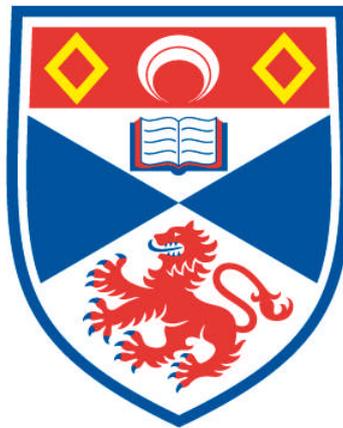


**REVIVING THE PAST:
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY EVANGELICAL
INTERPRETATIONS OF CHURCH HISTORY**

Darren W. Schmidt

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews**



2009

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Reviving the Past:
Eighteenth-Century Evangelical
Interpretations of Church History

Darren W. Schmidt

A Dissertation Submitted For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
St Mary's College, University of St Andrews

24 February 2009

ABSTRACT

This study addresses eighteenth-century English-speaking evangelicals' understandings of church history, through the lens of published attempts to represent preceding Christian centuries panoramically or comprehensively. Sources entail several short reflections on history emerging in the early years of the transatlantic Revival and subsequent, more substantial efforts by evangelical leaders John Gillies, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Joseph and Isaac Milner, and Thomas Haweis. Little scholarly analysis exists on these sources, aside from the renaissance of interest in recent decades in Edwards. This is surprising, considering the acknowledged prominence of history-writing in the eighteenth century and the influence attributed, then and now, to the works of authors such as Gibbon, Hume, and Robertson. The aim is, first, to elucidate each of the above evangelicals' interpretations of the Christian past, both in overview and according to what they said on a roster of particular historical events, people and movements, and then to consider shared and divergent aspects. These aspects range from points of detail to paradigmatic theological convictions. Secondly, evangelical church histories are analyzed in relation to earlier Protestant and eighteenth-century 'enlightened' historiography, in part through attention to evangelical authors' explicit engagement with these currents. This contextualization assists in determining the unique qualities of evangelical interpretations. Is there, then, evidence of a characteristic evangelical perspective on church history? An examination of this neglected area illumines patterns and particulars of evangelicals' historical thought, and these in turn communicate the self-perceptions and the defining features of evangelicalism itself. Findings support the primary contention that evangelical leaders made use of a dynamic pattern of revival and declension as a means of accounting for the full history of Christianity. Beyond displaying the central place of 'revival' for evangelicals, these church histories demonstrate evangelicalism's complex relationship—involving both receptivity and critique—with Protestant and Enlightenment currents of historical inquiry.

DECLARATIONS

I, Darren Schmidt, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 80,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

I was admitted as a research student in September, 2005 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in May, 2006; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2005 and 2008.

Date 24 Feb. '09 Signature of candidate

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The first and foremost expression of thanks is set aside for Cara, who has been far more than a constant presence and encouragement through the last three years. She was there much earlier, when thoughts germinated and spread roots and plans for an overseas ‘adventure’ began. The journey, with its dips and ascents, has been a shared one, and I am ever grateful. My family thoroughly embraced the novelty of life in St Andrews (hailing as we did from Ontario, Canada)—the sea, sand, castles, cathedrals, and clotted cream. Our children Matthew and Aimée gave me the opportunity each day to step from a world of historical study into one of train sets, teddies, and preschool humour. Many thanks, my dears. And now, Jeremy’s newborn cries mark another season of endings and beginnings, bringing new life to our days (and nights).

I am immensely grateful to my parents and parents-in-law for their faithful encouragement and support. The transatlantic divide was felt forcefully at the sudden passing of my father-in-law, Tony Thompson, in July 2007. I am sorry not to be able to express again to him my thanks for his interest and, more than this, his good-natured companionship through the years. Then my father, Henry Schmidt, succumbed to illness just after I returned home from my viva, during Christmas 2008. He will be dearly missed. His gentle strength and quiet faithfulness have spoken, and hopefully will continue to speak, volumes.

However independent PhD study might be, community—I have realized—is vital. Various communities have played an important role for me: St Andrews Baptist Church, the St Mary’s College postgraduates and their families, the network of scholars formed through society meetings and conferences and by e-mail. In St Andrews, Chris Chun, Theng Huat Leow, and Jason Goroncy offered the best kind of community one could hope for while immersed in studies—these were brothers as well as colleagues. David Bebbington, Ken Stewart, Geordan Hammond, Jonathan Yeager, and Todd Thompson deserve special mention as colleagues who have generously offered assistance along the way. My colleagues at Taylor University College in Edmonton, Canada have spurred me on as I have juggled completion of studies and teaching responsibilities. I have appreciated opportunities to present findings and test arguments through involvement with the Ecclesiastical History Society, the Christianity and History Forum, the Canadian Evangelical Theological Association, and the Canadian Society of Church History.

I am indebted to the Sir Richard Stapley Educational Trust and the Stanford and Priscilla Reid Trust for financial support. The Rev. Dr. Robert Bernhardt of the Reid Trust has demonstrated particular interest; his supportive e-mails often appeared at just the right time.

Rare Books librarians in St Andrews, Edinburgh, Manchester, Cambridge, and the British Library have readily offered their expertise. I am also appreciative of the work of anonymous individuals supporting the vast resources contained in Thompson Gale’s Eighteenth-Century Collections Online.

In relation to my viva, I want to express my thanks to Dr Mark Elliott of St Mary’s College, St Andrews and Professor John Coffey of Leicester not only for their perceptive and helpful comments and questions, but also for their interest and amicability.

Finally, I have had the very pleasant experience of receiving the insightful and gracious supervision (seasoned plentifully with wit) of Stephen Holmes. Many thanks are due for his wise counsel, patience, amicability, and imparted confidence.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CEH</i>	Wesley, <i>Concise Ecclesiastical History</i> (1781)
<i>DNB</i>	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
<i>ECCO</i>	Eighteenth-Century Collections Online
<i>EH (1765)</i>	Mosheim, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i> (1765)
<i>EH (1774)</i>	Mosheim, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i> (1774)
<i>ESTC</i>	English Short Title Catalogue
<i>HCC</i>	Milner, <i>History of the Church of Christ</i> (1794–1809)
<i>HCL</i>	Gillies, <i>Historical Collections</i> (1754)
<i>HCL (Bonar)</i>	Gillies, <i>Historical Collections</i> (Bonar ed.)
<i>HWR</i>	Edwards, <i>History of the Work of Redemption</i> (Yale ed.)
<i>HWR (Erskine)</i>	Edwards, <i>History of the Work of Redemption</i> (Erskine ed.)
<i>ISH</i>	Haweis, <i>Impartial and Succinct History of the Church of Christ</i> (1800)
<i>WJE</i>	Works of Jonathan Edwards (Yale ed.)
<i>WJW</i>	Works of John Wesley, Bicentennial Edition (Oxford / Abingdon ed.)

Chapter One – Introduction

In February 1737, Isaac Watts, the elderly English Dissenting minister and hymn-writer, wrote to American Benjamin Colman after reading an informal account by Jonathan Edwards of revival in Northampton, Massachusetts. Speaking also for his ministerial colleague John Guyse, Watts wrote: “We are of [the] opinion that so strange and surprising work of God that we have not heard anything like it since the Reformation, nor perhaps since the days of the apostles, should be published, and left upon record with all its attending circumstances....”¹ Later that year, the two Englishmen published Edwards’ complete *Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* and included a similar statement in their Preface: “...never did we hear or read, since the first ages of Christianity, any event of this kind so surprising as the present narrative hath set before us.”² Historian Frank Lambert has recently argued that this sort of historical appeal can be taken to encapsulate early evangelicals’ understandings of sacred history and the place of the Anglo-American Revival³ within this context. “Awakeners,” says Lambert, “could point to only two truly extraordinary Works of God: Pentecost and the Protestant Reformation.”⁴

Lambert’s assertion could leave the impression that evangelicals embraced a rather

¹ Cited in the editor’s introduction, in Jonathan Edwards, *WJE*, vol. 4, *The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1972), 36.

² *Ibid.*, 130.

³ Capitalized ‘Revival’ throughout refers collectively to the religious awakenings which occurred, according to both contemporary and scholarly accounts, in the 1730s and 1740s in Britain and North America. Lower-case ‘revival’ refers either to the phenomenon in general terms or to localized events. The evangelical Revival entailed both renewed Christian commitment by those already within the church and new participation by some previously outside it; thus the term implies more than simply ‘revivification’ of those who had lapsed in Christian commitment. For an eighteenth-century definition along these lines, see Solomon Stoddard, *The Efficacy of the Fear of Hell, to Restrain Men from Sin. Shewed in a Sermon before the Inferiour Court in Northampton. Decem. 3d. 1712 ...* (Boston, 1713), 187–88, cited by Frank Lambert, *Inventing the "Great Awakening"* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1999), 52. Evangelicals, however, generally would have agreed that their societal contexts were at least nominally Christian, and thus even the bringing of new converts into the church could be construed as the ‘revival’ of something which had been lost.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 27; see pp. 4, 19, and 255 for similar assertions.

simplistic and selective interpretation of church history⁵. But a survey of available English-language sources suggests otherwise. Already in the 1740s, several ministers prominent in the Revival on both sides of the Atlantic expressed broader perspectives on church history in an effort to situate the significance of the Revival, and evangelical newspapers in varying degrees combined news of revival with glances at the Christian past. This pairing of contemporary and historic accounts of ‘revival’ culminated in 1754 in a two-volume work entitled *Historical Collections Relating to Remarkable Periods of the Success of the Gospel*, by Church of Scotland minister John Gillies. In 1770 John Newton produced his *Review of Ecclesiastical History*, the first and only volume of an unfinished project. Then in 1774 prominent Edinburgh clergyman John Erskine published Jonathan Edwards’ *History of the Work of Redemption*, which Edwards had delivered as a sermon series to his congregation in Northampton in 1739. John Wesley in 1781 issued a four-volume *Concise Ecclesiastical History* abridged from the work of respected scholar Johann Lorenz von Mosheim and went on to incorporate his own view of church history into several sermons in subsequent years. At the end of the century, two works appeared from evangelicals within the Church of England: Joseph and Isaac Milners’ four-volume *History of the Church of Christ* (1794–1809), and Thomas Haweis’ three-volume *Impartial and Succinct History of the Rise, Declension and Revival of the Church of Christ* (1800).

Only a handful of scholarly works dealing with the subject of historiography make even passing reference to these eighteenth-century evangelical histories. Nineteenth-century church historian Philip Schaff included Milner as an example of ‘pietistic’ and

⁵ Throughout, ‘church history’, ‘history of Christianity’, and ‘the Christian past’ are used interchangeably and in a broad sense, thus inclusive of all historical expressions of Christianity. It will be evident in subsequent chapters that evangelicals did not view ‘church’ history in a strict denominational or institutional sense. ‘Church historiography’, meanwhile, refers straightforwardly to the writing of church history. Using this term holds the advantage of avoiding the confusion which might be caused by ‘Christian historiography’, since a substantial literature exists under this descriptor on the more general subject of writing history—secular or sacred—from a Christian perspective.

relatively uncritical church historiography.⁶ His assessment is echoed in a 1966 study entitled *The Transition in English Historical Writing, 1760–1830* and in a recent introduction to the study of church history by James Bradley and Richard Muller.⁷ A 1985 work analyzing the developing historiography on the Reformation makes reference to Milner’s work, but only as exemplary of the early-nineteenth-century evangelical view of Luther as part of an “evangelical succession” through church history “derived from” the sixteenth-century works of Foxe and the Magdeburg Centuriators. The same study, a detail-rich analysis of a broad spectrum of historical treatments of the Reformation, includes a page on John Wesley’s indebtedness to the Reformation tradition but overlooks what Wesley actually wrote in regard to the Reformation.⁸ A recent informative article by S. J. Barnett on the subject of sixteenth- to eighteenth-century Protestant claims to antiquity includes analysis of the church histories of Wesley and Milner, specifically in regard to their understandings of medieval groups such as the Waldenses and Albigenses.⁹

Surveys of church historiography from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century typically make no mention of evangelical histories. One suspects that most scholars interested in historiography either are unaware of the existence of evangelical church histories or pass them by with the assumption that they only parroted an older Protestant view (as hinted in works mentioned above) or, based on what surveys *do* include, that the

⁶ Philip Schaff, *History of the Apostolic Church: With a General Introduction to Church History*, trans. Edward D. Yeomans (New York: Charles Scribner, 1859), 71–72.

⁷ Thomas Preston Peardon, *The Transition in English Historical Writing, 1760–1830*, Studies in History, Economics and Public Law, no. 390 (New York: AMS Press, 1966), 159–60; James E. Bradley and Richard A. Muller, *Church History: An Introduction to Research, Reference Works, and Methods* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 13–14.

⁸ A. G. Dickens and John Tonkin, *The Reformation in Historical Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 147–48, 190. See also Rosemary O’Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation* (London & New York: Methuen, 1986), 87, which makes reference to Anglican evangelical understandings of the Reformation only in the context of debate with Oxford Movement proponents in the 1830s and 1840s. There is a sizeable chronological gap in O’Day’s historiographical analysis between the writings of John Strype in the late seventeenth / early eighteenth centuries and works produced from the 1790s forward (even Hume’s *History of England* receives only passing reference).

⁹ S. J. Barnett, "Where Was Your Church before Luther? Claims for the Antiquity of Protestantism Examined", *Church History* 68, no. 1 (1999): 35–37, 39, 40–41.

only interesting development was that of ‘enlightened’ historiography centred in the writings of Mosheim, David Hume, Edward Gibbon, and William Robertson. Euan Cameron’s recent title *Interpreting Christian History* includes a selective overview of church historiography which follows marked changes leading to modern, critical historical study through a succession of German writers including Mosheim. His selection tracks a major current but leaves the impression that other currents were subsumed or were negligible. He states, for example, that “the historiography of the Christian Church from the mid-eighteenth century onwards is largely a story of secularizing religious history.”¹⁰ Similarly, his earlier work covering Protestant perceptions of the Waldenses states that interest in this medieval movement waned together with a decline in polemical writing in the eighteenth century. He cites works at either end of the century which treated the Waldenses and observes renewed interest among evangelicals in the early decades of the next century, and thus overlooks the Waldenses’ continued presence in the discourse of eighteenth-century evangelical histories.¹¹

Even amidst the burgeoning scholarly literature on the Revival and eighteenth-century evangelicalism, only a few writers have taken interest in the place of church history in evangelical thought and life. If we look for scholarship directly treating the church histories to be analyzed herein, material is relatively scant. The one obvious exception is Edwards’ *History of the Work of Redemption*, which (alongside the rest of Edwards’ writings) has experienced renewed interest in recent years among historians and theologians, commensurate with the appearance of Yale’s critical edition. There is a vast distance in

¹⁰ Euan Cameron, *Interpreting Christian History: The Challenge of the Churches’ Past* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 145–52, quotation at 152.

¹¹ Euan Cameron, *The Reformation of the Heretics: The Waldenses of the Alps, 1480–1580*, Oxford Historical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 251; a similar discussion appears as an epilogue in Euan Cameron, *Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe* (Oxford & Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 285–96.

appreciation between the sweeping judgment of Peter Gay in 1966 that Edwards' *History* was the product of "the last medieval American" and Avihu Zakai's view expressed in 2003 that it was a positive effort to 're-enchant' in direct opposition to Enlightenment humanism.¹² But on the other works, modern scholarship consists of a handful of articles, a dissertation chapter, brief sections within biographies or analyses of the Revival, and passing references in other monographs. While recent studies have accomplished much in presenting eighteenth-century evangelicalism as a movement intersecting with contemporary intellectual and cultural currents, the role of history within evangelical discourse remains largely obscure. This is surprising, in part because of the recognized importance of the figures who produced the historical writings (Edwards and Wesley no less, alongside others who were prominent and influential within more contracted spheres) and the intrinsic value of analysing historical interpretations in order to reveal a person's or group's self-perception.

The major intent of this study is to analyze and compare these evangelical sources and to assess their significance, both for evangelicalism itself and in relation to earlier Protestant and cotemporaneous Enlightenment historiographies. Can one discern a characteristically evangelical interpretation, a shared set of presuppositions and historical understandings? Did evangelical authors attempt more than simple re-expression of an older Protestant understanding of the Christian past? Did they engage with current trends, and if so, was this in a positive or a reactionary way? What variations, if any, are apparent?

I. Scope and Methodology

Attempting to understand how eighteenth-century evangelicals made sense of

¹² Peter Gay, *A Loss of Mastery: Puritan Historians in Colonial America* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966), 88–117, esp. 116–17, and Avihu Zakai, *Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Reenchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

church history is a large task which might be approached in a variety of ways. One might ascertain the popular currency of church history through examining extant records of reading patterns, scouring personal correspondence, or analyzing usage in sermons or in popular evangelical literature. Analysis of evangelicals' attentiveness towards the Protestant Reformation, their reception and dissemination of martyrologies (such as Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*¹³) or spiritual or theological writings (such as those of the church fathers, Thomas à Kempis or the Puritans), or their production of biographies are all important aspects of a more complete answer to the question at issue. Each would be a sizeable project in itself. There exists a vast array of eighteenth-century evangelical publications concerning historical subjects, which certainly strengthens the force of the suggestion that evangelicals possessed a lively appreciation for church history.

My chosen sources, however, are only those comprehensive treatments written by evangelicals—'comprehensive' in the sense that they set out to represent a full chronology from apostolic days up to the eighteenth century.¹⁴ This scope necessarily excludes, then, evangelical works which focus on a particular time period, group, or person(s), such as *The History of the Waldenses and Albigenses* published in Bolton in 1793 by prominent Methodist itinerant Thomas Taylor.¹⁵ On this count we also leave aside Erasmus Middleton's four-

¹³ William Haller, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1963), 252, mentions three 'Methodist' editions or adaptations of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, by Martin Madan (1761/1776), Paul Wright (1784), and Wesley himself in his *Christian Library* (1750). David Loades observes that Foxe's book enjoyed popularity among late eighteenth-century Anglican evangelicals who resisted the Anglo-Catholic movement. Between 1790 and 1830, in the midst of the Anglican controversy, almost a dozen new editions of Foxe's book were published in Britain and America. For evangelicals, Loades writes, "the *Book of Martyrs*, along with the English Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, was a foundation stone of the English church." David Loades, "Afterword: John Foxe in the Twenty-First Century," in *John Foxe and his World*, ed. Christopher Highley and John N. King (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2002), 281–82, 285, 288–89.

¹⁴ As is discussed in Chapter Six, the final published volume of the Milners' *History of the Church of Christ* only reached up to about 1529, but the clear intent, interrupted by various circumstances, was to carry the narrative up to the eighteenth century.

¹⁵ John A. Newton, "Taylor, Thomas (1738–1816)", in *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27085> (accessed 8 May 2008). The full title was *The History of the Waldenses and Albigenses, Who Begun [sic] the Reformation, in the Vallies of Peidmont [sic], and Various Other Places, Several Hudred [sic] Years before Luther*.

volume *Biographia Evangelica* (1779–1786), which exhibited a line of ‘evangelical’ luminaries beginning with Wycliffe, Hus, and Jerome of Prague and extending to eighteenth-century figures such as Watts, Ralph and Ebenezer Erskine, Edwards and Whitefield.¹⁶ John Newton intended a full church history but managed only one volume, covering first-century Christianity, before his appointment to the Olney curacy sidelined this work; aspects of his approach, influential for both Milner and Haweis, are discussed in Chapter Six.

This study’s scope also is limited to sources for which representing history was the sole or main intent. Excluded are works which used church history as only one aspect of a broader subject or as predominantly a polemical tool. An example involving both of these uses is Augustus Toplady’s two-volume *Historic Proof of the Doctrinal Calvinism of the Church of England...* (1774). This work was essentially a defence of Calvinism as genuine Christianity, with church history serving as one weapon of controversy among several. It included brief descriptions of “eminent Christians” prior to the Reformation such as the Waldenses and Albigenses but especially concerned the progress of the English Reformation and its martyrs through to the seventeenth century. A more difficult exclusion is that of Thomas Gisborne’s *Familiar Survey of the Christian Religion, and of History as Connected with the Introduction of Christianity, and with its Progress to the Present Time...* (1799), intended for the instruction of young people. It treated sacred history from creation to the present but also included various sections which interrupted the main historical narrative, such as a fifty-page history of the Jews from Moses to the present day, and discussions on the subjects of

¹⁶ The more complete title was *Biographia Evangelica: or, An Historical Account of the Lives and Deaths of the Most Eminent and Evangelical Authors or Preachers, Both British and Foreign, in the Several Denominations of Protestants, From the Beginning of the Reformation, to the Present Time...* In beginning with Wycliffe, Middleton either departed from his subtitle’s intent to start at the Reformation or saw Wycliffe as the planter of a seed of ‘reform’ which flowered in the sixteenth century. Middleton was associated with Haweis; he is notable also as one of six students expelled from St Edmund Hall, Oxford in 1768 for exhibiting ‘Methodistical’ behaviour. Arthur Skevington Wood, *Thomas Haweis 1734–1820* (London: SPCK, for the Church Historical Society, 1957), 142.

Scripture, Christian doctrine, the person of Christ, church government, and religious establishment. Gisborne's volume appears primarily as an apologetic work. And since he was a clergyman of the Church of England and his *Familiar Survey* appeared in close proximity to the publications of Milner and Haweis, exclusion of the work gives better balance in terms of our authors' chronological, denominational and geographical representation.

A brief explanation should be given of the chronological range of the publications to be analyzed. This begins technically with Edwards' sermon series in 1739 (which became the *History of the Work of Redemption* of 1774) treated in Chapter Three; Chapter Two includes several sources published already in the early 1740s. In beginning here I am following the prevailing scholarly view that the transatlantic Revival of these decades and the emergence of leaders such as Edwards, the Wesleys and Whitefield mark a turning point in the history of English-speaking Protestantism. Most famously, David Bebbington has argued that evangelicalism in Britain, at the least, constituted a new movement: one influenced by, but distinguishable from, Protestant entities such as Puritanism and Pietism.¹⁷ Bebbington's definition of evangelical origins and characteristics has been instrumental in giving the contours for the writing of evangelicalism's history from the eighteenth century forward. His thesis, however, is not immune to criticism. Recently several scholars have argued convincingly in favour of perceiving stronger continuity between evangelicalism and its Protestant forebears, chiefly the Reformation and Puritanism.¹⁸

¹⁷ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 2–17.

¹⁸ Garry J. Williams, "Was Evangelicalism Created by the Enlightenment?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 53, no. 2 (2002): 283–312; Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart, eds., *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities* (Norton Street, UK: Apollos, 2008). Bebbington's response at the end of this volume (pp. 417–32, esp. 427–31) concedes that the late seventeenth century evinces "the early stages of evangelicalism," in part due to calls for revival in New England at the least; yet he maintains that the

The cessation of sources with the first decade of the nineteenth century stems in part from a practical need to limit the number of sources to enable detailed analysis. As mentioned, four of the five major sources selected have undergone little academic scrutiny to date. More substantially, there appears to be a gap of several decades in the early nineteenth century during which no new church histories from an evangelical perspective appeared. What happened, rather, was that several of the works analyzed herein—those by Edwards and the Milners—enjoyed regular republication culminating in a flurry of publishing activity in the 1830s and 1840s. This flurry also brought forth one new edition of Gillies’ work and the republication of material from the last three centuries of Haws’ history. The role of church history in these decades, coinciding with the Disruption in Scotland and the evangelical quarrel with Oxford Movement advocates within the Church of England, would be worthy of a study in itself. The scope of this study, then, is eighteenth-century sources, and only the first editions of these works.

While sources are thus limited, their comprehensiveness makes them well-suited to enable a solid grasp of evangelical understandings of church history. Interpretive criteria and linguistic features which gave meaning to church history will be more visible through the course of a narrative covering seventeen hundred years.

