join one political party over another?

Especially on the issue of slavery, there was a great deal of bipartisan effort. The main issue was not whether you were a Tory or Whig (the two major political parties). Party membership was fluid then, and both parties were essentially aristocratic cliques. The real issue for many in those years was whether you were anti-slavery. It wasn't until the 1830s that Anglican evangelicals, for a number of reasons, moved toward the Conservative Party (formerly Tory).

Did uncompromising idealism gain evangelicals their political victories? Or did they compromise some ideals to achieve progress?

Some compromise was necessary. Shaftesbury went through anguish about this, but he soon learned to modify his agenda so he could achieve some of it. For example, he really wanted to limit the number of daily working hours in factories to ten but agreed to a ten-and-a-half-hour work day to at least make some progress on the issue.

What issues divided evangelicals?

Evangelicals were divided on slavery. Some believed, as did many Christians in the American South, that slavery was justified biblically. Even those who believed slavery immoral disagreed on how best to eradicate it: immediately or gradually? By force of law, persuasion, or military might?

Another issue was education. Beginning in the late 1820s, more and more Nonconformist evangelicals began taking prominent roles in national affairs. They shared with Anglicans a passionate concern for education; both groups saw it as a means of spreading the gospel. But Nonconformists were not ready to pass legislation that favored the teaching of Anglican doctrine or giving privileges to Anglicans.

These divisions ended up frustrating efforts to retain Christian teaching as a prominent part of public education. That led ultimately to a loss of control over the educational system, opening the way for a more secular state education.

In what social or political areas did evangelicals score their greatest success?

A great deal can be said for the national legislation enacted, but in many ways, the most significant social transformations in 19th-century Britain occurred at the level of the local parish.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, popular revivalism led by the Methodists helped transform communities that had been largely unchurched. They were given a spiritual focus, which generated social structures such as the small-group-like "methodist societies" where people supported each other in practical ways. Out of that grew the concern for education and other social services across communities.

Also, take the ministry of Thomas Chalmers in the 1810s and 1820s in Glasgow, Scotland, as an example. He thought of the parish as a self-help unit. You inspire people to take their Christian social responsibility seriously and then you set up structures to help them fulfill that responsibility. Coupled with his evangelistic teachings, he advocated an intensive program of education and social help at the local level.

Did evangelicals make any significant blunders?

Certainly. Concern for Sunday as a day of rest, for example, increasingly occupied the evangelical political program in the 1830s, '40s, and '50s. Evangelicals tried to regulate the type of activities that were inappropriate. They wanted people to focus on spiritual matters and attend church on Sundays, and rightly so. But they overdid things and made many people feel that it was wholly wrong, say, to visit an art gallery on a Sunday. That stirred only resentment, and many people reacted: "Well, if I'm condemned by the church for doing *that*, why shouldn't I spend the whole day in the pub!"

So the country became polarized, and evangelicals ended up with a tarnished image.

Why did evangelical social passion wane at the end of the 1800s?

It didn't wane completely; it was still there, especially at the grassroots level. But at the national level, a number of factors conspired to cool evangelical social passion.

First, the success of evangelicals. Many of the pressing needs of the early 1800s had been alleviated. Shaftesbury in later life spent more time on animal welfare. The fact that cruelty to animals came to the top of his agenda suggests, at least in part, that to him many critical needs of people had been met.

Second, much of the Christian impetus for social reform was channeled into the Labor Party and trade union movement. By the end of the century, many social causes were championed by non-evangelicals.

Third, the political system became less responsive. It was much harder to build a consensus across party lines, as Wilberforce had done on antislavery 50 years earlier. When party politics thwarted worthy social programs, many evangelicals became disillusioned and retreated from the political arena.

Finally, there was a spiritual/theological dynamic. The Keswick movement, which became popular among evangelicals, encouraged people to cultivate a personal walk with God and to strive for personal holiness.

The result, naturally, was that social reform took a back seat.

Many American evangelicals, like Charles Colson, lift up Wilberforce and other 19th-century British evangelicals as examples to emulate politically today. Is that a fair use of history?

It is to this extent: 19th-century evangelicals, when they saw a problem, believed they could do something about it. They knew they weren't going to get instant success, but they had a sense of divine calling to address the problem.

In the contemporary world, I sense more defeatism; problems are just too big. But these British evangelicals teach us that individuals with vision and leadership skills can respond to the call of God and make a difference.

But we shouldn't underestimate the vastly greater scale and complexity of late-20th-century societies and their problems. A 19th-century Wilberforce could quickly stimulate nationwide petitions and public meetings, and all within a culture that claimed to share Christian values.

A modern-day Wilberforce needs to be much more sophisticated. He or she obviously would need to learn how to make use of the media; he would need considerable financial resources; he would need to communicate with all sorts of interest groups—and all in a culture with a secular mindset.

So the challenge is much more complex. Then again the opportunities are larger. What could Wilberforce have accomplished if he had been able to use television?

What personal lesson do you garner from this era?

The need for patience, for sticking at something to see change, to see God work in a situation. Shaftesbury, for example, took up factory reform in 1833. It was only in 1847 that his objective, the ten-hour work day, was achieved. He committed himself to a 14-year struggle that at the onset he hoped would take 14 weeks.

Just because some initiative has not been successful instantly doesn't mean there won't eventually be a substantial achievement.