This leads us to the question of methodology in treating these sources. Towards distilling interpretations, three areas of analysis will be employed. The first is an examination of prefatory material and/or preliminary writings in which our authors specified aspects of their approach to history or went so far as to establish a full-fledged interpretive framework. It is a characteristic feature of eighteenth-century histories that writers would map out their understanding of history beforehand, in part to demonstrate

transatlantic Revival beginning in the 1730s marked a new phase, involving various discontinuities such as in churchmanship, theological activity, socio-political concerns, and expectation of further revival.

what was novel in their work or to justify its usefulness in relation to others. Evangelical authors typically offered theological presuppositions or themes which would shape their histories and often suggested historical patterns.¹⁹

The next two areas of analysis pertain to the historical content of each source. In an examination of this length, it would be impossible to do justice to each work's representation of the whole history of Christianity. The chosen compromise is to be attentive, firstly, to unifying themes and overall portrayals, especially high or low points, and, secondly, to what each author said about a selected roster of historical details. The focus on specifics is explained and exemplified well by Mark Noll's work entitled *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*.²⁰ For the present study, the roster which will be attended to is as follows:

- Pentecost & apostolic Christianity
- Early sectarian groups such as the Montanists (second century) and the Novatians (third century)
- The Emperor Constantine (r. AD 306–337), his conversion to and promotion of Christianity
- Pope Gregory I, the Great (590–604)
- Medieval monasticism (particular monks or orders and/or general impressions)
- Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1313) and his bull *Unam Sanctam* (1302)
- Medieval protesters, i.e. Waldenses, Albigenses, Wycliffe, Hus, Jerome of Prague

¹⁹ Modern historians may cringe at terms such as 'pattern' or 'paradigm' in reference to history. Butterfield wrote in 1949 that "the word pattern ... is too hard to be applied to anything so elastic as history." Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1949), 81. For eighteenth-century writers of church history, however, historical texturing was both possible and desirable, thus making appropriate the usage of the above terms in a descriptive sense.

²⁰ Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000); see p. 12 for his justification of his approach.

- Luther's Reformation, ca. 1517–1529
- Early Anabaptism
- Seventeenth-century Puritans, Presbyterians and/or Pietists
- The Revival in Great Britain and America in the 1730s and 1740s

The intent is to streamline, rather than to constrict slavishly; there still will be room for eccentricities or unique features beyond this list. Not every author covered each point; but the selection is varied enough that it will provide a good amount of detailed data for comparison. The selection, of course, unavoidably reflects a degree of an imposed personal interest; another person might have chosen quite a different roster. The attempt, however, has been to capture a wide breadth theologically and ecclesiastically (from popes to protesters, from an emperor to monks, and so forth) and to anticipate what was interesting (in positive and negative senses) for eighteenth-century evangelical writers or what is illuminative for our evaluation of their perspectives. The roster provides a kind of litmus test. For example, whether an author speaks favourably of Constantine and the reform-minded Pope Gregory or gravitates towards 'heretical' groups on the fringe of the institutional church²¹ will communicate much about the author's own convictions and ecclesial loyalties.

Our approach to these sources might also be called linguistic and sympathetic rather than source-critical. Each author drew from other sources, whether acknowledged or not. Gillies used a wide range of histories for his collection and included a list of these at the outset of each of his two volumes. Edwards' history was informed by his wide reading, but his sources were largely unacknowledged (no doubt in part because he

²¹ Throughout, lower-case 'church' is used for generic references to visible expressions of Christianity or ecclesiological concepts, and capitalized 'Church' distinguishes references to particular denominations or local churches.

composed the work as a sermon series rather than as something prepared for publication). The Milners also demonstrated a very extensive array of sources. Wesley's published history, of course, was an edition and abridgment of the work of Mosheim. Haws made very little reference to his sources. It would be impossible within the scope of this study to do justice to each writer's use of sources; any one could sustain exclusive analysis. What will be attended to (though not exhaustively) are explicit interactions with other historians, especially from Protestant and Enlightenment spheres. Moreover, in the case of Gillies and Wesley, who were primarily editing and abridging, some scrutiny of how they used their sources (i.e. what they selected verbatim, abridged, added or dropped) will shed valuable light in determining their own interpretations.

This study's primary focus, then, is how these evangelical leaders depicted the past, how they narrated the story of Christianity. Throughout, words such as 'understanding', 'depiction' or 'portrayal' and their cognates are employed, since any writer of history offers a personal interpretation no matter how much they might claim or strive for impartiality. The intent is not to scrutinize the historical veracity of evangelical church histories but rather to analyze how they understood and used the Christian past, with the recognition that they often viewed it through the lenses of contemporary issues. This approach is articulated by Ted Campbell in his work on Wesley's view of Christian antiquity: he considers "distortions or exaggerations" just as instructive and interesting as interpretive aspects which by modern standards appear accurate.²² These evangelical church histories need to be appreciated within their eighteenth-century context, a period of marked development in historical technique and critical capacity but still far removed from the standards of twenty-first-century historical inquiry. If at times they appear overly biased or

²² Ted A. Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1991), 4.

even irresponsible, it is important to recognize that the same charge could be levied at works by ‘enlightened’ authors (see discussion below). Evangelical sources deserve sensitive and serious treatment as an undervalued aspect to the dynamics of eighteenth-century historical writing and evangelical identity.

To what extent can the interpretations of these evangelical authors be seen as representative of evangelicals more generally? We cannot simply assume that these works adequately reflected (or determined for that matter) broader interpretations. Only Milner’s first volume contained numerical evidence of subscriptions, and printing records for this and other sources have not been located. What we can attend to as some measure of a work’s influence is evidence of additional printings or subsequent editions or translations, concurrent publishing in more than one location, and any documented statements indicating popularity. The fact that these histories appeared as octavo (Gillies, Edwards, Milner, Haweis) or duodecimo (Wesley) editions rather than folio or quarto demonstrates something of their perceived popular-level market.²³ And as we have already pointed out, the prominence of the authors as first- or second-order leaders within transatlantic evangelicalism surely lends weight to the assertion that a study of their historical works constitutes an important angle on evangelical historical interpretations more generally. That every one of the authors was ordained in an established (or well-established, in the case of Edwards’ New England Congregationalism) church implies a degree of cultural

²³ In comparison, Gottfried Arnold’s 1699–1700 church history appeared in folio, and quarto editions appeared for Mosheim’s *Ecclesiastical History* (1765), several editions of Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and Hume’s histories of Great Britain and of England, and Robertson’s 1759 *History of Scotland* and 1777 *History of America*, although many octavo editions of these popular works also appeared. ESTC, <http://estc.bl.uk> (accessed 28 July 2008). G. E. Aylmer contrasts English “chap-book” popular histories with “the serious history which appeared in massive folio or stout octavo volumes” and which were affordable only by the more affluent. Since most of our sources were indeed octavo, their size should not be pressed as conclusive evidence of their popular appeal. But Aylmer clarifies that the wealthier reading public in the eighteenth century was an expanded audience, including, beyond aristocrats and clergymen, merchants and other professional laypersons. Gerald E. Aylmer, “Introductory Survey: From the Renaissance to the Eighteenth Century” (introductory essay to Part 3, “Early Modern Historiography”), in *Companion to Historiography*, ed. Michael Bentley (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), 277.

privilege but also a situation of regular contact with, and pastoral orientation towards, the general populace which would work against any sort of ‘elitist’ perspective. This study, then, can claim an ability to approach popular evangelical views of history, as well as evangelical emphases and self-perceptions, through some of the most well-known and well-respected evangelical spokespersons.

After a discussion of historiographical background, the next five chapters will treat, in roughly chronological order, evangelical writings on church history: reflections emerging from the early years of the Revival and John Gillies’ *Historical Collections* (Chapter Two), Edwards’ *History of the Work of Redemption* (Chapter Three), Wesley’s *Concise Ecclesiastical History* and a selection of his sermons (Chapter Four), Joseph and Isaac Milners’ *History of the Church of Christ* (Chapter Five), and Thomas Haweis’ *Impartial and Succinct History of the Church of Christ* (Chapter Six). Each successive chapter will be able to incorporate increasing comparison with preceding material, ascertaining similarities and differences. A concluding chapter will compare all views represented in the five core chapters, set these in relation to earlier Protestant and eighteenth-century Enlightenment historiography, and consider the cohesiveness and uniqueness of evangelical understandings of church history.

II. Historiographical Background

A. The Reformation

Of critical importance for approaching the historical visions of Protestant evangelicals in the eighteenth century is a grasp of the understandings of church history which arose amidst the sixteenth-century Reformation. Appeals to history quickly became part of the theological wrangling and ecclesiastical divisions and the subsequent

Protestant²⁴ culture. Scholars have observed the perseverance of Protestant historical understandings,²⁵ and thus it behoves us to encapsulate these as necessary background to eighteenth-century evangelical views. To what extent might evangelical writings on church history be seen as the persistence of a Protestant tradition?

Scholars have identified history as an important, even a central or catalytic, aspect of the debates and polemical writings of reformers, from Luther to the Anabaptists. For F. C. Baur, the reformers' success or failure hinged on their ability to legitimate their key tenets through historical precedent.²⁶ Recently Euan Cameron has asserted that questions of history were fundamental from the outset of the Reformation. He clarifies that early reformers were preoccupied with theological issues, but as they considered corruptions in the Catholic Church stretching back several hundred years they were faced with the problem of accounting for the biblical promise of the continual presence of the Holy Spirit among Christ's followers.²⁷ Markus Wriedt identifies Luther's disputation with Eck in Leipzig in 1519 as the "latest" point by which Luther employed history "to prove the necessity of the Reformation and to justify his own actions."²⁸ John Headley, in his work on Luther's conception of church history, similarly finds Luther developing an interpretation of church history at this early stage following Luther's first protest.²⁹ The historical task expanded in subsequent decades. Cameron points to Luther's *On Councils*

²⁴ Usage of the term 'Protestant' in this section includes Anabaptists, although it is recognized that early Anabaptists distanced themselves from, and experienced derision from, Lutherans and Calvinists as well as Catholics.

²⁵ An excellent recent treatment of this subject is found in Barnett, "Antiquity of Protestantism": 14–15, 29–37.

²⁶ Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Ferdinand Christian Baur on the Writing of Church History*, trans. Peter C. Hodgson, A Library of Protestant Thought (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 80.

²⁷ Cameron, *Interpreting Christian History*, 122, 123.

²⁸ Markus Wriedt, "Luther's Concept of History and the Formation of an Evangelical Identity," in *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe, 1: The Medieval Inheritance*, ed. Bruce Gordon, St Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Aldershot, England: Scholar Press, 1996), 31–45, 38.

²⁹ John M. Headley, *Luther's View of Church History*, Yale Publications in Religion 6 (New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press, 1963), 59–62. Headley's evidence rests in Luther's *Operations on the Psalms*, written between 1519 and 1521.

and the Churches and Bullinger's *On the Origin of Error* (both published in 1539) as well as Calvin's *Treatise on Relics* (1543) as attempts to counter Catholic authority by seeking to uncover the doctrinal and practical accretions or errors of medieval Catholicism.³⁰

Meanwhile, one finds a variety of approaches to church history among early Anabaptists. Historian Geoffrey Dipple elucidates interpretations spanning from disregard for history among Swiss Anabaptists to moderating efforts by Menno Simons to situate his movement soundly within historical orthodoxy.³¹ Even disregard, of course, involved an interpretation: Bernese Anabaptists debating with Calvinists in 1538 asserted a very early fall of the church into apostasy, whereupon the entire period of the papacy could be overlooked since "no Christians" or "true church" existed.³² In between these poles resided the *Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren* (begun in the 1560s) which traced faithful Christianity through a lineage of sufferers or deemed heretics.³³ Generally speaking, Anabaptists evoked harsher views of the corruptions of the historical church. In Dipple's view, Anabaptists' experience of persecution led them to scorn a politically-supported church which they saw as stemming from Constantine's day.³⁴

Scholars have demonstrated both defensive and proactive uses of church history by early reformers. Wriedt claims that through historical inquiry Luther "could both counter accusations that the Reformation was an innovation and prove that the truth of

³⁰ Cameron, *Interpreting Christian History*, 124–31.

³¹ Geoffrey Dipple, "Yet, From Time to Time There Were Men Who Protested Against These Evils: Anabaptism and Medieval Heresy," in *Protestant History and Identity*, ed. Gordon, 1:123–37, 127, 132–33. Dipple's work is a revision of Franklin Littell's more monolithic portrayal of Anabaptist historical interpretations as strongly restitutionist and primitivist. See Franklin Hamlin Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church: A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), for example p. 57: "The Anabaptists were among the first to ground the church in a total and systematic application of primitivist historiography."

³² Walter Klaassen, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources*, Classics of the Radical Reformation 3 (Kitchener, ON & Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1981), 110–11.

³³ George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd ed., Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies 15 (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1992), 396–97, 1076–77; Dipple, "Anabaptism and Medieval Heresy," 134–36.

³⁴ Dipple, "Anabaptism and Medieval Heresy," 129–32.

the church had not perished.”³⁵ In Gordon’s view, history was employed by all the chief magisterial reformers—Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli, Bullinger, and Calvin—in critiquing the Catholic Church and in asserting their continuity with ancient Christianity in order to legitimate Protestantism.³⁶ First, history served their polemical purposes, in response to charges by Roman Catholic opponents of religious novelty encapsulated in the question ‘Where was your church before Luther?’ Gordon contends that this question was “at the root of each attempt by Protestant writers of the sixteenth century to place their movement within the expanse of Christian history.” Protestants were compelled “to establish another means of discerning the undoubted continuity of the church,” since “innovation” to the sixteenth-century mind was diabolical.³⁷ Along these lines, Cameron discerns a two-pronged historical approach: reformers “searched not only the New Testament but also the early Church for evidence that primitive Christianity was ignorant of those Catholic institutions and customs which the reformers opposed,” and “they searched more recent history for evidence that rites or customs believed to be ‘timeless’ in fact originated in more recent epochs.”³⁸

Beyond argument’s sake, reformers made positive use of church history as a means of shaping identity. They looked to the past for the purpose of identification and located ‘witnesses to the truth’ or models of faithfulness and perseverance in the face of difficulty. These exemplary precedents were most readily found among Christian martyrs from recent and distant times. Brad Gregory, in highlighting the prominent place of persecution in Protestants’ historical understanding, writes that for early Protestants “the current persecution of God’s children was not a here-and-there, sixteenth-century aberration but

³⁵ Wriedt, "Luther's Concept of History," 38.

³⁶ Bruce Gordon, "The Changing Face of Protestant History and Identity in the Sixteenth Century," in *Protestant History and Identity*, ed. Gordon, 1:1–22, esp. 12–21.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1–3.

³⁸ Cameron, *Interpreting Christian History*, 122.

the culmination of a persistent, on-and-off pattern stretching from biblical times to the present....” The experience of suffering very quickly became an historical ‘mark’ of the ‘true’ church.³⁹ Through this process the long-standing emphasis on visible, institutional continuity shifted dramatically to a contrary vision of an invisible body whose endurance was signposted by the history of protest against the institutional hierarchy.

The main features of traditional Protestant understandings of church history can be outlined through a glimpse at two significant sixteenth-century works. One of the most prominent and prolific church historians was the Lutheran Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520–75), who published *A Catalogue of Witnesses to the Truth, Who Before Our Time Cried Out Against the Pope* (1556) and led a group of writers compiling a monumental *Ecclesiastical History* which became known as the *Magdeburg Centuries* (1559–74).⁴⁰ The title of Flacius’ initial work displays well the double-edged Protestant approach to history, with its evident interest in critiquing medieval Catholicism and positively identifying ‘true’ believers. Baur observes that Flacius sought to trace both “the sparks of divine truth” and the encroaching “darkness.”⁴¹ In his preface Flacius construed these pre-Reformation ‘witnesses’ as a continuity: “From these historical testimonies themselves,” he wrote, “it can be abundantly proved that there have always been at least a few of the pious, those who were more upright in their judgment than the common crowd and who joined with us in condemning the entire Papacy or certain parts of it.” Flacius went on to suggest that the number of witnesses was larger than could be traced historically (since records had been lost or suppressed and since, it was assumed, every public voice represented a group of sympathizers). Flacius then produced the crux of the matter in his mind: “Wherefore most

³⁹ Brad S. Gregory, "Martyrs and Saints," in *A Companion to the Reformation World*, ed. R. Po-chia Hsia, Blackwell Companions to European History (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 455–70, 464.

⁴⁰ Cameron, *Interpreting Christian History*, 133–34.

⁴¹ Baur, *Church History*, 82.

false is that sophistry of the Papists, who try to attribute to us and to our religion the hateful charge of novelty, and to attribute to themselves the dignity of great age.”⁴² As indicated by the title and prefatory comments of Flacius’ work, a key criterion for inclusion as a ‘true witness’ was opposition to the papacy and its perceived excesses or errors. Indeed, it seems that in the dual purpose noted above, one took care of the other: if an historical person or group was noted for opposition to Rome and its hierarchy, then they were deemed to be genuine Christians.

In the second edition of his *Catalogue* (1562) Flacius anticipated a history beginning with the time of Christ which would elucidate the ‘true’ church and prove the fallacy of Catholicism.⁴³ This was answered chiefly by Flacius himself in directing the writing of the *Magdeburg Centuries*, published in thirteen folio volumes. In a preface to the first volume, the authors promoted the study of church history for a proper understanding of the unity of true belief through the centuries, the origin and development of error, the true form of church government, and the “marks” of the true and false churches. Other themes of note were the valued example of persecuted Christians and the conviction that, in the midst of spiritual darkness, God perennially roused luminous witnesses to true belief and worship.⁴⁴ Building on this final theme, the *Centuries*’ preface to the fifth volume (and fifth century) hinted at an historical pattern: in Baur’s words, “after the great blessings of God there come great sins by men, and after these come great punishments.” For the writers of the *Centuries* this appeared as three phases: the promotion, ignorance, and obscuring or corrupting of God’s Word.⁴⁵

The work was organized according to themes, such as the church’s general

⁴² Ibid., 81 n. 1.

⁴³ Ibid., 82 n. 2.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 95.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 104.

character, spread, external circumstance (i.e. persecuted or at peace), leading doctrines and errors, ceremonies, government, schisms, councils, leaders, heretics, martyrs, and miracles.⁴⁶ Within this structure, however, were essentially two rival histories, parallel narrations of the ascendancy of the ‘false’ church and the preservation of the ‘true’. As in Flacius’ earlier work, opposition to the papacy became an *a priori* judgment in favour of an historical character’s faith and virtue.⁴⁷ Against Catholic claims to a visible, institutional continuity with the apostolic age, Flacius and his assistants redefined the church through the ‘marks’ of opposition to papal corruption and, correspondingly, the experience of persecution from Rome. The *Centuries* essentially sought to turn the tables on Catholic charges of novelty: to prove Protestant beliefs to be ancient and orthodox and to portray the papacy as, in Schaff’s words, “an innovation and apostacy.”⁴⁸

In the English-speaking world, the best-known early Protestant historical work was the *Actes and Monuments* or ‘Book of Martyrs’ by John Foxe (1517–1587).⁴⁹ His first edition (1563) focused especially on the English Lollards and only reached back to about AD 1000.⁵⁰ In successive editions (1570, 1576 and 1583) his task expanded into a full-fledged history from the first century to his own day. Here we focus on the preliminary material in the 1583 edition (the largest of the four) for the main features of his approach to church history.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 83–84.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁸ Schaff, *Apostolic Church*, 66.

⁴⁹ Historian Alec Ryrie reminds that Foxe was influenced by John Bale, whose *Epistle Exhortatorie of an Englyshe Christiane* (1544) Ryrie identifies as the beginning of the English martyrological tradition. This was followed by his *Image of Both Churches* (1545) which traced a succession of persecuted Christians from the first to the sixteenth centuries. Alec Ryrie, "The Problems of Legitimacy and Precedent in English Protestantism, 1539–47," in *Protestant History and Identity*, ed. Gordon, 1:78–92, at 81, 84, 85. Gregory, "Martyrs and Saints," 463–64, points to literature—tracts, songs, and correspondence—predating better-known works which reflected a “Protestant martyrological sensibility.”

⁵⁰ Andrew Pettegree, "Adriaan van Haemstede: the Heretic as Historian," in *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe, 2: The Later Reformation*, ed. Bruce Gordon, St Andrews Studies in Reformation History (Aldershot, England: Scholar Press, 1996), 59–76, 64–65.

Foxe's key themes echoed those of Flacius and the *Magdeburg Centuries*. As with his counterparts on the Continent, the ecclesiastical rift of his generation was foundational for his approach. In twenty-nine introductory pages within Book I, Foxe tackled head-on the Catholic charge of Protestant novelty and responded with a tactic similar to that of Flacius. Protestant doctrine and life, he claimed, corresponded with those of early Christianity, based on what he found in "the old actes and histories of au[n]cient tyme."⁵¹ In contrast, the Catholic Church had deviated from ancient orthodox Christianity: it was "almost ... vtterly reuolted from the pure originall sincerity" of Paul's teaching, constituting a "defection and falling from faith."⁵² Prior to examining, at length, perceived Catholic excesses, he starkly juxtaposed Roman Catholicism with ancient Christianity. The Roman Church had migrated from "persecuted" to "persecutyng"; bishops had gone from being "made Martyrs" to "mak[ing] Martyrs."⁵³ In response to Catholic opponents who would accuse Protestant churches of being only fifty years old, Foxe rejoined: "...we affirme and say, that our church was, when this church of theirs was not yet hatched out of the shell, nor did yet euer see any light..."⁵⁴

In this introductory material, Foxe mapped out church history up to his own day. He divided the history into five distinct periods: about three hundred years of suffering from the time of the apostles; an equal time of 'flourishing'; yet another of 'decline' wherein primitive simplicity eroded despite a continuing orthodox profession; then four hundred years, from Pope Gregory VII to the days of Wycliffe and Hus, during which the Antichrist had free reign in the church; and finally the time of reformation, lasting about

⁵¹ John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* [...], (1583 edition) (hriOnline, Sheffield, 2004), <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/johnfoxe/> (accessed 20 February 2006), 1:3. In this and subsequent references to Foxe, the first number indicates the Book, and the second the page. Original spellings have been maintained, but abbreviated letters and archaic characters have been updated in square brackets.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1:20.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1:4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:2–3.

two hundred and eighty years from Wycliffe up to Foxe's day.⁵⁵ Complicating his depiction, Foxe also held that the millennium, the binding of Satan and reign of Christ, had already occurred, lasting from the end of persecution under Constantine to its renewal in the thirteenth century.⁵⁶ Without attempting to solve this puzzle in which the Antichrist gains ground while, supposedly, Christ reigns and Satan is bound⁵⁷, it is important for our analysis to observe Foxe's use of periodization—with its highs and lows—as well as biblical prophecy in his portrayal of the past.

A number of key theological planks supported Foxe's interpretation. His ecclesiological vision was prominent. V. Norskov Olsen has argued that this aspect is central to a proper understanding of the *Actes and Monumentes*.⁵⁸ In his prefatory "Four Questions propounded to the Papists," Foxe juxtaposed an institutional and a spiritual church, or a Catholic concern with external trappings and rituals and a Protestant emphasis on faith given by the Holy Spirit and defined as belief in forgiveness and justification through Christ's death. But how might a spiritual church be discernible in history? Countering the Catholic argument that its visible institution constituted the true church stemming from apostolic times, Foxe proposed that the spiritual, invisible church was made manifest to its own members through the eyes of faith.⁵⁹

Despite this claim, Foxe elevated more mundane, tangible markers. His vision of rival churches and contested ecclesiology was manifested forcefully through a woodcut illustration on the title page itself. On one side demonic creatures hovered over a Catholic

⁵⁵ Ibid., 1:1, 30. See also Preface, 11–14 for a much more detailed picture of Foxe's five periods, especially in an English context.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1:3.