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William Wilberforce and the Abolition of the Slave Trade: Recommended Resources

William Wilberforce & the Century of Reform

editors

History, like everything else, has become multimedia. When it comes to learning about the past, books are still the main course, but increasingly there are a variety of dishes upon which history is served. Beginning with this issue, we're going to make an even greater effort to make readers aware of the best books, movies, recordings, CDs, and Web sites related to the topic. Here's what we've come up with on Wilberforce and British social reform.

On and by Wilberforce

You'd expect a man as great as William Wilberforce to generate some fine biographies, and he has. Immediately after his death, two of his sons, Robert Isaac and Samuel, penned *The Life of William Wilberforce* (1839), which is the source of a great deal of material found in later biographies.

For modern treatments, see John Pollock's *Wilberforce* (Lion, 1977) for a full account, or Garth Lean's *God's Politician* (Helmets & Howard, 1987) for a quick read. In editing the issue, we found Sir Reginald Coupland's *Wilberforce* (Collins, 1945) a nice balance of engaging prose and good scholarship.

Wilberforce's best seller is a long book with a long title. The SCM 1958 version retained the title—*A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country Contrasted with Real Christianity*—but has given us only the best of the wordy Wilberforce.

On slavery

Local libraries carry a fair share of books on slavery. One we found particularly helpful, especially for the gripping images it contains, is Susanne Everett's *The Slaves: An Illustrated History of the Monstrous Evil* (Putnam, 1978).

A thorough and fascinating account of the slave trade can be found in Roger Anstey's *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition: 1760-1810* (Macmillan, 1975).

Other reforms and reformers

Wilberforce, of course, was but the most famous social reformer, and abolition, only the most famous cause of the 1800s. To gain an appreciation of the breadth of concern and the major Christian social activists of the era, note these books:

Saints in Politics by Ernest Howse (University of Toronto Press, 1952) and *Saints and Society* by Earle Cairns (Moody, 1960) give nice overviews of the Clapham Sect and other Christian social reformers. *Evangelical Faith and Public Zeal: Evangelicals and Society in Britain 1780-1980* edited by John Wolffe (SPCK, 1995) contains essays that explore various causes to which evangelicals gave

themselves.

To narrow to one concern, the inner city, see ***Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work 1865-1920*** by Norris Magnuson (Baker, 1977) and ***Lighten Their Darkness: The Evangelical Mission to Working-Class London, 1828-1860*** by Donald M. Lewis for two careful and intriguing studies.

Again, most local libraries carry biographies of the more famous reformers of 1800s England, like Florence Nightingale and Elizabeth Fry-though such books often ignore the importance of their spiritual commitment. Two biographies that do not downplay the role of Christian faith are David W. Bebbington's ***William Ewart Gladstone: Faith & Politics in Victorian Britain*** (Eerdmans, 1993) and Georgina Battiscombe's ***Shaftesbury: A Biography of the Seventh Earl, 1801-1885*** (PBS, 1974).

Fiction

Probably no writer did a better job of evoking the sights, sounds, and smells of London, and the customs of his day, than did Charles Dickens. Take up and read ***David Copperfield***, ***Hard Times***, ***Oliver Twist***, or even ***A Christmas Carol*** to do some "serious" historical background research.

Films and Videos

Film versions of any of the Dickens books are another way of exploring this era. Also see ***William Wilberforce (1759-1833)***, a 35-minute video produced by Gateway Films (1-800-523-0226), which comes with a leader's guide for group discussion.

Issues of Christian History

This isn't the first time we've covered this era. See our issue on ***William and Catherine Booth*** (Issue 26), founders of the Salvation Army, for an in-depth look at the most famous inner-city ministry in Victorian England.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (Issue 29) looks at the greatest preacher of the era. ***William Carey*** (Issue 36), ***Hudson Taylor*** (Issue 52), and ***David Livingstone*** (forthcoming: fall 1997) look at three famous missionaries who grew up in industrial Britain and took advantage of its colonial reach to spread the gospel across the world.

Issues 1 through 51 are available now on CD-ROM for easy researching. See the ad on page 48 for more information.

Online and the Web

Christian History has a site on America Online (keyword: Christian History) where some past issues of the magazine can be found. In addition, there are dozens of message boards on a variety of topics where one can read and post messages to other church history fans. One message board, for instance, is designed to discuss the current issue on Wilberforce and the Century of Reform.

There is also a link to the Gateway Films site, which specializes in church history films (like the Wilberforce film mentioned above).

We now have a page on the world wide web. Go to this address: www.ChristianityToday.com/christianhistory

From there you can scan a number of church history related sites. For example, some have early church documents online; others have pictures and articles about early American Methodism; and others contain key texts from the Middle Ages. And on it goes.

You can search for other church history web pages on a topic of your choice from within the Christian History area or through more generic search engines, like Yahoo! or Alta Vista.

For example, entering "William Wilberforce" in Yahoo!, we found a site that has a letter John Wesley wrote to William Wilberforce six days before Wesley died, encouraging Wilberforce to continue in his abolitionist efforts. Look it up at <http://www.forerunner.com/forerunner/> and scroll to document X0554 and click.

Wilberforce and his Clapham friends used the cutting-edge media of their day to make history. There is no reason we shouldn't use all the media of our day to learn about that history.

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