⁵⁷ Loades writes that Foxe "squared this schematic circle by emphasizing that Antichrist's takeover of the papacy had occurred gradually over many generations, so that the church was becoming seriously corrupted long before Satan was finally loosed." Loades, "Afterword," 277 n. 1. But this analysis still seems theologically insufficient for a period in which, Foxe was claiming, Christ ruled as king.

⁵⁸ V. Norskov Olsen, *John Foxe and the Elizabethan Church* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1973), 50.

⁵⁹ Foxe, *Actes and Monumentes*, Preface, 11, 19.

mass with elevated host, a procession, and a priest surrounded by worshippers with rosary beads; on the other side an assembly listened to the preaching of the Word and witnessed the presence of God (represented by the Hebrew word ‘Yahweh’), while above, martyrs at their pyres and ascending saints raised trumpets heavenward.⁶⁰ To the reader, therefore, biblical teaching, spiritual worship, and a faithful witness in the face of death appeared as signs delineating genuine Christianity. More explicitly, in his prefatory address to English Christians Foxe contrasted “the poore oppressed and persecuted Church of Christ” with the Church of Rome glorified by earlier histories. True Christianity, he claimed, had been nearly invisible due to suppression and neglect, but he intended to uncover it so that the reader could see “the Image of both Churches.”⁶¹ Then in Book I, immediately prior to commencing his detailed narrative, Foxe divided membership of the historical church between those who only outwardly declared Christianity and received the sacraments, and the elect who were “inwardly ioyned to Christ,” who served him and received his “heauenly blessings and grace.” He added that “almost continually” the former group had been the chief enemies of the latter.⁶²

Correspondingly for Foxe, visible opposition to a corrupting institution signified true belief. The invisible church could be discerned by its “open defence of truth agaynst the disordered Church of Rome.”⁶³ Thus the Catholic understanding could be dramatically reversed: what medieval Christendom had seen as heresy in its midst was, ironically, genuine faith protected by God against Catholicism’s “heresies and errors.”⁶⁴ In effect, as David Loades has observed, Foxe (like Flacius) created two parallel continuities, one of faithfulness and one of oppressiveness, the first linking contemporary

⁶⁰ Ibid., title page.

⁶¹ Ibid., Preface, 11.

⁶² Ibid., 1:30.

⁶³ Ibid., Preface, 12.

⁶⁴ Ibid., Preface, 13–14.

Protestant sufferings with those of early Christians and the second linking the coercive acts of Christian Rome with pagan Rome.⁶⁵

An important aspect of Foxe's presentation was his emphasis on the continual existence of genuine Christianity. This was a theological conviction: as he expressed in his prefatory address "To the true and faythfull Congregation of Christes Vniuersall Church," the 'true' church, despite opposition and obscurity, had been powerfully preserved by God who was "continually stirring vp fro[m] time to tyme faythful ministers, by who[m] always hath bene kept some sparkes of hys true doctrine and Religion."⁶⁶ Even in the darkest days, Foxe contended, "some remnaunt alwayes remayned."⁶⁷ He was confident that he could establish "the continual desce[n]t of the Church" from its inception to the present.⁶⁸ His claim hinged in part on Matt. 16:18, Christ's promise to build a church on a rock which "the gates of Hades will not overcome," which he made a centerpiece in his commencement of Book I. Use of this verse had a polemical appeal, as it was the basis of the Catholic claim for a visible succession from the apostle Peter. From it Foxe drew guarantees of both opposition and divine protection.⁶⁹

This gave profound meaning to the study of church history. Foxe saw his task as the uncovering of "examples of Gods mighty working in his Church" or the "assured and playne witnes of God."⁷⁰ More strongly, the evidence of history would 'verify' Christ's promise in Matt. 16. He dedicated his efforts "that the wonderfull workes of God first in his Church might appeare to his glory."⁷¹ As he commenced his examination of specific historical accounts, Foxe sketched in a few lines the sweep of Christianity's history and

⁶⁵ Loades, "Afterword," 279 n. 7.

⁶⁶ Foxe, *ACM*, Preface, 11.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Preface, 12.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Preface, 13–14.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Preface, 5, 15.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 1:1.

concluded that what emerged was “the wonderfull operation of Christes mightie hand, euer working in his church, & neuer ceasing to defend the same against his enimies, according to the verity of his owne word, promising to be with his Church while the worlde shal stand.”⁷²

Finally, Foxe approached the writing of history not only from a polemical but also from a pragmatic, pastoral perspective. At the beginning of his history, Foxe stated his intent “not so much to delight the eares of my countrey in readyng of newes, as most especially to profite the harts of the godly.”⁷³ For Foxe, stories of martyrs’ meekness and faithfulness served to encourage godliness, warn against worldliness, and strengthen faith in the midst of trial.⁷⁴ He saw his martyrology as a needed complement to the preaching ministry: Christians who died for the gospel deserved reverence alongside preachers who proclaimed it.⁷⁵ Andrew Pettegree observes that martyrologies such as Foxe’s could serve an important didactic purpose akin to catechisms which taught essential Protestant beliefs, “but with a force heightened by the drama of the martyr’s situation.”⁷⁶

B. The Confessional Period

Writers mapping the development of church historiography label the period spanning from the works of early Protestants such as Flacius and Foxe to late seventeenth-century examples as ‘dogmatic’ or ‘confessional’. Schaff calls it the period of “polemic orthodoxy.”⁷⁷ History, in his view, had become “an armory” from which the various church parties could draw weapons in a struggle to establish their own orthodoxy and their

⁷² Ibid., 1:30.

⁷³ Ibid., 1:1. Foxe’s belief that Christ’s millennial reign was in the past informed his concurrent belief that he was living in the world’s last days, thus providing a sense of urgency which heightened practicality. See Olsen, *Foxe and the Elizabethan Church*, 44–47.

⁷⁴ Foxe, *A&M*, Preface, 15.

⁷⁵ Ibid., Preface, 16; also 5.

⁷⁶ Pettegree, “Adriaan van Haemstede,” 70.

⁷⁷ Schaff, *Apostolic Church*, 63–69.

opponents' heterodoxy.⁷⁸ Euan Cameron has written recently of the histories produced by Lutheran, Calvinist and Catholic authors: "The churches had locked themselves into mutually hostile, dogmatic positions. In each case they constructed an image of their past, and its relationship to their present, that vindicated their own identity and values. Theological premises determined their scholarly conclusions."⁷⁹ Baur applies the similar label "dogmatic-polemical" but adds that this historiographical colouring stemmed from the real controversies of these centuries.⁸⁰ In the context of political and ecclesiastical upheavals on the Continent and in the British Isles, a critical, detached historiography was as unlikely as it was undesirable.

Within this confessional historiography there existed variety, depending on circumstances and loyalties. Gordon perceives this already among early Protestant history-writers.⁸¹ Barnett's work confirms further variation among seventeenth-century church historians in an English-speaking context. In the charged political atmosphere of the first half of the seventeenth century, claims for Protestant antiquity differed according to Puritan-High Church or Presbyterian-Episcopalian conflicts. Royalist writers such as Richard Field (1561–1616) in his work *Of the Church* (1606) and Thomas Fuller (1608–1661) in his *Church-History of Britain* (1655) disassociated themselves from a view of the 'true' church as a thin line of medieval dissidents such as Albigenses and Waldenses, whereas this view was maintained in works by Puritan writers following after Foxe.⁸²

Moving into the later seventeenth century, an historical perspective pertinent for our analysis can be found in *The Fulfilling of the Scripture* by Robert Fleming (1630–1694). Fleming was a Presbyterian minister from Cambuslang who was ejected after Charles II's

⁷⁸ Ibid., 64.

⁷⁹ Cameron, *Interpreting Christian History*, 145.

⁸⁰ Baur, *Church History*, 116–17.

⁸¹ Gordon, "Changing Face of Protestant History," 5, and 12–21 for specific examples.

⁸² Barnett, "Antiquity of Protestantism": 17–20.

Restoration and became minister of a Presbyterian congregation in Rotterdam.⁸³ His work, first published in Rotterdam in 1669, appears to have been influential among Puritans and Presbyterians. A preface written shortly after the ascendancy of William and Mary said of the work that it “was born in evil days” but was preserved in secret among devout families in England and especially Scotland who “kept it close unto their holy Bibles, valuing it next thereto.”⁸⁴ In a 1726 London edition prominent English Dissenters such as Isaac Watts and Daniel Neal commended the work.⁸⁵ Among our sources, Gillies in Glasgow and Edwards in New England, at the least, drew from Fleming.

This work was not a history *per se*. As its subtitle read, it was “An essay shewing the exact accomplishment of the Word of God in his works of providence, performed & to be performed...: containing in the end a few rare histories of the works and servants of God in the Church of Scotland.”⁸⁶ What is especially noteworthy about Fleming’s work is the various factors which either drove or informed his apologetic and historical inquiry, as evidenced in the detailed outline of the book’s contents. A chief object, already identified in the title, was the tracing of the hand of providence. Another was historical proof for biblical prophecy. Fleming identified fulfilments such as the conversion of Gentiles, the fall of Jerusalem, the rise of Antichrist, and the killing of the two witnesses. A concern towards the end of the work was an effort to correlate recent instances of God’s “extraordinary providence” with those of apostolic Christianity. Fleming specifically identified recent gospel success, experience of persecution, endurance under this opposition, divine judgment on those who hampered the furtherance of the Reformation,

⁸³ John Howie and James Howie, *The Scots Worthies* (Glasgow, Edinburgh & London: Blackie and Son, 1856), 640 (Supplement).

⁸⁴ Robert Fleming, *The Fulfilling of the Scripture, in Three Parts*, 2 vols. (Glasgow: printed by Stephen Young, 1801), 1:iii.

⁸⁵ Robert Fleming, *The Fulfilling of the Scripture Complete; In Three Parts. ...*, 5th ed. (London: printed for J. and B. Sprint, and Aaron Ward; Richard Ford, and John Oswald, 1726), unpaginated (after title page).

⁸⁶ Robert Fleming, *The Fulfilling of the Scripture* (Rotterdam, 1669).

examples of spiritual outpourings in Scotland and Ireland in the 1620s and 1630s, the spiritual character of recent ministers, and other miscellaneous details.

David Allan points to Fleming as a relatively radical proponent of the prevailing Presbyterian view of Scotland as a nation possessing a rich heritage of religious reform.⁸⁷ This traditional interpretation “charted the lamentable decline and periodic resurgence of sincere religious piety as the unvarying barometer of Scotland’s moral health.” Its advocates believed, in Allan’s words, that “Scotland [was] a bulwark of the reformist cause since the earliest days of the Christian church” and “the Scots were a people in whose affairs divine providence had frequently intruded.”⁸⁸ Fleming’s language and interest in dramatic occurrences of spiritual renewal in Scottish history situate his work as an example of a ‘revivalist’ approach predating the evangelical Revival.⁸⁹ As Allan’s analysis demonstrates, Fleming’s work also displayed the seventeenth-century tendency to confine one’s historical view along national and/or denominational lines. It is a source, however, worthy of further scrutiny which on many themes anticipated eighteenth-century evangelical historical writings.

During the same period of turmoil and confessional church historiography, substantial numbers of Puritans emigrated from the Old World to the New. According to historiographer Ernst Breisach, from an early stage their experience of exile and new beginnings gave rise to a dramatic historical vision steeped in biblical language. Puritan settlements on the edge of the wilderness became theatres of divine action, with God intervening as in Old Testament times to protect or redeem the settlers. As a result,

⁸⁷ David Allan, "Protestantism, Presbyterianism and National Identity in Eighteenth-Century Scottish History," in *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c. 1650–c. 1850*, ed. Tony Claydon and Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 182–205, 187–88.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁸⁹ Historian Leigh Schmidt contends for a strong revivalist tradition evident in Scotland from the 1620s onwards. “The evangelistic events of 1742,” he claims, “were the culmination of more than a century of evangelical renewal and revival in Scotland.” Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scottish Communion and American Revivals in the Early Modern Period* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 21–50, quotation at 49.

histories of the colonies were set within a much more expansive sacred narrative, from William Bradford's *History of Plymouth Plantation* (1646) to Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702).⁹⁰

Mather's work, akin with others such as Fleming's, reflected a regional and confessional outlook. In the view of Mather (1663–1728), the New England settlements in the region of Massachusetts Bay held grand significance within the scheme of salvation history. His Introduction in the *Magnalia* established this historical backdrop: the early church was a golden era to be retrieved; Protestant reformers in the sixteenth century promoted continual, progressive religious reform; England, the foremost reformed nation, had failed in this task; and the New England Puritans were living out the mandate to display further reform for the sake of the English Church.⁹¹ Historian Sacvan Bercovitch perceives in Mather's historical writing both the concept of progress—New England represented a large step forward in salvation history—and attentiveness to decline and revival in church history.⁹²

A general comment on Puritan and Presbyterian historiography in the seventeenth century is in order. We have noted hints of interest in historical revival and renewal and themes such as the providence of God and the continuance of the godly. But these history-writers lived in circumstances which, in their perceptions, were dire. The state of religion was tied up with politics, and for Presbyterians in Scotland and Puritans in England and New England their situation appeared bleak. They might look back to the early church, the Reformation or other seasons of grace (such as revivals in the early

⁹⁰ Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, & Modern*, 2nd ed. (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 196.

⁹¹ Peter Gregg Engle, "Jonathan Edwards as Historiographer: An Analysis of his Schema of Church History, Focusing on Period III of his *History of Redemption*" (PhD Diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985), 56–58. For a similar treatment of the New England Puritan vision which, in eschatological language, set itself apart from a corrupted English Church, see Zakai, *Edwards's Philosophy of History*, 171, 173.

⁹² Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1975), chap. 2, 35–71.

seventeenth century or the founding of the New England settlement), but this retrospective glance entailed a sense of longing or a desire to recapture a lost vitality. In 1938, A. S. P. Woodhouse characterized a Puritan vision of history, based on his reading of Milton, as follows: "...deterioration is its note, but deterioration relieved by sudden interventions of God in behalf of truth and righteousness, as seen in the prophets of old, pre-eminently in the earthly ministry of Christ, and recently, after twelve hundred years of increasing darkness, in the Reformation, whose work England was called on to complete ... [H]istory is not 'the known march of the ordinary providence of God'; it is a protracted wandering from the way, relieved by sudden interventions of God's *extraordinary* providence."⁹³ History-writers could hold onto their theological commitments that God would sustain the church and could claim precedents of divine intervention; but their context contributed a degree of pessimism. Michael Crawford, in reference to the early eighteenth century, comments that "Protestants had come to the realization that the Reformation as a period of more than usual activity of God's Spirit had come to an end."⁹⁴

A much more comprehensive and significant church history was the *Impartial History of the Church and Heresies* (1699–1700) produced by Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714). In the years in which he composed his history Arnold was drawn into Pietism, and this influence helped to shape a novel historical outlook. In reaction against a perceived dogmatism and cold institutional religion in the Lutheran Church, Arnold like other Pietists defined true Christianity as inner repentance and faith expressed outwardly in love and charity. An aversion to institutional Christianity and attraction to a spiritually-defined church led Arnold to write what was essentially a counter-history to the confessional ones

⁹³ A. S. P. Woodhouse, ed., *Puritanism and Liberty: Being the Army Debates (1647–9) from the Clarke Manuscripts with Supplementary Documents* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1938), 50 (Introduction).

⁹⁴ Michael J. Crawford, *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England's Revival Tradition in Its British Context*, Religion in America (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 129.

which sought to validate Protestant tenets and institutions.⁹⁵

In Arnold's view, the stream of true Christianity emanated from the church of the first two centuries and then diverted from the main flow, following the course of supposed heresies condemned by the dominant church. He elevated the doctrinal purity of the first- and second-century church and cast scorn on subsequent doctrinal controversies and creedal formulations. Arnold similarly castigated Constantine and doubted his conversion to Christianity. Monks he could view more positively as long as they kept their solitude, distant from ecclesiastical life. Similar to earlier Protestant historians, Arnold primarily followed the line of protest through the Middle Ages: Albigenses, Waldenses, Wycliffe and Hus. In regard to the Reformation, Arnold praised its initial renewed spiritual vitality but bemoaned its subsequent dogmatism and concern for externals. Essentially, then, Arnold followed earlier Protestant historians in gravitating to the marginalized characters of medieval Christianity, but he uniquely extended this peripheral gravitation back into the patristic and forward into the Protestant periods. In his view vital Christianity resided consistently, in Baur's words, "outside the limits of the orthodox church, among those who have withdrawn into themselves, or among those whom it has cast out—among the silent and hidden, the misunderstood and the oppressed."⁹⁶

Despite his obvious attempt to make a departure from extant Protestant historiography, in several important ways Arnold's work continued the tradition. First of all, vocal opposition to the institutional church and experience of persecution were criteria for determining the line of genuine Christianity. Like earlier histories such as the *Magdeburg Centuries* and the *Actes and Monuments*, Arnold's work featured competing churches, with the exception that the false church had been enlarged to encompass any hierarchical,

⁹⁵ Baur, *Church History*, 118; Schaff, *Apostolic Church*, 69.

⁹⁶ Baur, *Church History*, 118–19, 124–26, 130, quotation at 130; Schaff, *Apostolic Church*, 69–70.

institutional expression. Arnold also maintained the belief that true Christianity could never be completely overwhelmed.⁹⁷ And, although Arnold claimed ‘impartiality’ and sought to counter what he perceived as dogmatic history, in reality his gravitation to sectarians and rejection of the mainstream church erected an opposite partiality. Schaff judges that his history, “in contradiction to its own title, is but a production of passionate party spirit” against Catholicism, confessional Protestantism, and especially the Lutheran Church of his day.⁹⁸

Arnold’s work can be seen, however, as an important pendulum swing which created new opportunity in the writing of church history. Baur and Schaff see it as a catalyst for more critical historical study and for the eventual waning of polemical history. Both also highlight its novel application to church history of an interest in personal spirituality and practical piety. Schaff, in categorizing various periods of church historiography, follows the dogmatic period with a ‘pietistic’ one, for which he highlights the histories of Arnold and Milner.⁹⁹

C. ‘Enlightened’ Historiography

Our summary of Enlightenment historiographical trends and emphases will follow the scholarly gravitation to four history-writers active in the middle and latter decades of the eighteenth century: Mosheim, Hume, Gibbon, and Robertson. Historiographer Michael Bentley sees the cultural and intellectual transition of the Enlightenment as “most intense” between about 1750 and 1790.¹⁰⁰ This was also precisely the period in which

⁹⁷ Baur, *Church History*, 120–21, 123.

⁹⁸ Schaff, *Apostolic Church*, 70.

⁹⁹ Baur, *Church History*, 134–35; Schaff, *Apostolic Church*, 69–72. The spiritual emphasis in Arnold’s history is observed also by Dickens and Tonkin, *Reformation in Historical Thought*, 118.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Bentley, "Approaches to Modernity: Western Historiography Since the Enlightenment," in *Companion to Historiography*, ed. Bentley, 395–506, at 400.

works of history were in unprecedented popular demand, according to J. B. Black.¹⁰¹

Importantly, it was within this timeframe and alongside these prominent historians that evangelical authors produced their histories.

Mosheim (c. 1694/95–1755) was the only of these four ‘enlightened’ authors to focus more strictly on the history of Christianity. His Latin *Ecclesiastical History* (1755) was finished just before his death. Besides several additional eighteenth-century editions it was translated into German, French and English. The work’s most popular success was via the English translation completed by Archibald Maclaine (1722–1804), a Presbyterian minister in The Hague, and first published in London in 1765. Historians from the nineteenth century to recent years concur in calling Mosheim the “father” of modern church history.¹⁰²

Mosheim himself highlighted unique aspects of his approach in his *Ecclesiastical History*’s Preface and Introduction. In his Preface he noted especially his strict methodology of making use of original, contemporary sources rather than the work of other historians. There exists a strong echo of the humanist cry *ad fontes* in his perspective: as his translator, Maclaine, rendered his words, he had “drawn from the fountain-head” or the “genuine sources from whence the pure and uncorrupted streams of evidence flow.”¹⁰³ A second revising intent was the reclamation of medieval church history, which in his view had been more poorly treated than any other period. He hoped to initiate the task of “dispelling the darkness of what is called, the *Middle Age*.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ J. B. Black, *The Art of History* (London: Methuen, 1926), 14, cited by Barbara J. Melaas-Swanson, "The Life and Thought of the Very Reverend Dr Isaac Milner and His Contribution to the Evangelical Revival in England" (PhD diss., University of Durham, 1993), 156.

¹⁰² Schaff, *Apostolic Church*, 74; Peter Hanns Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), 244 n. 4; Cameron, *Interpreting Christian History*, 149. Cameron adopts the accolade for Mosheim even as he calls it “overused.”

¹⁰³ Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, *An Ecclesiastical History, Antient and Modern, From the Birth of Christ, To the Beginning of the Present Century...*, 2 vols. (London: printed for A. Millar, 1765), 1:xvi–xvii, quotation at xvi; see also xxvi (Introduction).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:xvii–xviii, quotation at xviii.

Mosheim's Introduction first acknowledged that church history could benefit the reader's "piety" by exhibiting "providential wisdom and goodness in the preservation of the church."¹⁰⁵ He then laid out his design to trace development and change in the church as a human society influenced by outward events and human weaknesses. Correspondingly, he divided his treatment into categories of *external* and *internal* history. The first category's discussion he subdivided between "prosperous" and "calamitous" events and between the activities of rulers in extending Christianity's scope and the actions of Christian doctors in benefitting its condition. Internal history he defined as "the *History of the Christian Religion*." Subdivisions within this category included leaders, church government, doctrines and laws, rites and ceremonies, and heresies. He clarified that he used the term 'heretic' not in a derisive sense but rather as a label for those who had caused controversies in the church, whether unwitting or not.¹⁰⁶ Near the end of his Introduction Mosheim declared his plan to further structure his material century by century within an overarching, fourfold periodization demarcated by Christ, Constantine, Charlemagne, Luther, and the present day. Each of these, he claimed, was distinguished by "signal revolutions or remarkable events."¹⁰⁷ The organization of Mosheim's *History* into centuries and thematic divisions mimicked those of Arnold and the Magdeburg Centuriators. At the same time, his effort was a noticeable departure from Protestant tradition in his primary attention to human causal factors and in the absence of theological or prophetic colourings for his various divisions and themes.¹⁰⁸ Mosheim reiterated his human-centred perspective soon afterward in his Introduction: he would enliven his

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 1:xxi; Mosheim also laid out several other practical benefits from the study of history at pp. xxvii–xxviii.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 1:xxi–xxiv.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 1:xxviii–xxix.

¹⁰⁸ In support of this judgment of Mosheim's perspective, see Baur, *Church History*, 146–47, and Cameron, *Interpreting Christian History*, 150.

history by searching out “the secret springs” or causal factors based on political, religious or philosophical history, contemporary writings and personal knowledge of human nature, passions, habits and opinions.¹⁰⁹ He also stated his desire to avoid the bias derived from the spirit of the times and partisan interests.¹¹⁰

What modern scholars consider most unique about Mosheim’s approach are his relatively critical studiousness and his moderate spirit. We have seen his intent to use original sources, to consciously avoid partisanship, and to strip the term ‘heretic’ of its reproachful sense. As Cameron observes, Mosheim inserted his own share of judgments on what appeared in history to be “irrational” or “fanatical,” but nonetheless his work reflected a new critical acumen.¹¹¹ In Schaff’s consideration, Mosheim replaced much of the “polemic zeal for particular confessions” and sharp denunciations of heretics with a more “peaceful, conciliatory spirit.” This involved a tendency to de-emphasize doctrinal and confessional matters which, in Schaff’s view, produced occasional doctrinal aloofness and disregard for any divine quality about the church. Mosheim’s work thus could be associated with the human-centred approach of Hume, Gibbon and Robertson.¹¹²

We turn now to a consideration of general features of Enlightenment historiography. Bentley uses the work of Eric Voegelin to perceive among early eighteenth-century historians a “sense of epoch” due to social shifts such as scientific developments, a growing national and international consciousness, the erosion of the church as a uniting institution, and an increasing adoption of a humanistic outlook. Bentley agrees with Voegelin that such changes undercut the longstanding Christian

¹⁰⁹ Mosheim, *EH (1765)*, 1:xxiv–xxvi.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:xxvi–xxvii.

¹¹¹ Cameron, *Interpreting Christian History*, 150.

¹¹² Schaff, *Apostolic Church*, 72, 73. Similar judgments of Mosheim can be found in Baur, *Church History*, 144–45.

understanding of creation and human history.¹¹³ Enlightenment historians placed greater emphasis on the role of human passions and desires as motivating forces directing events. Schaff identifies all four of the historians named above as exemplars of a ‘pragmatic’ school which sought through historical writing to uncover such inner motivations for the purpose of moral lessons.¹¹⁴ Bentley concurs with this feature of Enlightenment historiography and adds that “few authors ... avoided giving a patina to their text that was intended to elevate the mind of the reader or bend it towards a particular conclusion.”¹¹⁵ In this, Enlightenment authors differed from the ‘erudite’ school which meticulously sifted through records and produced history as an end in itself. Pragmatic historians believed that history could instruct and enlighten its audience, and for this reason they sought to produce entertaining and well-written works.¹¹⁶ One recent source situates the historiography of Gibbon, Hume and Robertson between antiquarianism and politically or ecclesiastically partisan history.¹¹⁷

In varying degrees Enlightenment history-writers also subscribed to a notion of human progress.¹¹⁸ According to Bentley, the Enlightenment outlook “promoted a singular sense of the present as a moment of exceptional importance and weight in the history of the world.” Correspondingly they viewed history with a sense of superiority and were selective in what they would study. They tended to elevate classical civilization and recent times and to deride or ignore medieval history.¹¹⁹ Hume in writing his *History of England*

¹¹³ Bentley, "Approaches to Modernity," 396. Bentley is drawing from Voegelin's 1975 work *From Enlightenment to Revolution* (p. 5). Voegelin's characteristics correspond well with the definition of 'Enlightenment' found in Harry Ritter, *Dictionary of Concepts in History*, Reference Sources for the Social Sciences and Humanities 3 (New York, Westport, CT, & London: Greenwood Press, 1986), 133.

¹¹⁴ Schaff, *Apostolic Church*, 73.

¹¹⁵ Bentley, "Approaches to Modernity," 397.

¹¹⁶ Breisach, *Historiography*, 209.

¹¹⁷ Dickens and Tonkin, *Reformation in Historical Thought*, 136–37.

¹¹⁸ Gerald E. Aylmer, "Introductory Survey: From the Renaissance to the Eighteenth Century," in *Companion to Historiography*, ed. Bentley, 249–80, at 272.

¹¹⁹ Bentley, "Approaches to Modernity," 400, 401, quotation at 400.

began with the recent past and worked backwards, and essentially disregarded Anglo-Saxon history as an uncivilized period. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* used the erosion of ancient Roman civilization as a means of subtly praising modern English political liberties; in his mind his own day was witnessing a cultural renewal which equalled or excelled the Antonine age (AD 98–180).¹²⁰ Joseph Levine observes that Gibbon's work, supposedly on themes of 'decline' and 'fall', concluded with the Renaissance and specifically the "revival of ancient languages and learning."¹²¹

As suggested above, Enlightenment perspectives eroded the Christian understanding of history as a theatre of God's action. In recent decades scholars have countered the earlier notion, however, that Enlightenment writers generally were committed to a secularist or atheist outlook. In an important article, Leonard Krieger posits that the question facing historians should be "not so much *whether* religious elements are present in Enlightened history, but *how* they are present."¹²² He observes, first of all, that the "continued vogue of old-fashioned church history" in traditional or "new-fangled pietistic," "anti-Enlightened" forms weakens the view that history-writing was revolutionized in a modern, secularist direction. Historians, he believes, have failed to grasp the continued overlap between history and religion in the eighteenth century.¹²³ In his view, writers such as Gibbon and Hume certainly maintained an anticlerical attitude towards Christianity. But Gibbon's "opposition to its [Christianity's] dogmatic metaphysics, its institutional intolerance, and its miraculous tradition was mingled with

¹²⁰ Ibid., 403, 405; Aylmer, "Introductory Survey," 273. Bentley (p. 403) points to Gibbon's implicit pride in English freedoms brought by the 1689 constitutional settlement. Here he distinguishes Robertson as possessing "a wider vision and a more historical mind."

¹²¹ Joseph M. Levine, *Humanism and History: Origins of Modern English Historiography* (Ithaca, NY & London: Cornell University Press, 1987), 187, 191, 199; see also Breisach, *Historiography*, 217.

¹²² Leonard Krieger, "The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Historians", *Church History* 47, no. 3 (1978): 287.

¹²³ Ibid.: 282, 283, 286. At p. 283 Krieger associates "traditional" with "learned" historiography, thus possibly meaning the 'erudite' school. Based on Krieger's sources (p. 282), the term "pietistic" refers to German Pietism.

respect for individual Christians and an increasing interest in ecclesiastical history.” Hume, meanwhile, “devoted more attention to the religious beliefs in which he disbelieved than to any other single subject,” primarily because he saw them as of crucial importance historically.¹²⁴ Krieger considers that they were influenced in part by a Protestant anti-Catholicism, but they expanded an anticlerical attitude into a negative account of the church which unified their narratives.¹²⁵

Krieger agrees that these historians “did in fact write secular history” and consequently rejected the notion of particular providence. But he finds in the writings of several Enlightenment historians articulations of belief in a general providence underlying human affairs. These covered a range, from the more sceptical, deistic idea suggested in Hume that a perceptible design demonstrated an “intelligent cause or author,” to Robertson’s relatively conservative statement that “careful observers” could, through reason, “form probable conjectures with regard to the plan of God’s providence and ... discover a skilful hand directing the revolutions of human affairs, encompassing the best ends by the most effectual and surprising means.” One limited divine action to “origins” and the other allowed “persistent governance.”¹²⁶ Krieger argues that while they made few explicit references, Enlightenment historians consistently perceived a divine order which undergirded, or made coherent, human history. The Enlightenment involved not secularization but “the retreat of God from tangible fact to intangible principle.” Krieger concludes that leading historians’ concept of a divine ruler “carried over more specific Christian assumptions than they knew and made their struggle against positive religion

¹²⁴ Ibid.: 289.

¹²⁵ Ibid.: 288, 289.

¹²⁶ Ibid.: 290–91. Robertson’s statement is found in *The Progress of Society in Europe*, ed. Felix Gilbert (Chicago, 1972), xvii. Other recent scholars construe Robertson’s historical view as one of the progressive fulfilment of God’s plan in which he acted indirectly, through human affairs. Alexander Broadie, *The Scottish Enlightenment: The Historical Age of the Historical Nation* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), 57; Breisach, *Historiography*, 216.

more of an internecine conflict than we have known.”¹²⁷

Historiographer Ernst Breisach argues that by the early 1700s, an all-encompassing ‘sacred’ history hinging on prophetic fulfilments was being replaced by ecclesiastical history, the study of the church primarily as a human institution and periodized not by prophecy but by ancient, medieval and modern divisions.¹²⁸ Corresponding with Krieger’s argument, Breisach holds that belief in divine causation was not abandoned but rather was either confined to history’s origin or reduced to a vague notion. Direct intervention was seen as very rare, and historians became preoccupied with secondary causes.¹²⁹ In his view, the unifying principle of Christianity was replaced with various patterns of progress involving differing degrees of fluctuation or alternation between advances and downturns.¹³⁰

III. Evangelicalism and Revival

This overview of historiography from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century provides helpful context for consideration of eighteenth-century evangelical writings on church history. While the primary intent in what follows is to analyze and compare evangelical sources, an awareness of features in traditional Protestant and contemporary history-writing better equips us to elucidate what was unique about evangelical interpretations and to evaluate their religious and cultural significance. Our study will demonstrate that out of an array of factors which gave shape to evangelical historical understandings, the concept of revival emerges as of paradigmatic importance.

¹²⁷ Krieger, "Heavenly City": 296–97.

¹²⁸ Breisach, *Historiography*, 177, 180–81.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 181–82, 199, 205.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 205, 208–210. Breisach’s elevation of progress as a unifying feature is at odds with Krieger’s insistence on the divine principle. The point here, however, is to note general emphases, and both authors discuss progress and divine governance as themes. The two views could plausibly be combined into one in which a divine first cause has set in motion the patterns which order the course of history.

For early evangelicals the importance of ‘revival’ can hardly be understated, as from the late 1730s onwards their self-identity was linked inextricably with their local experience of religious renewal and their perception of an international Revival which bound them together as a phenomenon, a new ‘work of God’. Without concerning ourselves overmuch with the scholarly debate on evangelicalism’s origins,¹³¹ mentioned above, it is significant that scholars generally agree on viewing the Revival of the 1730s and 1740s as a watershed moment, both for evangelicals in subsequent decades and for historians seeking to represent the history of evangelicalism. For example, historian John Coffey, intent to emphasize connections between eighteenth-century evangelicalism and seventeenth-century Puritanism, points to ‘revival’ as one feature which distinguishes evangelicalism.¹³²

It is also important to observe at this point that beyond evangelical usage, the notion of ‘revival’ had a currency in the eighteenth-century English-speaking Enlightenment. Enlightenment historians took interest in what they saw as ‘revivals’ of classical learning or languages, especially in the Renaissance and in their own age, separated by seasons of decline. Declension, of course, was an interest corollary to one in revival, but as a recent work suggests, notions of progress contributed to place emphasis on the upswings of the pattern.¹³³ Significantly, an electronic search within eighteenth-century sources finds over six hundred and fifty works which include the phrase “revival of

¹³¹ Indeed, while the sources to be analyzed here shed light on eighteenth-century evangelical self-identity, it also will be evident that evangelical leaders, partly in an effort to confirm evangelical beliefs and practices, searched for ‘evangelicals’ in every age stretching back to the New Testament, thus complicating any attempt to draw conclusions on evangelical origins.

¹³² John Coffey, "Puritanism, Evangelicalism and the Evangelical Protestant Tradition," in *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (Norton Street, UK: Apollos, 2008), 252–77, at 275–76. Similar conclusions are advanced by other authors in the same collection of articles: see, for example, Michael A.G. Haykin, “Evangelicalism and the Enlightenment: A Reassessment,” 37–60, at 60; D. Densil Morgan, “Continuity, Novelty and Evangelicalism in Wales, c. 1640–1850,” 84–102, at 101–102.

¹³³ Ritter, *Concepts in History*, 101.

religion” and over two thousand which refer to the “revival” of letters, literature, and learning. A decade-by-decade comparison of publication numbers with religious and cultural usages reveals a roughly parallel pattern over the course of the eighteenth century: single-digit numbers for both in the first decade, followed by steady growth through the century. In its religious use, significant jumps in frequency occurred in the 1730s and 1740s, 1770s and 1790s. Its cultural use increased sizeably from the 1750s to the end of the century, again with a noticeable flourish in the 1790s.¹³⁴ Prior to detailing evangelical accounts, then, it is apparent that their use of revivalistic language captured at least an aspect of the spirit of the age.

In summary, the contention to be advanced through this study is that evangelical leaders, possessing a lively historical interest, broadcast interpretations of church history which especially employed revival and declension as an important, even prevailing, pattern. This conception unified their historical accounts and encompassed theological aspects which brought meaning to the past. Part of the formative process entailed mixing the media of traditional Protestant and new ‘enlightened’ interpretations as well as revising or rejecting aspects of each. It could be said, then, that evangelical history-writers were productive of an account of church history which revived or renewed traditional Protestant versions and interacted with leading Enlightenment historians also interested in patterns of declension and revival. The result was a uniquely evangelical cluster of interpretations, significant in itself as a necessary addition to our understanding of eighteenth-century historiography but also by virtue of what these interpretations communicate about early evangelical self-perceptions.

¹³⁴ ECCO, <http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO> (accessed 28 July 2008). This search covered 150,000 books published in the eighteenth century and included any multiple editions present in the database. Some works reflected both religious and cultural connotations of ‘revival’.

Chapter Two – Church History and the Transatlantic Evangelical Revival: From Contemporaneous Accounts to John Gillies’ *Historical Collections*

Participants amidst the transatlantic Revival of the 1730s and 1740s expressed a sense of historical moment, as though what they had witnessed and experienced was a high point in the grand sweep of church history. This was patently the case in 1737 in the comments of English Dissenting ministers Watts and Guyse, cited at the outset of Chapter One, on the Northampton revival as an event unparalleled since the Protestant Reformation or perhaps even since the early church. The sources analyzed here and in the following chapter signify further efforts by evangelicals in the immediate context of the Revival and in the decade following to connect contemporary events with the Christian past. The present chapter focuses on short writings produced in the early 1740s—magazines, a sermon, and yet another preface to a work by Edwards—and John Gillies’ two-volume *Historical Collections* published in 1754. Following this trajectory of sources reveals a deepening historical attentiveness and an expanding evangelical historical vision centred on the phenomenon of religious revival.

I. Contemporaneous Accounts

One example of historical interest in the context of revival arises with Thomas Prince Sr. (1687–1758), a Congregational minister at the prominent Old South Church in Boston and central figure among New England evangelicals participating in an international Calvinist network.¹ On 25 May 1740, on the important occasion of an annual conference of ministers from Massachusetts Bay, Prince delivered an address entitled “The Endless Increase of Christ’s Government,” based on the text of Isaiah 9:7—“Of the

¹ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 142.

increase of his government there shall be no end.”² After setting out a theological framework concerning Christ’s eternal existence and mediatory role between humanity and God, Prince spent more than half of his sermon attempting to trace the “endless increase” of Christ’s dominion on earth and in heaven.

Prince focused primarily on the spread of the gospel in the time of Christ and the apostles. But he also summarized, in sweeping fashion, subsequent ages of the church, casting the chronology in terms of a geographical progression.³ Christians early on were scattered like seed throughout the Roman Empire. Then the church prospered surprisingly within this field, through three centuries of persecution culminating in the conversion of the emperor, Constantine. The figure of Constantine looms as the only individual whom Prince named after Christ and the apostles. He not only halted persecution, but, in Prince’s words, he “openly worships Christ as Lord of all, throws down his crown before him; and not only resigns his whole power and empire to him, but also spreads his kingdom to the remotest nations.”⁴ This geographical expansion continued through the centuries, east through Bohemia, Poland and Russia, north through Germany, Denmark and Scandinavia, and west through the British Isles to the New World. While Prince’s account offered no characteristic Protestant slight on the Catholic ‘dark ages’ and limelight on the Reformation, his geographical sketch still reflected this traditional rendering by deftly avoiding Europe’s enduring centres of Catholicism, such as Italy, Spain, and France.⁵ He left off with a novel interpretation of the course of more recent history, with an eye fixed firmly on stirrings of revival in the New World: “I shall only here observe, that as in the

² Thomas Prince, “The Endless Increase of Christ’s Government,” in *Six Sermons by the Late Thomas Prince, A.M. One of the Ministers of the South Church in Boston. Published From His Manuscripts . . .*, ed. John Erskine (Edinburgh: printed by David Paterson, for William Martin, 1785), 1–39.

³ Prince’s account of Christ’s government on earth runs for twelve pages (18–29) but includes only three (25–27) on the history from post-apostolic days to his own.

⁴ Prince, “Endless Increase,” 25–26, quotation at 26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

mysterious depths of wisdom, but in spotless justice, our divine Redeemer has been for several ages removing the light and grace of his kingdom from the eastern parts of the earth; so, like the apparent course of the sun, he comes on and rises on the western regions; and perhaps ... he may be now opening a way to enlighten the utmost regions of America: And this may be his chief design in these great events.” Prince speculated that this westward march of Christ’s kingdom would continue, all the way back to its source in Jerusalem, at which point a “conflagration” would usher in the millennial reign of Christ.⁶ Then in the final section of his sermon, Prince, pondering the enlarging population of heaven from creation to the end of time, included a brief exclamation on the Christian historical era which reflected his theme of progress: “But what increasing multitudes in every age and nation, since for above 1700 years, have been continually saved, and transported to him in that growing world above!”⁷

William Cooper (1694–1743), Prince’s Boston colleague at Brattle Street Church, similarly ruminated on history in a conspicuous public place, in this case in a preface to Edwards’ *The Distinguishing Marks Of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741). Alongside a call for the collection of contemporary narratives of religious conversion, he framed Edwards’ own analysis of revival with a panoramic sketch of the work of God in history. Like Prince, Cooper employed an astronomical image to represent his interpretation. God’s design, in Cooper’s view, progressed in stages from the Hebrew patriarchs and Moses through Christ to his own day, with each stage constituting an increase in glory like a dawning sun which overwhelms or eclipses the light of the stars.⁸

Within this overall scheme, Cooper represented history from the time of Christ to

⁶ Ibid., 27–28.

⁷ Ibid., 29–34, quotation at 32. Prince’s eschatological framework and cosmic proportions combined with his keen eye to contemporary events correspond with the historical vision of his friend and ministerial colleague in New England, Jonathan Edwards (see Chap. Three).

⁸ William Cooper, Preface, in Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 215.

the present as a series of dramatic renewals separated by long stretches of decline. He wrote that after the “large effusion of the Spirit” and dawn of the “Gospel light” at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit gradually withdrew, the effectiveness of the gospel waned, and “the state of Christianity withered in one place and another.” He offered no details on the medieval Church, but for the reader it was clear that corruption persisted until Cooper’s next historical marker, the Protestant Reformation, when light again “broke in upon the church, and dispelled the clouds of antichristian darkness that covered it.” This high point brought powerful preaching, conversions, and transformed lives. Yet, according to Cooper, Protestant churches like their ancient counterparts subsequently lapsed into a “dead and barren time” marked by absence of the Spirit’s influence, few or doubtful conversions, and a listless Christianity. He concluded with a bold assessment of recent events which were the subject of Edwards’ scrutiny. Cooper echoed what Watts and Guyse had written in relation to the previous Northampton revival: “The dispensation of grace we are now under is certainly such as neither we nor our fathers have seen; and in some circumstances so wonderful, that I believe there has not been the like since the extraordinary pouring out of the Spirit immediately after our Lord’s ascension. The apostolical times seem to have returned upon us....”⁹

Finally, as revivals spread in Britain and New England and transatlantic networks strengthened in the early 1740s, evangelical magazines appeared which sought in part to establish the revivals as a central feature of the church’s history.¹⁰ A number of these searched the Christian past for revival precedents. This was the case with the first

⁹ Ibid., 216–17. Marsden, *Edwards*, 235–36, highlights Cooper’s historical sketch but uses it primarily to comment on his interpretation of contemporary events and implicit criticism of fellow ministers who did not support the Revival. Cooper’s historical depiction, in its broad temporal scope, division into progressive ‘dispensations’, focus on the Spirit’s role in conversion, reference to particular scriptural texts, and usage of astronomical imagery, mirrors Edwards’ (Chap. Three).

¹⁰ Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 156–57, 172–74, and 223–24.

publication to appear, beginning in September 1740 under the title, *The Christian's Amusement containing Letters Concerning the Progress of the Gospel both at Home and Abroad etc. Together with an Account of the Waldenses and Albigenses...*¹¹ The magazine was produced by London printer John Lewis, a Calvinist Methodist and member of Whitefield's London Tabernacle. Lewis's early issues included excerpts from, or recommendations of, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century divinity. Moreover, as the full title indicates, they inferred a pedigree for Methodists by offering stories of medieval groups which experienced persecution from Catholic authorities and which Protestants would come to see as their forebears, courageous preservers of genuine Christianity in 'dark' centuries. After Whitefield adopted the publication as his mouthpiece in 1741 and narratives of the "present progress of the gospel" multiplied, the magazine's historical content waned.¹²

Other magazines similarly preoccupied with accounts of Christianity's 'progress' appeared in subsequent years: first William M'Culloch's *The Glasgow-Weekly-History Relating to the Late Progress of the Gospel at Home and Abroad...* (derived primarily from the London magazine) in 1742; then, in 1743, *The Christian History, Containing Accounts of the Revival and Propagation of Religion in Great Britain and America...*, published in Boston by Thomas Prince Jr. under the influence of his father, Prince Sr., and finally James Robe's *The Christian Monthly History or an Account of the Revival and Progress of Religion Abroad and at Home* in Edinburgh.¹³ Their chief purpose, alongside Lewis' London paper, was the dissemination

¹¹ See Susan Durden, "A Study of the First Evangelical Magazines, 1740–1748", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 27, no. 3 (1976): 257 n. 5, and analysis 258–66. Biographical information on Lewis is from Susan Durden, "Transatlantic Communications and Literature in the Religious Revivals, 1735–1745" (Ph.D. diss., University of Hull, 1978), 83 n. 2.

¹² Durden, "First Evangelical Magazines": 258–60. Interest in the gospel's "present progress" was declared in the subtitles of the magazine's two subsequent incarnations up to 1748, first as *The Weekly History* and then as *The Christian History*.

¹³ For discussions of these magazines (including Lewis's in London), see *Ibid.*; Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 156–57, 172–74, 224; Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 67–72; Frank Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity: George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737–1770* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 73–75;

of revival news for contemporary encouragement of revival and as an historical record of remarkable events for posterity—the presence of the word ‘History’ in their titles has primarily to do with the latter intent. James Robe, for example, perceived his task as that of “a faithful Historian” and articulated in a statement of purpose for his *Christian Monthly History*: “Hereby God’s wonderful dealings with His Church in this Age shall be propagated to many Ages to come ... Hereby also proper Materials will be preserved for a History of the State of Religion different from the Transactions of Ecclesiastical judiciaries.”¹⁴ This posture in itself revealed the editors’ sense of the importance of the Revival in a larger historical framework.

But each of these publications more directly attempted to forge a connection between past and present in order to establish evangelical beliefs and practices as part of a long-standing tradition. Susan Durden writes that “concern for the past, and for the respectability gained by possessing such a pedigree was ... a major preoccupation” of these magazines and others which followed.¹⁵ Frank Lambert and Mark Noll echo this in relation to Prince’s *Christian History*. Noll cites Prince’s declared intent to include “the most remarkable Passages Historical and Doctrinal’ from earlier Christian writers.”¹⁶ Lambert highlights Prince’s identification of revivals in history as an effort to place contemporary events within “a rich Puritan and Protestant tradition.” He also links the magazine with Prince Sr.’s *Chronological History of New England* (1736) which placed the colony’s history within a narrative stretching back to creation: “From Prince’s perspective, something great that had begun in the New Testament and revived in the Reformation was being perfected in New England. During the Great Awakening, Prince situated the

Lambert, *Great Awakening*, 151–74; Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys*, History of Evangelicalism (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 116–19.

¹⁴ *Christian Monthly History*, cited in Durden, “First Evangelical Magazines”: 270, 271.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 258.

¹⁶ Noll, *Rise of Evangelicalism*, 118, citing the *Christian History* for 5 March 1743.

evangelical revival within his grand historical scheme primarily through the *Christian History*....”¹⁷ These publications, although not ordered as systematic, chronological histories, nonetheless exemplify an historical consciousness among revival leaders and, more importantly for this study, an interest to contextualize revival occurrences within a broader historical framework.

II. John Gillies’ *Historical Collections*

A much more substantial early evangelical interpretation of church history appeared in the two-volume work by John Gillies entitled *Historical Collections Relating to Remarkable Periods of the Success of the Gospel, and Eminent Instruments Employed in Promoting It*, produced in 1754.¹⁸ Gillies (1712–96) was a Church of Scotland minister at College Church (also known as Blackfriars) in Glasgow.¹⁹ His ordination and appointment took place in July 1742, the very month in which a mass awakening occurred around a communion celebration in nearby Cambuslang under the leadership of Whitefield and several Church of Scotland ministers. When a second communion was organized for one month later, on 15 August 1742, the roughly thirty-year-old Gillies (alongside other young ministers) was

¹⁷ Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, 73–75, at 75, citing the *Christian History* for 5 March and 9 April 1743 and 6 October 1744, and Lambert, *Great Awakening*, 119–20.

¹⁸ John Gillies, *Historical Collections Relating to Remarkable Periods of the Success of the Gospel, and Eminent Instruments Employed in Promoting It* ..., 2 vols. (Glasgow: printed by Robert and Andrew Foulis, 1754). Gillies’ publishers, the Foulis brothers, Ned Landsman describes as “Glasgow’s most esteemed publishers” who originally were critics of the Scottish revivals. In the 1750s they were printers for Glasgow University and publishers of the influential works of moral philosopher Francis Hutcheson. Ned C. Landsman, “Presbyterians and Provincial Society: The Evangelical Enlightenment in the West of Scotland, 1740–1775”, *Eighteenth-Century Life* 15 (1991): 199. Gillies added a 251-page *Appendix* in 1761, and in 1796, after Gillies’ death, his associate John Erskine of Edinburgh published a 93-page *Supplement to ... Historical Collections*, based on Gillies’ notes. These additions focused primarily on contemporary accounts.

¹⁹ Gillies should not be confused with his nephew John Gillies (1747–1836), who lived with his uncle in Glasgow while attending university and went on to succeed William Robertson as Royal Historiographer for Scotland. He published respected histories of ancient Greece (1786) and King Frederick II of Prussia (1789). See W. G. Blaikie, revised by C. W. Mitchell, “Gillies, John (1712–1796)”, in *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10743> (accessed 14 April 2008), and W. W. Wroth, revised by I. C. Cunningham, “Gillies, John (1747–1836)”, in *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10744> (accessed 14 April 2008). This confusion is made in David Allan, *Virtue, Learning and the Scottish Enlightenment: Ideas of Scholarship in Early Modern History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 171, 214, which refers to the “radical Glaswegian minister John Gillies” but cites the work of his nephew.

called on to assist. He soon married the daughter of the Rev. John Maclaurin of Glasgow, an elder statesman of the Cambuslang revival.²⁰ Gillies went on to develop remarkably broad and important connections. He corresponded with Edwards; he also developed a friendship with Whitefield, offered him his pulpit, and became his first biographer.²¹ Moreover, he was one of the most receptive ministers in Scotland to John Wesley, again offering his Glasgow pulpit and even attempting, with limited success, to introduce Methodist singing to his congregation. Wesley first stayed with Gillies for a week in April 1753 and during this time helped Gillies to select material for his publication; shortly thereafter Gillies wrote to Wesley acknowledging his “important assistance in my ‘Historical Collections.’” Wesley visited on at least five subsequent trips to Scotland up to 1786.²² Michael Crawford describes Gillies in the decade of the 1750s as “the focal point of the British/American evangelical connection for collecting and publishing religious intelligence,” effectively situating him as successor to the evangelical magazine editors of

²⁰ Hew Scott, ed., *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae: The Succession of Ministers in the Church of Scotland from the Reformation*, rev. ed., 7 vols., vol. 3, Synod of Glasgow and Ayr (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1920), 399, gives his ordination date as 2 July, in contrast with 29 July in John Erskine, Addendum No. 5, “Account of the Reverend Dr Gillies,” in John Gillies, *A Supplement to Two Volumes (Published in 1754) of Historical Collections, Chiefly Containing Remarkable Instances of Faith Working by Love ...* (Edinburgh: printed for Archibald Constable, 1796), 83–93, at 86–87. William McCulloch, minister at Cambuslang and central figure in the revival, included Gillies’ name on a list of those helping with the second communion event. Arthur Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival: The Scottish Evangelical Revival of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Banner of Truth, 1971), 120. Noll, *Rise of Evangelicalism*, 113, explains that “in the rush of events younger ministers and probationers were enlisted to assist.” See pp. 109–114 for a summary of events at Cambuslang and nearby Kilsyth. Landsman, “Presbyterians and Provincial Society”: 196, includes Gillies in a group of young evangelicals completing their education and entering ministry in the 1730s and early 1740s who would soon compose the leadership of the Popular wing of the Scottish Church opposite the Moderates (headed by William Robertson) who had been their classmates.

²¹ Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*, Library of Religious Biography (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 76, 139, 208, 218. Gillies’ *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield* appeared in 1772, just two years after Whitefield’s death.

²² Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 225, 231, 233, 307 n. 42; Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 33; John Wesley, *Works of John Wesley*, vol. 18–23, *Journal and Diaries*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988–1995), 20:453–55, 21:105–106, 194, 22:317; Samuel J. Rogal, *John Wesley’s Mission to Scotland, 1751–1790*, Studies in the History of Missions 3 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 42–53, 55–56; “John Wesley’s Links with Scotland,” *Methodist Recorder Online, Methodist Heritage*, <http://www.methodistrecorder.co.uk/Scotland.htm> (accessed 20 November 2006); D. Butler, *John Wesley and George Whitefield in Scotland; or, The Influence of the Oxford Methodists on Scottish Religion* (Edinburgh & London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1898), 125, 127; Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 221–22.

the 1740s.²³

As the title of his work suggests, Gillies collected and compiled historical material from a variety of sources. This style of presenting material was relatively common leading up to his day. At least sixty publications with ‘Historical Collection’ or ‘Collections’ in their titles appeared in the century prior to Gillies’ work. These included histories of noble families, monarchs, parliamentary proceedings, voyages, wars, the corruptions of ‘popery’, and modes of church government. The format was used for several substantial histories, for example Thomas Salmon’s *Historical Collections, Relating the Originals, Conversions, and Revolutions of the Inhabitants of Great Britain to the Norman Conquest...* (London, 1706) and Sir James Dalrymple’s *Collections Concerning the Scottish History, Preceding the Death of King David the First, in the Year 1153* (Edinburgh, 1705), which was referred to in subsequent literature as Dalrymple’s *Historical Collections*.²⁴

Evidence suggests that Gillies’ volumes had an important and enduring influence. Hints of its popularity are given in an ‘advertisement’ at the front of the first volume, which acknowledges that although the work was larger than originally intended, the extra expense associated with this was “sufficiently answered by the numerous Subscription with which Providence has favoured the Undertaking.”²⁵ It appears that many of these subscriptions came from south of the border via Wesley; Gillies wrote to him on 1 September 1757: “I find both now and formerly, that Scotland is a bad place for getting subscriptions for Books. I have hardly been able to publish the *Historical Collections*, but for the subscriptions you got me in England.”²⁶ The work was present in John and Charles

²³ Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 233.

²⁴ ESTC (accessed 23 May 2008).

²⁵ Gillies, *HCL*, 1:iii. By 1791, however, the volumes were labelled “scarce” by a bookseller. John Todd, *J. Todd’s Catalogue of Ancient and Modern Books, Prints, & Books of Prints, For the Year 1791. ... To Be Sold ... On Tuesday the 7th of December, 1790* (York, 1790), 98.

²⁶ *A Collection of Letters, On Religious Subjects, From Various Eminent Ministers, and Others; To the Rev. John Wesley* (London: printed for G. Whitfield, 1797), 55.

Wesley's respective libraries.²⁷ Two decades later, Baptist minister John Ryland made use of, and recommended, Gillies' volumes in his own work.²⁸ Gillies' preface and historical content from the apostolic age to the seventeenth century were reprinted in *The Methodist Magazine* in four- to eight-page increments from January 1800 through November 1801.²⁹ In 1845, almost a century after its first publication, the prominent Scottish evangelical (and by then Free Church) minister Horatius Bonar republished Gillies' work with the observation that it had been "known and prized by the Christian Church."³⁰ Some interest persevered through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, at least in Presbyterian circles.³¹ This is an important evangelical source, from a Scottish perspective, which to date has received very little analysis, especially in regard to Gillies' first volume which covered church history from Pentecost to the seventeenth century.³²

From the outset of his *Collections*, Gillies established several key elements of his interpretive stance. His reference on the title page to Jesus' words from Matthew 28:19–

²⁷ Volume Two is part of the book collection at John Wesley's house next to City Road Chapel, London, and the complete work is in the Charles Wesley Family Book Collection (item #72) housed at the Methodist Archives and Research Centre, John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester. Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley's Reading: Evidence in the Book Collection at Wesley's House, London", *Methodist History* 41, no. 3 (2003): 128; Randy L. Maddox, "Online Guide for 'Charles Wesley Family Book Collection'," *Methodist Archives and Research Centre*, <http://rylibweb.man.ac.uk/data1/dg/methodist/cwesley.html> (accessed 20 November 2006). Maddox points to Wesley's journal for evidence that he read and appreciated Gillies' work; see entry for 24 June 1755 in Wesley, *WJW*, 21:20, also pp. 18–19 and 18 n. 65 (16 and 23 June 1755) for hints of the work's influence on his thinking about the Revival in England.

²⁸ John Ryland, *Contemplations on the Beauties of Creation, and on All the Principal Truths and Blessings of the Glorious Gospel...*, 3rd ed. (Northampton, England: printed by Thomas Dicey, 1780), 364.

²⁹ *The Methodist Magazine*, vols. 23 (1800) and 24 (1801).

³⁰ John Gillies, *Historical Collections Relating to Remarkable Periods of the Success of the Gospel* (Kelso, Scotland: printed at the Border Watch Office, 1845), quotation at 584. This edition included the content of the *Appendix* and *Supplement*. Bonar was an important figure in the Disruption of 1843; see Hew Scott, ed., *Festi Ecclesiae Scoticae*, rev. ed., vol. 2, Synods of Merse and Teviotdale, Dumfries, and Galloway (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1917), 74.

³¹ In the late nineteenth century Gillies was, according to Scottish minister D. Butler, "still known" for his *Collections*. Butler, *Wesley and Whitefield in Scotland*, 124. Reformed evangelical publisher Banner of Truth produced a facsimile edition in 1981 under the title *Historical Collections of Accounts of Revival* (Fairfield, PA), and in 1992 a Korean translation of Bonar's republication appeared as *18-segi ūi nidaeban yōngchōk pubūng*, trans. Nam-Joon Kim (Sōl: Tosō Ch'ulp'an Sollomon).

³² Lambert, *Great Awakening*, 174–78, entails the most extensive published analysis of Gillies' work to date. Lambert's main interest, however, is in the effect of Gillies' work on an evangelical conception of local revivals in the 1730s and 1740s as one monumental event. Brief references, cited below, appear in works by Crawford, Durden, Hindmarsh, and Noll.

20—“Go and teach all nations:—and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world”— immediately asserted his preoccupation with themes of the progress or spread of the gospel and Christ’s continual presence with those who followed his commission. He embellished his perspective in his preface, subtitled “Of the Characters and Uses of this Kind of History.” The historical medium of the New Testament Gospels, the Book of Acts, and sections of the Epistles proved for Gillies that “historical narrations of the success of the gospel ... have a tendency, by the divine blessing, to promote real religion.” He also discerned a “Scripture-pattern of this species of writing” based on New Testament accounts which featured instances of widespread conversion and stories of “eminent” individuals. More specifically, he planned to follow them in detailing, as much as possible, numbers of converts, factors which occasioned conversions, and evidence of holiness. Specific texts (for instance 1 Thess. 1:5–8 and 3:5–6) proved for him a divine mandate to search out and circulate accounts of gospel success since, as he put it, “example has so peculiar an influence.”³³

Drawing from his reading of Scripture, Gillies pre-emptively set out a pattern for sacred history. The “most threatening dangers and lowest times have frequently been soon followed with the most signal appearances” in favour of the gospel, as exemplified in Israel’s exodus from Egypt and return from Babylon, the spread of the early Christian church, and the Protestant Reformation. Perhaps with his dedicatory verses in mind but also echoing earlier Puritan-Presbyterian historiography, Gillies elaborated that throughout history when the church’s “power is gone, and she seems in imminent danger of being consumed,” then God in fulfilment of his promises “seasonably interposes; and the time of need proves the time for the Lord to work.”³⁴ This was not a perfectly repeating cycle

³³ Gillies, *HCL*, 1:iv–vi.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:xi–x. In support, Gillies referenced Deut. 32:36 and Ps. 119:126.

but rather involved eschatological progression. Gillies concluded his preface with an extended call for his readers to pray and speculated that “the times of the greatest and most extensive flourishing of the gospel promised to the church in the last days” might be imminent.³⁵ Susan Durden takes note of this connection in Gillies’ mind between past, present and future: his *Collections*, written at a time when revival excitement had ebbed, displayed his “faith in the inevitability of full revival as discerned from historical pattern.”³⁶

Gillies’ first volume, our primary focus, covered seventeen centuries of gospel “success”; the second volume was devoted to the first half of the eighteenth century. Gillies’ initial chapter in Volume One highlighted the church’s first three centuries and especially its spread. This particular interest was reflected both in the chapter’s heading which highlighted the gospel’s “quick and extensive Progress” during this period and in his reliance on the work of the Rev. Robert Millar (1672–1752), his recently deceased colleague of nearby Paisley, entitled *A History of the Propagation of Christianity, and Overthrow of Paganism* (1723).³⁷ Gillies drew from Millar a description of the early spread of Christianity as “remarkable,” considering both the gospel’s spiritual emphasis in contrast with the temporal preoccupations of the surrounding culture and the concomitant force of opposition against it. The pre-eminent cause given for this success, however, removed any sense of surprise for the reader: Christianity “prospered, being attended with the power of God.”³⁸ Gillies added several other causes, all subservient to “divine providence”: learned men’s conversions and their compelling apologies for Christian belief; zealous teaching,

³⁵ Ibid., 1:vi–x, quotation at x.

³⁶ Durden, "First Evangelical Magazines": 274.

³⁷ On the influence of Millar’s two-volume work, especially for the British missionary movement which blossomed in the late eighteenth century, see John Foster, "A Scottish Contributor to the Missionary Awakening: Robert Millar of Paisley", *International Review of Missions* 37 (1948), and Ronald E. Davies, "Robert Millar—an Eighteenth-Century Scottish Latourette", *Evangelical Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (1990). The apparently profound influence which Millar’s work had on eighteenth-century evangelical leaders, including Gillies and Edwards (see Chap. Three), needs to be examined in more depth.

³⁸ Gillies, *HCL*, 1:1.

prayer and proclamation; exemplars of holy living; and Christians' endurance in suffering.³⁹ The latter two causes took precedence for much of the chapter, in a sketch of ten Roman persecutions of Christians. This emphasis was summed up adequately in a statement drawn from Millar that "the courage, constancy and patience of the martyrs, with the holy lives and zealous endeavours of the primitive Christians, to promote the kingdom of Christ, did very much tend to advance the glory of our Redeemer, and the good of the church, in spite of all the persecutions which the enemy of mankind raised against it."⁴⁰ Gillies assented to Millar's view that God's intervening hand was displayed in the grisly fates of emperors who had persecuted Christians.⁴¹

A second chapter encapsulated gospel 'success' from the fourth to the sixteenth centuries. Gillies' compilation again employed language of providence, citing the demise of pagan religion as proof that Christ's kingdom would endure and not be conquered by human kingdoms. Anticipating Constantine's day, Gillies' text declared: "No less than a Divine Power could banish Heathenish idolatry, which had been the religion of the world for so many ages, was firmly rooted by custom, and supported by all the authority of the Romans, who had then dominion over the world: yet now we shall see idolatry ruined and abandoned, and the Roman empire itself become, in profession, Christian."⁴²

Despite Gillies' inclusion of providentialist language, comparison with his source—again Millar—reveals that on the rise of Christendom Gillies was actively qualifying and altering. At the end of the above citation, the words "in profession" were Gillies' own insertion, giving the impression of a nominal, rather than genuine,

³⁹ Ibid., 1:3–7.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1:16. The 'ten persecutions' account is at pp. 7–20.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1:18–19. This interpretation would reappear later, for example in reference to "providential chastisements" on persecutors of Hussites and Puritans (1:52, 246–47).

⁴² Ibid., 1:20.

Christianization of the Empire.⁴³ Whereas Millar had celebrated in triumphal terms Constantine's conversion and promotion of Christianity, Gillies' portrayal was comparatively subdued. He demurred on the question of whether Constantine became a true Christian but agreed that the Emperor assisted Christians and "advanced Christianity, which had been so much trampled on, to be the religion of the empire."⁴⁴ Millar had invoked "God in his infinite Goodness" as cause of this advancement; Gillies dropped this reference, and precisely at this point in his text inserted a critical footnote: "On the other hand," he wrote, "it must be owned, that his heaping so much wealth and honour upon church-men, and his blending the church and state together, did, through human corruption, great hurt to Christianity."⁴⁵

Evidently Gillies perceived in Constantine the beginnings of a process of corruption which escalated rapidly in ensuing centuries. In a volume just shy of five hundred pages, he treated the institutional Church of the fifth through thirteenth centuries in a single page, and prefaced his discussion with a blunt apology: "That the Reader may not be surprized to find so little said upon such a number of centuries, it is proper to observe, that this period does not afford much matter upon the success of true Christianity." He continued by referring "the inquisitive reader" to the second volume of Millar's work for "a specimen of such accounts as are to be had."⁴⁶ Millar in fact had

⁴³ Compare Robert Millar, *The History of the Propagation of Christianity, and Overthrow of Paganism...*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: printed by Thomas Ruddiman, 1723), 1:573. Gillies also removed some of Millar's harsher language in reference to pagan, classical Rome: Millar had spoken of heathenism as something which "powerfully influenced the Minds of deluded Men" and which took root not only through governmental authority but also "by the Arts of Satan."

⁴⁴ Gillies, *HCL*, 1:20–21.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, quotation at 21 n. 'b', and Millar, *Propagation of Christianity*, 1:574–96. At the end of his presentation of Constantine, Millar had made one critical judgment, observing that from Constantine's day "riches did increase in the Church" and "Schisms, Divisions, and many superstitious Customs crept in with them" (p. 596). Considering Gillies' interaction with Wesley, the striking similarity of language between Gillies' judgment of Constantine and Wesley's utterances in the early 1780s (see Chap. Four) poses the possibility that they conferred on this point.

⁴⁶ Gillies, *HCL*, 1:29.

covered the fifth through fifteenth centuries in a chapter extending over one hundred pages.⁴⁷ While Gillies did not negate Millar’s material, he clearly was more dismissive of medieval Christendom. One possible explanation is a more pronounced anti-Catholic attitude.⁴⁸ This is suggested by what he did include, highlighting, from another section of Millar’s work, churches in India and Ethiopia which were “very ancient” and which condemned “the errors and corruptions of the church of Rome” and exalting ancient Celtic Christianity as a more pristine faith pre-existing Roman Catholicism in Scotland.⁴⁹ In light of other material (discussed below) which he included a few pages later, however, it is evident that he did not view the Catholic Church as spiritually bankrupt. A more plausible explanation is that Gillies, preoccupied with revival, focused his attention not on the geographical spread of Christianity *per se* but rather on dramatic occasions of renewed faith and practice which seemed to correspond with evangelical experience. Lambert, while not directly addressing differences between Gillies and Millar, observes that “Gillies’s history is not a narrative of the advance of Christianity in particular” but is concerned instead with instances of “piety” or “practical religion.”⁵⁰ In Gillies’ view, such instances were lacking in medieval Christendom.

Gillies’ *Collections* then shifted to the story of those who visibly opposed Roman

⁴⁷ Millar, *Propagation of Christianity*, 2:89–196.

⁴⁸ Stephen Stein, in Jonathan Edwards, *WJE*, vol. 5, *Apocalyptic Writings*, ed. Stephen J. Stein (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1977), 54, similarly describes Millar’s work as “anti-Catholic.” But even as his work denounced ‘popery’ and contrasted Protestant and Catholic missions, it gave attention to Catholic missionary ventures and the Catholic Church’s geographical spread before and after the Reformation. This should distinguish Millar somewhat from other Protestant history-writers who swept aside or denigrated Catholic expansion.

⁴⁹ Gillies, *HCL*, 1:29. The latter was a well-established Presbyterian argument which promoted the Culdees as proto-presbyterians. This interpretive stance was being actively debated in eighteenth-century Scotland, the opposite sides represented by the Seceders and the Church of Scotland’s Moderate party. See the discussion in Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland’s Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689–c. 1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chaps. 4 and 8, as well as Allan, “Protestantism, Presbyterianism and National Identity,” 188. While neither of these studies treats Millar or Gillies, both eighteenth-century works would appear to fit comfortably alongside those who, Kidd says, “continued unselfconsciously in the Culdaic tradition” (p. 189). That is, their interpretations leaned towards the Seceders’ view, but they remained aloof from the historiographical contest.

⁵⁰ Lambert, *Great Awakening*, 176.

Catholicism prior to the Reformation, a roster of protesters familiar and well-loved by Protestants since the days of Flacius and Foxe: Waldenses and Albigenses, Wycliffe, Hus, and Jerome of Prague.⁵¹ As we have observed, Foxe made God’s promise to establish and preserve the church the cornerstone of his historical presentation, and thus discerning a continual presence of ‘true’ believers in every age became vital. Gillies ascribed to much the same perspective in his preliminary material. Now in the content of his history he included citations which emphasized the antiquity and endurance of protests against corruptions of the Roman Church. From Presbyterian minister Benjamin Bennet’s *Memorial of the Reformation* (1717) he took the view that Waldenses had their roots in the fourth century or even in apostolic times. From moderate Puritan Samuel Clarke’s *A General Martyrologie* (1660) he adopted the positions that Waldenses emerged especially “when the darkness of Popery had overspread the Christian world,” that Albigenses, distinct in name only, “lay hid like sparks under the ashes” until the time of Luther, and that together these demonstrated “constancy in suffering for the truth.”⁵² Gillies drew from Millar a presentation of Wycliffe and the Lollards as ‘proto-Protestants’: through their courageous opposition to Roman corruptions and promotion of the Scriptures among the common people, these individuals planted “seeds of sacred truth” which later “helped to produce a plentiful harvest, when Almighty God, to shew forth his glory, brought about the reformation from Popery.”⁵³ In a footnote Gillies also filled in the historical picture for Scotland, referring to John Knox’s *History of the Reformation* and specifically to fifteenth-century Glasgow records in which Knox had located evidence of

⁵¹ Gillies, *HCL*, 1:30–52.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 1:30–33, quotations at 30, 33. Gillies’ references correspond to Samuel Clarke, *A General Martyrologie, Containing a Collection of All the Greatest Persecutions which have Befallen the Church of Christ, from the Creation, to our Present Times ...*, 3rd ed. (London: printed for William Birch, 1677), in this instance within a major section entitled “The Persecution of the Church under the Papacy” (pp. 76, 124).

⁵³ Gillies, *HCL*, 1:34; corresponds with Millar, *Propagation of Christianity*, 2:178.

pre-Reformatation martyrs and their orthodox expressions of belief. Gillies derived from Knox the assertion that God providentially “preserved in this realm some sparks of his light even in time of the greatest darkness.”⁵⁴ Having brushed aside medieval Christendom as nearly void of ‘gospel success’, Gillies found these examples to be critical links in the historical chain of ‘true’ belief as necessitated by his theological perspective.

Gillies’ account largely reflects the traditional Protestant picture of a small, persecuted remnant standing against a corrupt medieval Catholicism. But he nuanced this impression using Clarke’s *Martyrologie*. Clarke had given accounts of nearly fifty individuals in England besides Wycliffe, from the ninth century to the early sixteenth, who stood against ‘popery’. Gillies cited Clarke’s conclusion that God had always maintained “a true church, a true ministry, and true ordinances” on the island, which like a seed came to life (and thus from obscurity into historical view) after the inclement weather of “corruptions and Antichristianity” had passed. Gillies then reproduced Clarke’s immediate reference to Anglican divine Richard Field’s work *Of the Church* (1606), which more ambitiously revised the notion of true Christianity as only a tiny remnant:

Altho’ we do acknowledge WICKLIFF, HUSSE, JEROM OF PRAGUE, &c. to have been the worthy servants of God, and holy martyrs, suffering for the cause of Christ against Antichrist, yet we do not think that the church was to be found only in them, or that there was no other appearance or succession of the church and ministry, as the Papists falsely charge us; for we believe that they who taught and embraced those damnable errors which the Romanists now defend, were a faction only in the church, as were they that denied the resurrection, urged circumcision, and despised the apostles of Christ in the churches of Corinth and Galatia.⁵⁵

Gillies’ use of Clarke and emphasis on Field’s perspective situates his interpretation as

⁵⁴ Gillies, *HCL*, 1:34, n. ‘a’. *The History of the Reformation of Religion Within the Realm of Scotland* was first published in 1587; for Gillies’ material, see John Knox, *The History of the Reformation of the Church of Scotland; Containing Five Books: Together with some Treatises conducing to the History ...* (Edinburgh: printed by Thomas Lumisden and John Robertson, 1731), 1–4, essence of quotation at 4. Gillies misapplied the phrase ‘sparks of light’ to the whole of what Knox had presented in these pages; Knox’s comment specifically pertained to the content of thirty-four ‘Lollard’ articles recorded by Catholic authorities in the Glasgow Register.

⁵⁵ Gillies, *HCL*, 1:35; corresponds to Clarke, *Martyrologie*, 380–81. Clarke gave no details, stating simply that Field “had good reason to say” what he did.

more moderate than his earlier construal of the medieval Church might have indicated. Scholars speak of Ralph and Ebenezer Erskines' Secession Church (from 1733) as continuing a Scottish Covenanting mindset which presented a more radical vision of a suffering, marginalized remnant of true believers through the ages, and it is possible that Gillies was asserting (through English sources) an evangelical ecclesiological commitment to an established Church through his historical interpretation.⁵⁶

Gillies' moderate approach was borne out in his *Supplement to ... Historical Collections*, compiled and published by his friend John Erskine in the year of Gillies' death, 1796. This included writings by Catholics Thomas à Kempis and Archbishop Fenelon of Cambrai, the latter in turn on Catholic luminaries from Cyprian to Bernard of Clairvaux. Gillies cited Fenelon's assessment that Bernard was "a prodigy in a barbarous age" and himself praised à Kempis' character and popular devotional writings. Significantly, he prefaced their inclusion with an observation that these "eminent authors" had been "raised up" providentially "to be instrumental in promoting vital religion by their writings." He chose to highlight them "without regard to those with whom they were unhappily connected; and even without regard to the corrupt mixtures that are to be found in their, otherwise valuable, writings."⁵⁷

Gillies' irenicism becomes more poignant when one considers the anti-Catholicism aroused by legislative proposals in 1778 and 1791 for Catholic relief, in the first instance leading to riots in Glasgow, Edinburgh and especially London. Gillies himself had

⁵⁶ Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past*, 185–86, 200–201; Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), 23, and see 17–23, 28–29 for helpful background on the various Presbyterian ecclesial groups of the first half of the eighteenth century. These scholars describe evangelicals as comparatively more urbane and engaged with cultural trends such as Enlightenment ideas. Note that usage of the word 'moderate' in the text above should not be confused with academic identification of a 'Moderate' party within the Scottish Church.

⁵⁷ Gillies, *Supplement*, 5–7.

proposed a General Assembly committee for the purpose of resisting a Scottish relief bill.⁵⁸ But his friend Erskine, in a reverent biographical synopsis which acknowledged Gillies' vocal opposition to Catholic emancipation, recounted that Gillies had come to the assistance of a Catholic family harassed in Glasgow after the proposed bill had been published.⁵⁹ In his *Historical Collections*, while he clearly disagreed with much of Catholic religion, his Protestantism did not rule out the possibility of 'true' Christianity existing within the Catholic fold.

Gillies concluded his lead-up to the Reformation by including favourable references to the age of Renaissance and exploration. He adopted from Millar the view that "the improvement of arts and sciences, the reviving of learning, and the discoveries made by navigation, were made blessed occasions for advancing the kingdom of Christ over the world."⁶⁰ In discussing the fifteenth century, the focus for Gillies, as for the authors he employed, was obviously the sixteenth century. For example, from Fleming's *Fulfilling of the Scripture* (1669) Gillies highlighted aspects which prepared for the Reformation: increased learning and knowledge of ancient languages, talented men, and the invention of printing which would soon broadcast God's Word "which had for so many ages been shut up." Gillies cited Fleming's description of these as "precious advantages most remarkably from the Lord" which led to the "dawning ... of that blest day of the church's rising, after that dark night of Antichristianism."⁶¹

What follows is a favourable account of the centuries from the Reformation to

⁵⁸ Richard B. Sher, *Church and University in the Scottish Enlightenment: The Moderate Literati of Edinburgh* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 281; Gillies' motion was defeated by 118 to 24 votes. See also Scott, ed., *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae*, 3:399, and Henry Moncrieff Wellwood, *Account of the Life and Writings of John Erskine* (Edinburgh: printed by George Ramsay and Company, 1818), 285, 291, 309.

⁵⁹ Gillies, *Supplement*, 84–85. Butler, *Wesley and Whitefield in Scotland*, 124, similarly highlights Gillies' charitableness, claiming that he "anticipated much of the catholic spirit and toleration" of a later period.

⁶⁰ Gillies, *HCL*, 1:53; material from Millar, *Propagation of Christianity*, 2:340.

⁶¹ Gillies, *HCL*, 1:54; Gillies' references correspond with Fleming, *Fulfilling of the Scripture* (1726), in this instance with p. 327.

Gillies' own day. On Luther, Gillies' source, Clarke, had given numbers of years between Luther's first opposition to Rome and earlier precedents such as the Waldenses, Wycliffe, Hus, and Wessel Gansfort. This at least created an impression of continuity with these protesters and reformers of the High Middle Ages; but Gillies, in footnoted comments, cast these connections more explicitly as fulfilments of prophecy. He referred the reader to an interpretation of the supposed 356-year span between the Waldenses (perhaps thinking specifically of Waldo) and Luther as constituting the three and a half days in Revelation. He also observed an even century between Hus' martyrdom and Luther's first opposition, answering an earlier recounting from Clarke of the tale that Hus at the stake prophesied that "out of the ashes of the Goose (for so Husse in the Bohemian language signifies) an hundred years after, God would raise up a Swan in Germany, whose singing would affright all those vultures: which was fulfilled in Luther, just about an hundred years after."⁶² He continued with a substantial section of nearly seventy pages consisting of accounts of various other sixteenth-century reformers (including Melanchthon, Zwingli, Calvin, Bullinger and Knox) and martyrs or other notable figures (including Patrick Hamilton, George Wishart, Tyndale, Ridley, Latimer, Cranmer, John Foxe, William Perkins, and Thomas Cartwright).⁶³ These were offered as exemplars, clearly instances in Gillies' mind of the 'eminent instruments' promoting the gospel as announced by the title of his volumes. Gillies' chief sources for this section were the martyrologies of Foxe and Clarke, and he followed their interest in the last moments of their subjects' lives evincing either courage and steadfastness in the face of martyrdom, or resolute faith to the point of

⁶² Gillies, *HCL*, 1:57, and 39 for Hus's supposed prophecy. Gillies' references are to Samuel Clarke, *The Marrow of Ecclesiastical History*, 3rd ed. (London: printed [by J. R.] for W[illiam] B[irch], 1675), also known as Clarke's *Lives*, first published in 1650; in this instance, see pp. 116–26 (quotation at 119), 131. Clarke wrote with slightly greater emphasis that Hus' words were "exactly fulfilled in Luther."

⁶³ Gillies, *HCL*, 1:56–123.

natural death.⁶⁴ As Gillies' compilation moved into the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries he again picked up this theme. From Fleming's work he highlighted as Protestant 'successes' the testimonies of martyrs in Catholic heartlands such as Spain and Italy and others' peaceful deaths. The extract from Fleming continued with accounts of nine lesser-known Protestants whose testimonies at death were deemed noteworthy.⁶⁵

Gillies also drew from Fleming some particularly dramatic language for the Reformation. This period was a "high spring-tide of the power and efficacy of the word" and the "dawn" of a "blessed day" after ages of "darkness" and hidden faith. Even more dramatically, the Reformation could be viewed from a cosmic perspective: God "visibly rent the heavens, and caused the mountains [to] flow down at his presence, with so solemn a down-pouring of the Spirit following the gospel, as there could be no standing before it, but cities and nations were subjected to so marvellous a power, to the embracing of the truth."⁶⁶ The minds of Gillies' readers, no doubt, would have moved with ease from this description backward to the Book of Acts and forward to accounts of the transatlantic Revival.

In the next major section, composing over three hundred pages, Gillies continued to trace the stream of vital Protestant Christianity through the seventeenth century. For this account he drew especially from Clarke's *Lives* and Wesley's *Christian Library* (1749–1755), the latter also a collection of sources which Wesley was in the midst of compiling and publishing when he assisted Gillies in 1753. From these authors Gillies repeated stories of particularly 'zealous and diligent' ministers and other individuals in England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and New England. Interspersed within these personal accounts, he included any indications of a more widespread 'awakening': in the West of Scotland in

⁶⁴ For examples of the latter, see *Ibid.*, 1:59–60 (Luther), 67–68 (Calvin), 106–107 (Knox).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:124–34, esp. 125–26, 127–28.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:127.

1625, 1630 and 1638 and Ireland in 1628; more generally in Scotland and England during the Interregnum; in Halle as the centre of the German Pietist movement beginning around 1662; in London with the outbreak of a plague in 1665 (highlighting the role of “silenced,” or nonconforming, ministers); and in the rise and growth of religious societies in England, Scotland and Ireland from the end of the century into the first decades of the next.

Prominent in Gillies’ narratives concerning the British Isles were devout Presbyterians and Puritans. Although his spiritual focus allowed him to avoid the sensitive topics of regicide and excesses of Cromwell’s government, his organization followed the major chronological markers of seventeenth-century history. He demarcated his discussion of faithful ministers in Scotland before and after 1638 (the swearing of the Scottish National Covenant) and in England and Wales before and after 1640 (the approximate start of hostilities leading to civil war by 1642) and 1660 (the Restoration of Charles II).⁶⁷ Gillies’ apparent favour for the religious character of the Interregnum in contrast with the Restoration period was buttressed by an account of the rise of societies for reformation and for propagating the gospel. Gillies encapsulated the view of this account in subtitles indicating that “Profaneness and Debauchery” were “generally discouraged and suppressed in England” in the mid-seventeenth century, whereas “afterwards they overflowed like a Flood.”⁶⁸

Gillies began his second volume, covering the first decades of the eighteenth century, with accounts of Danish missions in India and the forced migration of Salzburg Protestants in the 1720s and 1730s. The text moved quickly, though, into the subject of

⁶⁷ See *Ibid.*, vol. 1 table of contents: Book 3, chap. 1, sections 1, 2 and 5; and chap. 2, sections 4 and 5. Compare Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland*, 15, who asserts that “later zealots” viewed the period 1638–1650 as “the zenith of godliness in Scotland.” Since he associates “zealots” with “modern presbyterian dissent,” he seems to have in mind either Seceders or Free Church proponents rather than eighteenth-century Church of Scotland evangelicals.

⁶⁸ Gillies, *HCL*, 1:423.

local revivals in New England culminating in the “remarkable Revival” at Northampton in the mid-1730s. From this point forward his sources were primarily the products of the transatlantic evangelical network: Prince’s *Christian History* from Boston (which included extracts from Edwards’ *Faithful Narrative*), M’Culloch’s *Glasgow-Weekly-History*, and Robe’s *Christian Monthly History* from Edinburgh, as well as sections from the published journals of Wesley (over fifty pages) and Whitefield (almost thirty pages) recording details and observations on the progress of the Revival.

When we consider Gillies’ historical presentation in the first volume alongside the revival accounts of the second, the overall effect is a continuous narrative of revivals in the church, with pronounced emphasis on recent times. Crawford comments: “Gillies’s collection gives the impression that the first seventeen centuries since Christ were but a prelude to the extraordinary activity of the Spirit in the eighteenth....”⁶⁹ Within a two-volume work composed of over nine hundred pages, the reader arrived at the outset of the Reformation by page fifty-six of the first volume. Perhaps in recognition of a lopsidedness, Gillies had labelled the first of three ‘books’ contained in the first volume “A few *hints* of the success of the gospel from the beginning to the sixteenth century.”⁷⁰

But any perceived imbalance should not detract from the importance of Gillies’ historical effort. The content of the first volume demonstrated the interpretive pattern of recurring revival which he had laid out in his preface, and this not only lent weight to accounts of contemporary revival but also heightened the sense of eschatological import. The reader started with an account of the church’s divine establishment and its phenomenal spread in early centuries despite persecution, skimmed quickly over the

⁶⁹ Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 226. An ‘advertisement’ at the beginning of Gillies’ first volume indicated that if space had permitted, he would have placed even more emphasis on eighteenth-century events, specifically those in the American colonies, among American natives, and in Scotland. Gillies, *HCL*, 1:iii.

⁷⁰ Gillies, *HCL*, vol. 1 table of contents (emphasis mine).

medieval Church, while noting several individuals and groups which preserved vital Christianity, and then moved through progressively larger sections on the dramatic religious reversal at the Reformation (nearly eighty pages), renewal in the seventeenth century among Pietists, Presbyterians and Puritans (three hundred and thirty pages), and finally international Revival in Gillies' day (over four hundred pages). Lambert, focusing on constructions of the 'Great Awakening', sees Gillies' work as important in shaping evangelical understandings of this phenomenon through "presenting it as the extension and culmination of the Reformation" and "situating it as one of a very small number of preeminent events in salvation history."⁷¹ The historical picture magnified the significance of the transatlantic Revival.

There is much within our roster of historical details which Gillies did not cover. He made no mention of early heresies. In his curt treatment of medieval Christendom Gillies passed over any comment on Gregory I, Boniface VIII, and monasticism, although his later additions gave appreciative statements on Bernard of Clairvaux and two members of the semi-monastic Brethren of the Common Life, Thomas à Kempis and Wessel Gansfort. Within the parameters of his obvious interest in the Reformation Gillies did not include Anabaptism. Much of this is unsurprising. We have already situated aspects of Gillies' interpretation within a moderate Presbyterian historiographical outlook, and it follows that he would have had no natural affinity with sectarians or groups traditionally seen as heretical. In a Scottish ecclesial context including Seceders, who had been harshly critical of the Revival when Whitefield failed to support their partisan struggle against the national Church, Gillies had ample reason to avoid any suspicion of sectarianism.

Besides his ecclesiastical commitment, the more obvious filter on what Gillies included or excluded was his attention to 'the success of the gospel'. He gravitated to

⁷¹ Lambert, *Great Awakening*, 178.

figures who appeared to demonstrate a vital Christianity. But most interesting for Gillies were seasons during which Christianity seemed to flourish and spread rapidly. Key seasons were Pentecost and early Christianity under persecution, the Reformation with its doctrinal purity to which the faithful deaths of its proponents gave testimony, and the eighteenth-century Revival with its exemplary leadership, remarkable geographical spread and manifest power in transforming many lives. These were clearly the high points in history. Adding texture in between these historical markers were individual testimonies and the communal witness of the Waldenses and Albigenses in medieval Europe, occasional Catholic spiritual exemplars, and faithful ministries which brought occasional dramatic renewals in seventeenth-century Britain, Germany and the New World. The cumulative effect of Gillies' long section on Puritan and Presbyterian ministers was to elevate the seventeenth century and especially the period from 1638/40 to 1660 as an extended season of gospel 'success' different only in degree from the main historical markers.

Thus the phenomenon of religious 'revival' or 'awakening' emerges as a key factor in Gillies' interpretation. Horatius Bonar, in the preface to his republication of Gillies' work in 1845, grasped its central place in Gillies' conception. He construed Gillies' *Collections* as a history "not ... of the sleeping many, but of the waking few."⁷² Moreover, believing that church history was replete with instances of general awakenings and that these in fact composed "the true history of the Church," he heartily recommended Gillies' work: "Many a wondrous scene has been witnessed from the day of Pentecost downwards to our own day, and what volume better deserves the attention and study of the believer than that which contains the record of these outpourings of the Spirit?"⁷³

Recent scholars who have shown interest in Gillies' volumes likewise highlight its

⁷² Gillies, *HCL (Bonar)*, v.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, v–vi.

revivalist character. Bruce Hindmarsh refers in passing to the *Historical Collections* as “a landmark work in evangelical revival historiography.”⁷⁴ Lambert observes Gillies’ intent “to place the more recent awakenings within an evangelical tradition with roots in the New Testament.” Crawford similarly features the work as an example of the post-awakening attempt to make sense of the Revival through an historical approach, and he describes Gillies’ conviction “that God is working in history, and that his kingdom will spread gradually by means of revivals until it encompasses the globe.” Lambert and Crawford together see Gillies’ use of a New Testament ‘pattern’ as an effort to legitimate contemporary revival accounts.⁷⁵ Reginald Ward summarizes Gillies’ effort as “an updated version of the Acts of the Apostles” which acted as a key source of “propaganda” supporting British revivalists.⁷⁶

Gillies’ sources for his first volume were most often Puritan and Presbyterian writers going back to the mid-seventeenth century. In deriving his revivalist history from these sources Gillies should be seen as the continuator of a tradition which had expressed interest in religious renewal and had sought to promote this through narratives of exemplars and dramatic seasons in church history. The work of Leigh Schmidt reminds that an eighteenth-century evangelical Presbyterian such as Gillies was working within a religious culture which possessed an enduring fascination with revival.⁷⁷ But, as has been asserted in Chapter One, precedents tended to be preoccupied with national or ecclesiastical contexts. Moreover, they were produced in seasons of dramatic political

⁷⁴ Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 195 n. 6.

⁷⁵ Lambert, *Great Awakening*, 175; Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 225–26.

⁷⁶ W. Reginald Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 296.

⁷⁷ See esp. Schmidt, *Holy Fairs*, 21–50. That a revivalist tradition was entrenched in southwestern Scottish Presbyterianism is suggested when one pairs Schmidt’s point that religious vitality persisted in this region from revivals in the 1620s and 1630s through the mid-seventeenth century (p. 35) with the argument of Andrew Hook and Richard B. Sher, eds., *The Glasgow Enlightenment* (East Linton, Scotland: Tuckwell Press in association with the Eighteenth-Century Scottish Studies Society, 1995), 13, that eighteenth-century Scottish evangelical Presbyterianism “was particularly strong in Glasgow and the West of Scotland.”

upheaval or, later in the seventeenth century, amid perceptions of religious declension. Gillies, having witnessed a tangible revival seen as unlike any other within peoples' cultural memories, drew these older sources together and appended to them a full volume of contemporary descriptions to produce something new: a comprehensive view of church history through the lens of revival. For the basis of his pattern he pointed to the supreme example of New Testament accounts. Then he traced the contours of gospel success and reversal, cast in the language of God's faithfulness to the church and periodic direct intervention on its behalf. And in its language and its orientations towards more recent developments, his *Collections* hinted of an optimistic anticipation that this history of salvation could be approaching its grand finale. Gillies promoted an historical interpretation rooted in traditional Presbyterian and Puritan understandings but brought to flower by events of the Revival. His "landmark" work helped to establish this interpretation not only among evangelicals within the Church of Scotland but within a broader, transnational network in which Gillies himself played an important part.

III. Comparative Features

Several commonalities immediately emerge from a comparison of these early sources. One is an emphasis on divine action or providence. This was an obvious theme of Prince's sermon, in which he saw Christ's government manifested in history as an orchestration of his kingdom's growth. Prince seemed to hold an especially high regard for early Christianity, the time of Constantine, and the present day as seasons of divine blessing, and otherwise followed a course of steady development. Other writers demonstrated greater interest in remarkable instances. Cooper's summary identified key moments manifesting the Holy Spirit's presence, such as through powerful preaching and conversions. James Robe's interest in discerning "God's wonderful dealings with His Church" can be taken as representative of the evangelical magazine editors generally.

Gillies prepared his reader well by laying a theological foundation of Christ's continual presence with the church and perennial intervention in fulfilment of his promise to preserve it. Gillies' content focused attention on extraordinary seasons in which, to him, it seemed the heavens had opened and brought spiritual refreshment. But he also gave examples of what he saw to be more ordinary causes of renewal, such as increased learning, effective preaching, and individual examples of holiness. His identification of these as causal factors subservient to God's providence may have been a conscious reaction against the diminishing of divine causation by contemporary writers.

Another consistent interest was in the 'progress' of Christianity. Cooper and Gillies both highlighted widespread conversions and the proclamation of the gospel as key criteria for depicting the landscape of church history; for Gillies, we have found, these factors distinguished true gospel success from propagation of a mere nominal kind. Prince uniquely represented Christianity's expansion as a traceable historical movement from east to west following the vanguard of the Spirit. But his interpretation shared with the others an inherent idea of development. The various magazines in their titles highlighted the "progress" or "propagation" of the gospel, and they depicted this both through historical referents and through their obvious preoccupation with the contemporary Revival. Gillies similarly sought to identify instances of gospel "success," and like the other writers gave the impression of an upward trajectory in history despite setbacks.

An impression of progress was strengthened by expressions of eschatological moment or excitement in connection with contemporary events. Cooper spoke of these events as unprecedented since Pentecost. Prince envisaged the gospel sun now arching from Western Europe to the New World on course for a millennial kingdom. Gillies most explicitly speculated that the fulfilment of biblical promises of an ultimate "flourishing of

the gospel” might be at hand.⁷⁸ These writers’ construals of church history appear as a sanctified alternative to Enlightenment notions of cultural, literary or scientific advancement. Gillies’ portrayal of history fits within Ned Landsman’s characterization of mid-century Scottish evangelicals in and around Glasgow as mediators of revivalistic religion and Enlightenment currents of thought, including in the latter the concept of progress.⁷⁹ It seems his characterization can appropriately be extended to include evangelical writers in other contexts.

An additional shared factor was a broadening geographical horizon for history. Landsman, focused on the Glaswegian context, writes that evangelicals like the *literati* of their day “would substantially enlarge their perspective on their church and their nation, moving away from the rigidly national and sectarian framework of their predecessors and toward the broader perspective of British provincials.”⁸⁰ This assessment again can be applied more generally. In the sources examined in this chapter, some ethnocentrism was present, for example in Prince’s view of the New World situated under the meridian splendour of the light of Christ’s advancing kingdom and in Gillies’ attraction to ancient Culdaic and seventeenth-century Presbyterian and Puritan Christianity. Gillies’ material

⁷⁸ Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 72, notices heightened millennial anticipation among early evangelicals produced by “an up-to-the-minute sense of contemporaneity” which was fostered by “the web of international religious news,” in which all of the above authors participated. Our study clarifies that eschatological expectation associated with the exchange of contemporary accounts was buttressed by historical attentiveness.

⁷⁹ Landsman, “Presbyterians and Provincial Society”. Other ‘enlightened’ evangelical characteristics which he highlights correspond with additional features discussed below, such as a growing provincial identity and international awareness, and emphasis on toleration and catholicity.

⁸⁰ Ibid.: 195. Landsman in another article observes more generally an interest among Scottish evangelicals in the 1740s in “religious developments” elsewhere in the British world (especially in the American colonies) which he sees as a departure from the view that the Church of Scotland was the vanguard of Reformed religion. Ned C. Landsman, “Witherspoon and the Problem of Provincial Identity in Scottish Evangelical Culture,” in *Scotland and America in the Age of the Enlightenment*, ed. Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 29–45, at 30–31, 33–34. This effectively counters the earlier generalization by Ian Clark that Moderate Party leaders in their “world-affirming” stance and resistance to “a narrow and sectarian spirit” differed markedly from their Popular Party rivals. Ian D. L. Clark, “From Protest to Reaction: The Moderate Regime in the Church of Scotland, 1752–1805,” in *Scotland in the Age of Improvement: Essays in Scottish History in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. N. T. Phillipson and Rosalind Mitchison (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), 200–224, at 204.

may have been shaped by national ecclesial tensions, with evangelicals such as himself suspended between Seceders and Moderates. But these debates clearly were not a preoccupation. Gillies was much more interested in cultivating a transatlantic evangelical identity than a Scottish or even a Presbyterian or Calvinist one. The same is true of attempts by other evangelical writers in London and in the rising provincial centres of Edinburgh and Boston to represent Christian revival within an enlarged sphere.⁸¹

Emphasis on the ‘gospel’ also emerges as a feature of these evangelicals’ views of history. Robe assists our understanding in his stated purpose to pass on to posterity “a History of the State of Religion different from the Transactions of Ecclesiastical judiciaries.” Foremost in the minds of evangelicals was not the institutional church with its developments and crises, but rather the progress and decline of gospel influence, or the ebb and flow of vital Christianity. What made this Christian essence most visible in history was ‘revival’ with its accompanying marks, which Cooper and Gillies both identified as documented instances of conversion (individual but especially more widespread) and exemplars of faithful preaching and godly living. A revivalist tradition pre-existed the 1730s, and evangelical magazines and Gillies’ *Collections* frequently drew from sources which composed an important part of this tradition. But the primary interest of precursors such as Fleming and Cotton Mather was in local revivals within their denominational confines. In distinction from Protestant forebears who used history to defend creeds and institutions, these writers sought to promote the perception that God built up his church especially through seasons of ‘gospel success’, as the Holy Spirit enlightened, converted, and produced holiness irrespective of confessional or national borders.

Lambert treats Gillies’ *Historical Collections* as the terminus of a trajectory of sources

⁸¹ This expanding evangelical horizon continued through the century and fed into the missionary ‘awakening’ of the 1790s and early 1800s, which informed the historical presentations of the Milners (Chap. Five) and Haweis (Chap. Six).

beginning with Edwards' *Faithful Narrative* in 1737, through which evangelicals enlarged the concept of revival geographically from local to inter-colonial to transatlantic, and then, in Gillies, set this revival phenomenon within "the great drama of salvation history" stretching back to Pentecost. In Lambert's view, Gillies' work was motivated by an increasing need for a narration of "revival as a coherent story linked across temporal as well as spatial boundaries."⁸² Crawford similarly argues that with the outbreak of widespread revival, evangelical leaders "attempted to assess its meaning not only for their own localities, but also for all of Christianity," and then after the excitement subsided they continued their expansion into a more complete historical picture.⁸³ We have found, however, that evangelicals turned to church history in the immediate context of the Revival rather than afterwards. Leaders gravitated to the Reformation and Pentecost as primary precursors, but they found other examples as well, such as the Waldenses and Albigenses or seventeenth-century Puritans, Presbyterians and Pietists.

Certainly sophistication in terms of historical detail occurred between the late 1730s and 1754. First, Watts and Guyse made brief reference to Pentecost and the Reformation in connection with Edwards' *Narrative*; Avihu Zakai considers these figures "the first to capture the full redemptive significance of the revival in America, and thus to integrate it within salvation history."⁸⁴ Then in the 1740s Cooper and Prince offered much more paradigmatic reflections and magazine editors displayed a popular-level attentiveness to history. Then Gillies published a panoramic picture from the New Testament to the Revival. Akin to earlier evangelical perspectives, Gillies' interpretation elevated early

⁸² Lambert, *Great Awakening*, 9, 78–79, 173–74. Lambert's argument parallels, but also correctly goes beyond, Hindmarsh's recent analysis of evangelical correspondence networks and conversion and revival narratives which identifies an expanding sense among evangelicals that they were part of an international work of God. Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 71.

⁸³ Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 223.

⁸⁴ Zakai, *Edwards's Philosophy of History*, 208.

Christianity and the Reformation alongside the evangelical Revival as the high points of history. But his work also began to develop a more complex pattern of revival and declension hinted at by other sources interested in revival or gospel 'success'. This pattern effectively revised the traditional Protestant rendition. One beheld not simply a golden age, a period of darkness, and the dawn of a new, Protestant day, but rather oscillation which included an admission of renewed declension beyond the Reformation and which culminated (perhaps finally, in these leaders' views) in the transatlantic Revival. This perceived pattern only heightened the conviction that God was doing an even greater work than the Reformation in their midst. A revival-centred vision grew from candid historical comparisons amidst the years of the Revival to a more studied and comprehensive view in Gillies' volumes.

Chapter Three – Church History and Sacred Drama: Jonathan Edwards’ *History of the Work of Redemption*

Jonathan Edwards’ *History of the Work of Redemption* presents us with one of the most multi-faceted and influential evangelical interpretations of church history. It is the earliest substantial history within our timeframe, expressed originally by Edwards as a series of thirty sermons to his Northampton congregation in 1739. Because the work was not published until 1774, in an edition produced by the Scottish evangelical leader John Erskine, our consideration of Edwards falls after that of the sources discussed in Chapter Two. However, its content should be evaluated alongside these other early accounts.¹ Remarkably, the expanding vision of revival from local narrative to a sweeping interpretation of the past which we observed in Chapter Two, in a trajectory of sources covering two decades, seems to have taken place within Edwards’ inquisitive mind between 1735 and 1739 after the first glimmering of religious awakening within his congregation, prior to any perception of an international Revival.

When the *History* appeared in 1774, one British critic deemed it as terribly old-fashioned, “a long, laboured, dull, confused rhapsody,” the product of “the most unbridled imagination” or of an “intoxicated visionary presuming to see the will of God.”² A glance at its publishing history, however, asserts that the work garnered immense respect and popularity. Those responsible for its first appearance in published form seem to have anticipated its popular appeal. In his preface, Jonathan Edwards Jr. emphasized the

¹ Aspects of his interpretation appeared in other works published in his own lifetime, and it is possible that these hints influenced interpretations such as Gillies’ prior to the *History*’s publication. See especially Edwards’ *Distinguishing Marks Of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741) and *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New-England* (1742), in Edwards, *Great Awakening*, and *An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God’s People in Extraordinary Prayer* (1748), in Edwards, *Apocalyptic Writings*.

² Anonymous, *Monthly Review* 52 (London, 1775), 117–20, quoted by John F. Wilson in Jonathan Edwards, *WJE*, vol. 9, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, ed. John Frederick Wilson (New Haven, CT & London: Yale University Press, 1989), 86–87.

work's practicality for the sensitive reader: its "plain good sense, sound reasoning, and thorough knowledge of the sacred oracles, and real unfeigned piety."³ Erskine, who according to Edwards Jr. had particular interest in publishing the *History* from among all extant Edwards manuscripts, introduced the book as follows: "Though the acute philosopher and deep divine appears in them, yet they are in the general better calculated for the instruction and improvement of ordinary Christians...."⁴ Yale editor John F. Wilson agrees that its influence was predominantly at the popular level rather than among academics or elite society.⁵ Besides the 1774 edition, nine subsequent editions or printings appeared up to 1799, in Edinburgh, London and New York. A tally from 1800 to the 1840s finds at least twenty more publications, most of these again from Edinburgh, London, and New York with several more from Leeds, Worcester, Massachusetts, and Philadelphia. It also appeared regularly as part of Edwards' collected works from 1809 onwards. The *History* was translated into Dutch almost immediately, in 1776, Welsh in 1829 and again around 1850, French in 1854, and Arabic in 1868.⁶ In the last fifty years, besides the appearance of Yale's critical edition, several facsimiles of late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth-century editions have been published. Correspondingly the *History* has re-emerged in scholarly discussions.⁷

³ Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption. Containing, the Outlines of a Body of Divinity, in a Method Entirely New* (Edinburgh: printed for W. Gray, Edinburgh, and J. Buckland and G. Keith, London, 1774), v.

⁴ *Ibid.*, iii, vi, quotation at vi.

⁵ Edwards, *HWR*, 81–82. Citations throughout are from the 1989 Yale edition, which reproduces Edwards' original notebooks from which he preached in 1739, as this is the standard edition used in Edwardsean scholarship. Comparison, however, has been made with Erskine's 1774 edition and any important variances noted, since the latter is significant as the original version popularized in the eighteenth century. Despite Wilson's assertion that Erskine's version was heavily edited (and thus also subsequent publications, which all derived from this work up to the Yale edition), we have found that—at least for the purposes of this study—there is little substantive difference. See Edwards, *HWR*, 72–79, for Wilson's analysis of the structure of Edwards' original sermon series with reference to Erskine's publication.

⁶ Edwards, *HWR*, 26–27, 84–85, 95; Thomas H. Johnson, *The Printed Writings of Jonathan Edwards, 1703–1758: A Bibliography* (Princeton, NJ & London: Princeton University Press & Oxford University Press, 1940), 85–95 and 112–27.

⁷ As with Edwards' works generally, there is a burgeoning scholarly corpus analyzing the *History* from both historians' and theologians' perspectives. No attempt will be made here to comprehensively represent recent discussions. The most substantial analysis of the *History* is Zakai, *Edwards's Philosophy of History*.

To what extent may Edwards' work be read as history? This question evoked two opposite responses in the mid-twentieth century: Perry Miller attempted to portray Edwards as an historian in the modern sense, whereas Peter Gay (as cited in the Introduction, above) castigated Edwards' *History* as woefully outmoded, "medieval" in outlook.⁸ In more recent decades scholars have presented in various ways the interplay between history and theology in Edwards' understanding. One aspect of recent scholarship has been an interest in the *History* as fundamentally a theological work. Wilson, for one, argues for a subjugation of the historical content to Edwards' theological framework. Responsible for the modern Yale edition, he criticizes Erskine's edition as misleading through its removal of Edwards' regular repetition of his pivotal scriptural text and doctrinal assertion which effectively created a more streamlined historical narrative.⁹

Other scholars have argued for a consideration of Edwards' approach as a theocentric one which did not subsume history but, more positively, gave it great meaning and significance. Harry Stout contends that Edwards viewed history as "nothing less than a container for the synthetic whole of theology and indeed of God's innermost self-revelation." He clarifies that Edwards approached history through theological lenses in contradistinction to the emerging Enlightenment perspective in which the historian's explanations often lacked reference to the supernatural. In this manner, says Stout, Edwards gave history a "more mythic sense" and wrote it as a "metanarrative of redemption." History was viewed from the divine angle. Stout contends that in this Edwards was an innovator, moving beyond old concepts of history as "genealogy" or "chronicle" and even Puritan attempts to discern "God's Wonder-Working Providence" in

⁸ Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1949), cited by Wilson in Edwards, *HWR*, 96–98; Gay, *Loss of Mastery*, 88–117, esp. 116–17. John F. Wilson, "Jonathan Edwards as Historian", *Church History* 46, no. 1 (1977): 8–13, 15, 18, provides an expert response to Gay and Miller, arguing that both misunderstood and misrepresented Edwards' *History*.

⁹ Edwards, *HWR*, 25, 72–79.

human affairs.¹⁰ Similarly, Avihu Zakai situates Edwards' historical approach in relationship with Enlightenment thinkers as an effort to counter their humanist emphasis. This Edwards accomplished, according to Zakai, through portraying God's redemptive work as encompassing all of creation and history, thus positively reviving a medieval, 'enchanted' sense of time eroded by modern European thought.¹¹

How might eighteenth-century readers have received the content of the *History*? Wilson himself observes that the original work's "greatest influence was in the popular culture as a 'historical' construction of evangelical consciousness rather than as a strictly philosophical or theological treatise like *Religious Affections* or *Freedom of the Will*."¹² Even with some of the framework removed in Erskine's edition, however, theological aspects were prominent in the text. We have already seen that both evangelical and 'enlightened' history-writers commonly brought presuppositions—be they theological or philosophical—to bear on historical content. While Edwards' 'divine' approach disgruntled some early reviewers, many appreciated his work as a soundly biblical and orthodox perspective on the Christian past.

I. The *History*'s Structure

Edwards' *History* contained no preface laying out the work's parameters. These appear, rather, chiefly through the structure of Edwards' entire thirty-sermon series which revolved around three components of a Puritan-style sermon, writ large: a Scriptural text, a doctrinal assertion, and rational proofs. His key text and doctrine acted as an obvious interpretive matrix, and in Erskine's edition these appeared at the outset and occasionally

¹⁰ Harry S. Stout, "Jonathan Edwards' Tri-World Vision," in *The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards: American Religion and the Evangelical Tradition*, ed. D. G. Hart, Sean Michael Lucas, and Stephen J. Nichols (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 27–46, at 27–28.

¹¹ Zakai, *Edwards's Philosophy of History*, xiv, 5, 20–23, 151, 159.

¹² Edwards, *HWR*, 86.

reappeared through explicit reference. First, several foundational theological planks emerge from Edwards' key text, Isa. 51:8: "For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation."¹³ In using this text Edwards immediately conjured up a picture of two opposing spheres—evil versus righteousness and judgment versus salvation—akin to the competing 'true' and 'false' churches of Flacius and Foxe. Edwards' emphasis, however, was clearly on the side of God's sovereignty and provision for the faithful. This is evident also from Sermon One's opening statement, immediately following a citation of the Isaiah text, that its purpose was "to comfort the church under her sufferings and the persecutions of her enemies" through evidence of God's redemptive and protective work on her behalf in every age, leading towards "finally crowning her with victory and deliverance."¹⁴ This theological emphasis allowed Edwards in his narrative to highlight the frequency and severity of opposition to the church and yet also to paint the whole in optimistic tones. George Marsden highlights "conflict between God and Satan" as a "constant motif," with the history detailing "the major theme of God's redemptive work among his chosen people and the minor theme of Satan's opposition."¹⁵

Edwards' key doctrinal assertion was that "the Work of Redemption is a work that God carries on from the fall of man to the end of the world."¹⁶ In connection with his central text and its theological implications, this doctrine emphasized themes of divine sovereignty as well as the perseverance of the church. It also can be seen as placing the burden of proof on the course of history. 'Proof', in fact, was a third traditional element of

¹³ In Erskine's edition, this text first appears at Edwards, *HWR (Erskine)*, 1, and is restated at pp. 258, 307, 310, and 374.

¹⁴ Edwards, *HWR*, 113.

¹⁵ Marsden, *Edwards*, 194.

¹⁶ The doctrine first appears at Edwards, *HWR (Erskine)*, 4, and is repeated most directly at 37, 63–64, 122, 220, 302, 359, 375.

Puritan sermons which Edwards extended to constitute the bulk of his sermon series.

Historical data became the substance by which Edwards would demonstrate the validity or integrity of his argument. If we think of the theological presuppositions as a frame, history composed the visible structure, still under construction.

Edwards' dual themes of opposition and providential growth can be seen in how Edwards set up his third major historical period stretching from the resurrection of Christ beyond Edwards' own day to the end of the world. Edwards viewed the time of Christ (Edwards' second period) and especially the cross as the fulcrum of all history and prophecy; nonetheless, he asserted that God's work of redemption in the subsequent period was to be much more successful by manifesting the "glorious effect" of Christ's atonement.¹⁷ Yet as he embarked on his historical account beyond the New Testament writings, he construed the whole third period as an age of suffering for the church.¹⁸

Within this overall characterization, Edwards subdivided the third period into four sections demarcated by advances in the work of redemption after seasons of decline and strong opposition. Each turning point entailed victorious endings and beginnings. Apostolic days witnessed the conversion of Gentiles and establishment of the church alongside the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple which effectively ended Jewish opposition. In Constantine's day, after a string of persecutions, the heathen Roman Empire fell and a visible church re-emerged. The future renewal of the church would be accompanied by the destruction of Satan's kingdom in the downfall of Antichrist and conversion of the Jews. And at the final Day of Judgment the opposition of Gog and Magog would be vanquished, the physical world and the wicked destroyed, and the church ushered into the heavenly kingdom.¹⁹ Each stage built upon the previous and anticipated

¹⁷ Edwards, *HW*, 345.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 372–74.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 347–53.

the next up to the final judgment. Edwards asserted, for example, that the advancement “in Constantine’s time [was] much greater than ‹that which ended in the destruction of Jerusalem›,” and that “those dispensations of providence that were towards the church of God and the world before the destruction of the heathen empire in Constantine’s time, seem all to be to make way for the glory of Christ and the happiness of his church in that event.”²⁰ Edwards reinforced this construal through astronomical imagery: he presented the entire course of sacred history as a movement from the darkness of night through the reflected light of the moon and stars (representing the Old Testament ‘church’) to dawn (Christ’s incarnation) and the light of day (from apostolic days to the end of history).²¹ Thus through his key doctrine and organization Edwards established a clear pattern of overwhelming corruption followed by spiritual renewal and divine destruction of forces opposed to his work of redemption, within an overall vision of the steady progress of God’s design.

This historical paradigm Edwards made explicit at an early stage. In his presentation of Israel’s history Edwards established a vital link between the advancement of God’s redemptive work and special seasons which he described in terms of effusions of the Spirit or revivals. Key seasons identified were the days of Moses, Joshua, Ezra the priest and the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah. Several of these he compared with Pentecost and the apostolic church.²² Yet even earlier, in his third sermon, Edwards identified an initial “effusion” in the time of Enoch (Gen. 4:26) and asserted an important generalization:

It may here be observed that from the fall of man to this day wherein we live the Work of Redemption in its effect has mainly been carried on by remarkable pourings out of the Spirit of God. Though there be a more constant influence of

²⁰ Ibid., 353–55, quotations at 354 and 355. Unless indicated, word insertions, set off with square brackets or angle quotations, reflect the Yale edition.

²¹ Ibid., 129, 202, 226, 229, 254, 269, 314, 344–45, 360.

²² Ibid., 192, 195, 233, 266.

God's Spirit always in some degree attending his ordinances, yet the way in which the greatest things have been done towards carrying on this work always has been by remarkable pourings out of the Spirit at special seasons of mercy, as may fully appear hereafter in our further prosecution of the subject we are upon."²³

Edwards then followed by connecting this cosmic vision of an historical pattern with the microcosm of the individual's experience of redemption from conversion onwards, which he characterized as one of "ups and downs" within an overarching progression. "So it is," he continued, "with respect to the great affair in general as it relates to the universal subject of it, as 'tis carried on from the first beginning of it after the fall till it is perfected at the end of the world...."²⁴ These citations illustrate well the earlier observation of an expanding vision of revival among Revival participants. Several scholars have highlighted the connection in Edwards' writings between the experiences of individual conversion, local revival and a much broader revivalist vision.²⁵ Contemporary and historical redemptive occurrences, individual and corporate, could be unified under God's grand design.

Despite reference to personal experience as confirmation of a pattern, Edwards viewed Scripture as the foundation of his interpretation. Besides its wealth of historical material, the Bible for Edwards could serve as a kind of template for post-biblical history. Stephen Holmes perceives that since Edwards lacked a "revealed interpretation" he approached church history "using the hermeneutical tools that he had developed." Thus aspects of Scripture's narratives acted as types for post-biblical persons and events, and its

²³ Ibid., 141, 143; quotation at 143; see 145, 195 and 233 for additional examples using the language of 'revival'.

²⁴ Ibid., 144–45.

²⁵ Wilson, at Ibid., 233 n. 5, observes Edwards' tracing of a "pattern of revitalization" in the Old Testament which "strikingly paralleled the experience of the Northampton community." William J. Scheick, "The Grand Design: Jonathan Edwards' *History of the Work of Redemption*," in *Critical Essays on Jonathan Edwards*, ed. William J. Scheick (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980), 177–88, specifically links Edwards' understanding of individual conversion with his thought on the historical progression of God's redemptive work.

prophecies mapped out history's course.²⁶ When Edwards' narrative arrived at the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, he interjected: "Thus far we have had the Scripture history to guide us; henceforward we shall have the guidance only of two things, viz. of Scripture prophecy and God's providence as related in human histories."²⁷

In his concluding sermon, Edwards summarized point-by-point the theology which guided his approach to history and the truth of which, he believed, history demonstrated. Pre-eminently in Edwards' thought, God ruled over, and gave meaning to, all of human history. Edwards spoke in terms of God's providence and redemptive design from beginning to end; "And so," he elaborated, "we have seen how all things are of him, and through him, and to him..."²⁸ Moreover, Edwards believed, God occupied the heart of history in the person of Christ, "the great Redeemer."²⁹ Then Edwards turned to particular providences, exemplified by key moments in redemption history. From a finite human vantage point, these providences might appear a "mere jumble and confusion" of streams, but a cosmic perspective rendered these as tributaries directed according to the perfect design of God.³⁰ The work of redemption also, for Edwards, displayed other divine attributes: his majesty, especially in how he preserved the church; his wisdom in ordaining the historical pattern of "great changes in the world" culminating in the glory of God and downfall of Satan; and his covenant faithfulness.³¹ Edwards again asserted the role of Scripture as the basis for his interpretation. He subjected his use of reason and observation to God's revelation; the Scriptures "alone inform what God is about or what he aims at in

²⁶ Stephen R. Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 118.

²⁷ Edwards, *HWR*, 383. For a sympathetic discussion of the biblical foundation of Edwards' historical interpretation, see Engle, "Edwards as Historiographer", 6–11, 15.

²⁸ Edwards, *HWR*, 516.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 518.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 519–20.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 522–23, 525, 526.

these works that he is doing in the world.”³² Finally, Edwards reiterated at the end his own design for practical application by his hearers: witnessing God’s work of redemption resulted in happiness for the church and misery for those without Christ.³³

II. Interpretive Details

With Edwards’ theological framework in mind, we can turn to what he articulated on historical particulars. As we have already observed, he paired the early church’s establishment with the event of Jerusalem’s destruction, which he interpreted as God’s judgment on Jewish opposition to Christ and a conclusion to the Old Testament dispensation.³⁴ At the same time, likely in order to counter Rome’s claims of ecclesial primacy, Edwards described the Jerusalem church as “the mother of all other churches in the world” according to biblical prophecy. Although he soon shifted his focus beyond Jerusalem, he described the universal church as God’s “spiritual Jerusalem” which continually “added to the church that was begun in the literal Jerusalem.”³⁵ Elsewhere, in similar fashion to his Boston associates Prince and Cooper, he captured the dynamic of changing times by representing Pentecost as the clear light of the sun just after dawn.³⁶

Edwards clearly viewed the apostolic period as a unique season in the history of the church. Precisely this time, he claimed, constituted the “last days” of Joel’s prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Spirit (Joel 2:28); the presence of “extraordinary and miraculous gifts” ceased with the death of the apostles.³⁷ In his view the spiritual effusion of this period was unequalled. He speculated that “there probably were more souls

³² Ibid., 520–22, quotation at 520.

³³ Ibid., 526–27.

³⁴ Ibid., 385–86.

³⁵ Ibid., 377.

³⁶ Ibid., 366–67.

³⁷ Ibid., 365; yet compare p. 346, where Edwards employed ‘last days’ to represent the historical expanse from Christ’s resurrection to the *eschaton*.

converted in the age of the apostles than had been before from the beginning of the world till that time.”³⁸ To Edwards this remarkable season was foundational for all subsequent church history. Its miracles and gifts established the church throughout the world, enabled the writing of the New Testament as a permanent “infallible rule of faith and works and manners,” and forever proved “the truth of the Christian religion.”³⁹

Next Edwards presented, as one, history from the fall of Jerusalem to the fall of the ‘heathen’ Roman Empire in Constantine’s day. The Empire in the first century, according to Edwards, was at its height in learning and political dominion and was intent to use these means to eradicate Christianity. Correspondingly his account highlighted Roman philosophers and Roman persecutions against Christians. Edwards compared ancient philosophers with deists of his own day who scorned Christian belief in “a crucified redeemer.”⁴⁰ On persecutions Edwards offered few details, naming only two emperors and focusing rather on accounts of the apostles’ deaths and on numbers of Christian martyrs. He portrayed the persecutions as escalating in violence as consecutive emperors increasingly became annoyed at their inability to suppress Christianity. The cause of persecution did not in his mind rest with the emperors themselves. Rather, the conflict had cosmic dimensions, represented in Scripture by the war between the angelic armies of Michael and the dragon (Rev. 12).⁴¹ With this dramatic backdrop, Edwards could focus his audience’s attention on the marvellous perseverance of the church despite opposition, reflecting the *History*’s central scriptural passage:

Though the learning and power of the Roman empire were so great, and both were employed to the utmost against Christianity to put a stop to it and to root it out for so long a time, and in so many repeated attempts, yet all was in vain . . . But still in spite of all that they could do, the kingdom of Christ wonderfully prevailed, and Satan’s heathen kingdom moldered and consumed away before it, agreeable to the

³⁸ Ibid., 375.

³⁹ Ibid., 365.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 388–89.

⁴¹ Ibid., 390.

words of the text, “The moth shall eat them up like a garment and the worm [shall eat them like wool].”⁴²

Edwards’ presentation of these centuries heightened the drama in approaching Constantine’s day. To Edwards, the season just prior to Constantine’s reign was especially dark, as in the time prior to Christ’s coming and in recent history. The tenth persecution was “the heaviest and most severe” of all, and was permitted by God in response to a church which had become spiritually listless, sinful, and factious in a time of peace.⁴³ Similar to Gillies, Edwards discerned a pattern: “Thus it was the darkest time with the Christian church just before the break of day. They were brought to the greatest extremity just before God appeared for their glorious deliverance, as the bondage of the Israelites <was the most severe before their deliverance>.”⁴⁴

As has already been indicated, Edwards saw Constantine’s day as one of three pinnacles dividing time from Christ’s incarnation to the *eschaton*. He made specific mention of Constantine’s residence in York prior to being raised to the emperorship, perhaps—as Peter Engle argues—to ascribe to England an important role in sacred history, in this case in sending forth a leader to bring about the demise of heathenism in the Empire.⁴⁵ Edwards accepted at face value the traditional story of Constantine’s conversion—his vision of a radiant cross in the sky, and his dream the following night encountering Christ with a cross in his hand. In Edwards’ view, Constantine’s victory in battle answered the visions and he took the throne as the “first Christian emperor.”⁴⁶ As a result of his actions, heathenism was destroyed, and the church was freed from persecution and enemies to live in peace and to prosper.

⁴² Ibid., 390–91.

⁴³ Ibid., 393–94.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 394.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 394–95. Engle, “Edwards as Historiographer”, 131.

⁴⁶ Edwards, *HWR*, 395.

Even church architecture acted as a symbol of Christian victory over heathenism: “Constantine set up himself to put honor on Christian bishops or ministers, and to build and adorn churches; and now large and beautiful Christian churches were erected in all parts of the world instead of the old heathen temples.”⁴⁷ Edwards’ own time witnessed steady construction of new churches in New England’s communities as the colony expanded into formerly Native American territory and built up towns and villages. It may be that he was drawing a parallel with church expansion in Constantine’s day or even subtly associating Constantine with powerful political and religious associates of his, such as Massachusetts’ royal governor, Jonathan Belcher, or the judge and military leader of western Massachusetts and Edwards’ uncle and neighbour, Col. John Stoddard. George Marsden views Edwards’ high praise for Constantine as signifying an assumption “that the advance of Christ’s kingdom intimately involved politics.”⁴⁸

Edwards’ language regarding the time of Constantine was unequivocal in praise. At an earlier point he spoke matter-of-factly of “Christ’s coming in Constantine’s time” which effected “a glorious spiritual resurrection of the bigger part of the known world in a restoration of it to a visible church state from a state of heathenism.”⁴⁹ His section on Constantine maintained a cosmic perspective, repeating the notion that the Emperor’s rise was a kind of appearance of Christ for salvation and judgment (as prophesied by Dan.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 396.

⁴⁸ Marsden, *Edwards*, 196; on Edwards’ prominent associates, see pp. 147–49, 227, and also George M. Marsden, “The Quest for the Historical Edwards: The Challenge of Biography,” in *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons*, ed. David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 3–15, at 11–12. In the latter source (p. 9), Marsden describes Edwards’ vision of both church history and his own church context as “thoroughly establishmentarian,” with an aim “to bring the Protestant Reformation to its conclusion, reuniting Christendom through awakening and under sympathetic Protestant rulers.” In regard to New England’s profusion of new churches, see Mark A. Peterson, *The Price of Redemption: The Spiritual Economy of Puritan New England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), which analyzes New England’s Puritan religious culture in decades leading up to the Great Awakening, primarily through economic language of supply and demand. Peterson contends that revival was the product of a prospering culture and a vibrant religious tradition rather than a reaction against perceived decline (i.e. pp. 21, 238–39).

⁴⁹ Edwards, *HWR*, 352.

7:13–14) and associating it with the apocalyptic opening of the sixth seal and casting of Lucifer out of heaven (Rev. 6:12 and 12:9). The altered state of religion under Constantine was “the greatest revolution and change” since the Flood.⁵⁰ He also observed a paradox: the Roman Empire which had conquered the world could not subdue the church within its grasp, but rather the church defeated the Empire.⁵¹ Edwards’ conclusion on Constantine placed him firmly within his overarching scheme of progressive divine action: “Now the kingdom of heaven is come in a glorious degree; it pleased the Lord God of heaven to set up a kingdom on the ruins of the kingdom of Satan. And such success is here of the purchase of Christ’s redemption, and such honor does the Father put upon him for the disgrace he suffered when on earth. And now we see to what a height that glorious building is erected that [had] been building ever since the fall.”⁵²

Moving forward in Edwards’ account, however, the success instigated by Constantine was soon followed by disintegration. Edwards held that the church’s “peace and prosperity” under Constantine accorded with Revelation’s reference to a half hour “wherein the four angels held the four winds from blowing till the servants of God could be sealed on their foreheads.”⁵³ Edwards focused his attention on various means of opposition to the church in the fourth and fifth centuries, especially heresy and renewed paganism. He characterized these as the “new devices” of Satan who, cast out of heaven in Constantine’s time, was “still in a rage.” Arianism arose like rising floodwaters which by the end of the fourth century “threatened to overflow all and entirely carry away the church of [God].”⁵⁴ Edwards noted the popularity of Pelagius’ teachings, especially those

⁵⁰ Ibid., 394, 396–97. Presumably Edwards was thinking of the church’s *visible* transformation, since he had seen an unparalleled *spiritual* events in apostolic times.

⁵¹ Ibid., 400.

⁵² Ibid., 398.

⁵³ Ibid., 405; reference is to Rev. 7, 8:1.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 405–406; ‘flood’ imagery was derived from Rev. 12:7–15.

in favour of human free will and against original sin, despite the strong counter-argument of Augustine. Edwards also recorded the attempt under Constantine's nephew Julian "the Apostate" (r. 361–363) to restore paganism and the invasion by heathen Goths and Vandals, signified for Edwards by prophetic visions in Dan. 2 and Rev. 8 and 17.⁵⁵ But these tides of corruption were stemmed, as foretold: just as the flood from the dragon's mouth (Rev. 17) was swallowed up by the earth, so the "heresies that for a while so much prevailed, yet after a while dwindled away, and orthodoxy was again restored, and that attempt by Julian was baffled at his death."⁵⁶ Besides the removal of these threats, Edwards also identified an active success of the gospel during this period in the conversion to Christianity of various heathen peoples, including East Indians, Persians, Arabians, Goths, Scythians, Iberians, Burgundians, Scots and Irish.⁵⁷

In the previous chapter we observed that Gillies treated as one the church from the fifth through the thirteenth centuries; Edwards similarly unified his discussion of the centuries from roughly the end of the fifth to the end of the fifteenth, bracketed by the 'rise of Antichrist' and the Protestant Reformation. Also similar to Gillies, Edwards characterized the whole in strongly negative terms: for Edwards it was "the darkest and most dismal day that ever the Christian church saw, and probably the darkest that ever it will see." He reminded his audience that he had cast the entire age from Christ's resurrection to the fall of Antichrist as one of "affliction and persecution" with occasional relief from God. "But this time," he continued in reference to the Middle Ages, "was a space wherein the Christian church was in its greatest depth of depression and its darkest time of all."⁵⁸

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 406–407.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 408.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 408–409.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 409–410.

Edwards firmly set this period within a cosmic drama, by referring to spiritual forces at work and by correlating the medieval Church and the Reformation with the earlier low and high seasons of pagan Rome and Constantine's reign:

How terrible was his [Satan's] opposition during the continuance of the heathen empire, and how glorious was Christ's victory and triumph over him in Constantine's time. It pleased God now so to prepare the way for a yet more glorious victory over him, to suffer him to renew his strength, and to make his interests strong in the world, and do the utmost that his power and subtilty can help him to; and suffers him to have a long time to lay his scheme, and to establish his interest, and make his numbers strong; and suffers him to carry his designs a great length indeed, to the almost swallowing up his church, and to a high and proud and almost uncontrolled dominion in the world....⁵⁹

Such an extended season of 'darkness' played an important theological role for Edwards. First, it added lustre to the 'bright' moments: Constantine and the anticipated Reformation. Second, it was set under the panoply of a sovereign God who had permitted Satan to lay siege to the church and served to make Satan's downfall and the progress of God's redemptive work appear all the more glorious.

Edwards then proceeded to identify Satan's two "great works" during this period: the "Antichristian and Mohammedan kingdoms," which together filled the old Roman Empire, west and east. The geographical comment was intended to strengthen the notion of continuity between the persecutions of the church under heathen Rome and renewed sufferings of 'true' believers under Roman Catholicism and Islam. Indeed, Edwards construed the Catholic Church's ascendancy at Rome, the seat of the former heathen Empire, as the prophesied healing of the beast's deadly wound (Rev. 13:3) and viewed its perceived "tyranny and superstition and idolatry and persecution" as a reflection of ancient Roman paganism.⁶⁰ Earlier in his sermon series he had anticipated this idea of continuity: in his view, the 'true' church prior to Constantine was under the heel of "heathen Rome,"

⁵⁹ Ibid., 410.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 410, 411.

and after Constantine under that of “Antichristian Rome.”⁶¹

Edwards followed his Puritan forebears in designating medieval Catholicism as Antichristian.⁶² He considered the Antichrist’s kingdom to be the foremost subject of Revelation’s prophecies, Satan’s “masterpiece” with which to oppose Christ and chief enemy of the church.⁶³ Edwards’ reading of Revelation was important for his dating of the appearance of ‘Antichrist’. He deduced that at the least this was not prior to AD 479, since Edwards in 1739, the (literal) prophetic 1260 years later, would have heard of Antichrist’s downfall. Aware of debates among Protestant commentators, Edwards hesitated to choose a precise date but rather concluded that ‘Antichrist’ arose gradually within the church, marked by increased ceremony and superstition in worship and the developing clerical authority focused in the bishop of Rome.⁶⁴ He speculated that this process was more evident by AD 606. Likely he had in mind either the ascendancy of papal dominion under Gregory I, ‘the Great’ (r. 590–604) or the assertion of the title ‘universal bishop’ by Boniface III (r. 607). From this point, in Edwards’ view, the pope

claimed the power of a temporal prince, and so was wont to carry two swords to signify that both the temporal and spiritual sword was his, and claimed more and more authority. Till at length he, as Christ’s vicar on earth, claimed the very same power that Christ would have if he was presently on earth and reigned on his throne, or the same power that belongs to God, and used to be called God on earth, and used to be submitted to by all the princes of Christendom.⁶⁵

With this assertion in place, the entire hierarchical Church of the Middle Ages could be judged as antichristian. Edwards did also detail other perceived abuses, such as hoarding of wealth, superstitious practices, and ignorance of the Bible and of learning in

⁶¹ Ibid., 374; Edwards also forged a link between Rome and ancient Babylon with its oppression of Israel.

⁶² Engle, "Edwards as Historiographer", 44–45 and esp. 44 n. 1, correlates Edwards’ view of Catholicism with that of earlier colonial Puritans and adds that, moving towards Edwards’ day, an association of Catholicism with the Antichrist strengthened rather than subsided.

⁶³ Edwards, *HWR*, 411; at 427, in the context of discussing Catholic persecutions of Protestants from the sixteenth century to his own day, Edwards reasserted his view that the Catholic ‘Antichrist’ had “proved the greatest and cruelest enemy to the church of Christ that ever was in the world.”

⁶⁴ Ibid., 412.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 412–13.

general.⁶⁶ Edwards presented such ‘corruptions’ as precise fulfilment of Scriptural prophecy. On papal power, Edwards rearticulated the prediction of 2 Thess. 2:3–4 and 7 that an “Antichrist” or “man of sin” would establish himself “in the temple as lord of God’s temple, or visible church, pretending to be vested with the power of God himself, as head of the church.” He concluded: “And all this is exactly come to pass in the church of Rome.”⁶⁷ Other scriptural referents for Edwards anticipated papal usage of excommunication and various types of prohibitions. On each point Edwards ended with a statement like, “This also is come to pass.”⁶⁸

As noted above, Edwards saw the rise of Islam as yet another diabolical instrument against the ‘true’ church during this period. Again he applied the imagery of Revelation: the invading Saracens and Turks he equated with the locusts and horsemen of the vision in Rev. 9 (vv. 3–11 and 15).⁶⁹ Although Edwards’ discussion of Islam was one-third the size of that of the ‘Antichristian’ Catholic Church, he gave comparatively far more historical details, such as dates and names; on the medieval Church he made no mention of monks or monastic orders or (despite his focus on the papal ‘Antichrist’) the name of a single pope.⁷⁰ A plausible reading is that the history of Roman Catholicism was an assumed, ‘familiar’ history passed down via two centuries of Protestant polemic, whereas on the subject of Islam, Edwards felt compelled to educate his audience.

Whatever Edwards found of merit in the Middle Ages had to do with opposition to Rome. He identified four ‘successes’ during this period. First, at an early stage entire ‘national’ churches resisted papal ascendancy and claims to status as a universal bishop.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 414.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 451.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 451–53.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 415–16.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 411–15, and 415–16. Edwards’ original sermon notebooks—demarcated in the Yale edition—contained nine pages on Catholicism and three on Islam.

Edwards argued that regions more distant from “the chief seat of Antichrist” in Rome held out the longest. In his view, the majority of Christians “in England and Scotland and France” most notably “retained the ancient purity of doctrine and worship.” Second, he believed that through this entire period there always were individual, scattered voices raised in opposition to Roman authority and religion. The theological importance of their continual presence constituting a ‘true’ church was critical for Edwards: they appeared “in every age of this dark time”; “no one age of Antichrist” was exempt; God kept “an uninterrupted succession of witnesses through the whole time.” Twice in this section Edwards declared that historians had identified these individuals, but he named none himself. Again the impression is one of a familiar Protestant historiography, perhaps an enduring reverence for popular works such as the martyrologies of Foxe in the sixteenth century and Clarke in the next. It sufficed for Edwards to observe that these witnesses included “private persons,” ministers, rulers, and others “of great distinction,” and that “in every age” they were persecuted and martyred.⁷¹

In the third place, Edwards highlighted the Waldenses as a gathered community (as distinct from national or individual examples) which “lived separate from all the rest of the world, that kept themselves pure and constantly bore a testimony against the church of Rome through all this dark time.” He observed especially their geographical isolation nestled safely in the Alpine valleys of Piedmont, corresponding in his thinking with the prophetic “place prepared of God for the woman” (Rev. 12:6) for her providential care “during the reign of Antichrist.”⁷² Edwards adopted the theory, like Gillies, that the Waldenses possessed early Christian roots, perhaps settling in Piedmont after fleeing

⁷¹ Ibid., 418–19.

⁷² Ibid., 419. Engle, “Edwards as Historiographer”, 152, finds it curious that Edwards applies the prophecy to the Waldenses and not to Wycliffe, Hus and Jerome of Prague; but he overlooks Edwards’ gravitation to the Waldenses’ physical situation and supposed endurance since ancient times as a more obvious fulfilment of the prophetic text.

Roman persecutions prior to Constantine's reign and remaining relatively untainted through the protection of "natural walls" and "God's grace." Edwards held up the Waldenses as important precursors of Protestantism in belief and in practice: "Their doctrine and their worship as there still remain accounts of it appear to be the same with the Protestant doctrine and worship, and by the confession of popish writers were a people remarkable for the strictness of their lives, for charity and other Christian virtues." Significantly, in Edwards' view Rome's eventual attempts to root them out spread the Waldenses and their ideas throughout Europe, fulfilling Christ's promise that the "gates of hell" would not prevail against Christ's church.⁷³

Fourth in Edwards' list of positive aspects was the emergence of "several noted divines" in the later Middle Ages who 'defended the truth' and 'bore testimony' against the Roman Church. It is not immediately clear what distinguished these from the individual witnesses constituting Edwards' second category. One possible explanation is that Edwards' interest here was in a doctrinal witness to be differentiated from one enacted through suffering. Chief in his mind was Wycliffe, followed by Hus and Jerome of Prague. These leaders (together with their many followers) "strenuously opposed" Rome. On Wycliffe, Edwards emphasized continuity with Protestantism, claiming that he "taught the same doctrine that the reformers afterwards did" and noting that his followers survived, despite persecution, to the time of the Reformation.⁷⁴

Edwards treated the time from the Protestant Reformation to his own day in a substantial section, entailing one and a half sermons. Edwards interpreted the progress of the magisterial Reformation as orchestrated by God. Luther was "stirred in his spirit to see

⁷³ Edwards, *HWR*, 419–20, quotations at 420. Edwards' use of Matt. 16:18 (the Yale edition finds six explicit references) situates his interpretation in line with the Protestant historiographical tradition emanating from the likes of Foxe.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 420–21.

the horrid practices of the popish clergy” and, after studying Scripture and the church fathers, acted “very openly and boldly” against “the corruptions and usurpations of the Romish church.”⁷⁵ In discussing medieval Christendom Edwards had anticipated the Reformation, and now he retrospectively reasserted the link, in theocentric and revivalistic terms:

Thus God began gloriously to revive his church again and advance the kingdom of his Son after such a dismal night of darkness as had been before from the rise of Antichrist to that time. There had been many endeavors used by the witnesses for the truth for reformation before, but now when God’s appointed time was come, his work brake forth and went on with a swift and wonderful progress. And Antichrist who had been rising higher and higher from his very first beginning till that time, was swiftly and suddenly brought down and fell half-way towards utter ruin, and never has been able to rise again to his former height.⁷⁶

Later Edwards reiterated his view of sixteenth-century Protestantism as a key Christian revival: it was “a glorious outpouring of the Spirit of God” marked by widespread conversions not only to Protestantism but, more distinctly, “to God and true godliness.” Despite scenes of “terrible persecution,” this vital Christianity “gloriously flourished in one country and another.”⁷⁷

Although Edwards did not include the Reformation alongside Constantine and the millennial kingdom as a major pivot point in church history, he nonetheless attributed to it vast significance in his overall scheme by construing it as preparation for the millennium. As we have just seen, Edwards perceived a “half-way” collapse in the antichristian kingdom instigated by the Reformation. Continuing on we find that he associated the papacy’s loss of authority and dominion with the pouring out of a bowl of divine judgment on the throne of the beast (Rev. 16:10). Edwards emphasized that although Catholicism subsequently regained some territory, the authority of the pope continued to wane.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Ibid., 421–22.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 422.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 438.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 422–24.

Edwards perceived a widening pattern of spiritual declension interrupted by God-given, Spirit-infused revival up to his own day. In his view the remarkable season of grace at the Reformation was followed by five avenues of diabolical opposition. First was the Catholic Church's attempt to re-establish or extend its influence through the Council of Trent. When the Council condemned Protestantism it "blasphemed God" in fulfilment of prophecy (Rev. 16:11). "Thus," he concluded, "God hardened their hearts intending to destroy them."⁷⁹ Opposition also came through various political conspiracies, such as plots to seize Luther, the combined efforts of James II of England and Louis XIV of France to eradicate Protestantism, and the attempt on the throne by Charles the Pretender. But all these were "baffled by divine providence."⁸⁰ Next, Catholic rulers in Germany and Spain contrived through war to regain lost territory. But, as Edwards pointed out, these efforts failed, and in the case of Germany they had the opposite effect of firmly establishing Protestantism.⁸¹ Fourth, he noted the persistence of Catholic persecutions which he believed exceeded all other persecutions both in scope and intensity. He highlighted the 'cruel' devices of the Inquisition and depicted widespread Protestant suffering. Edwards reminded his listeners of their heritage, tracing a line of persecution beginning under Queen Mary and continuing "with little intermission" under the hands of "the high church men" (associated with "the papists") until the Glorious Revolution. Such persecution had "occasioned our forefathers to fly that country & to come and settle in this land."⁸² Here Edwards paused to again amplify his cosmic picture of Catholic opposition as the work of Satan and the Antichrist foretold by biblical prophecy but also—alluding to Matt. 16:18—

⁷⁹ Ibid., 425.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 425–26, quotation at 426.

⁸¹ Ibid., 426–27.

⁸² Ibid., 427–29, quotation at 429. On the latter point, Erskine's edition was more dramatic: persecution caused the Puritans "to flee from their native country, and to come and settle in this land, which was then an hideous howling wilderness." Edwards, *HWR (Erskine)*, 291.

the steadfast protection of the church in fulfilment of Christ's promise.⁸³ Finally, opposition came through "corrupt opinions." Edwards listed a succession of these: Anabaptists, 'enthusiasts' who claimed direct divine inspiration, Socinians, Arminians, and deists who by elevating reason over revelation essentially were "professed infidels." On Anabaptists, Edwards likely had in mind the Peasants' War of 1525 or the militant Münsterite kingdom of 1534–35, since he referred specifically to their formation of "vast armies to defend themselves against their civil rulers." In regard to Arminians, Edwards recorded his critical impression that these composed the majority among established and dissenting churches in England and dissenters in New England.⁸⁴

Edwards followed this with a section on 'successes' since the sixteenth century. This organization might have suggested that the centuries since the Reformation had exemplified a mixture of positive and negative for Edwards. But praiseworthy instances tended to come from more recent decades, and thus the overall impression remained a pattern of longer seasons of decay separated by providential seasons of remarkable growth. First of all, Edwards gave attention to 'Christian' nations which had exemplified further "reformation in doctrine and worship." Here he highlighted the Russian Empire under Peter the Great (r. 1682–1725), which he believed had, through Peter's reforms in education, moved religiously towards Protestantism. A second success was the "propagation of the gospel among the heathen."⁸⁵ Missionary success manifested itself

⁸³ Edwards, *HWR*, 429; the allusion is suggested by Wilson (n. 2). Erskine's edition makes direct reference to Matt. 16; Edwards, *HWR* (*Erskine*), 291.

⁸⁴ Edwards, *HWR*, 430–32.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 433. It may be that, like with Gillies, Edwards' understanding of Christianity's missionary expansion was shaped by Millar's *History of the Propagation of Christianity*. Stein observes Edwards' familiarity with the work based on his reading list. In the year following his sermon series Edwards referred to the 1731 edition in correspondence. See Edwards, *Apocalyptic Writings*, 54, and letter d. 1 June 1740 to Josiah Willard, Secretary of the Province of Massachusetts, in Jonathan Edwards, *WJE*, vol. 16, *Letters and Personal Writings*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 83. Familiarity is also suggested by Edwards' *Personal Narrative* (cited at Zakai, *Edwards's Philosophy of History*, 151–52) written sometime in the mid- to late 1730s, which speaks of a strong fondness for histories detailing the 'promotion' or 'advancement' of Christ's kingdom.

especially, for Edwards, among Native Americans. He purported the theory that Satan had led them to the American continent after the collapse of heathen Rome in the time of Constantine in order “that they might be quite out of the reach of the gospel that here he might quietly possess them and reign over them as their god.”⁸⁶ It followed for Edwards that the invention of the mariner’s compass, the European discovery of America, and native receptivity to the Christian message were signs that God providentially was bringing about the worldwide destruction of “Satan’s kingdom” prefacing “the future glorious times of the church.” But America was not necessarily the centre of these events: Edwards also included stories of missionary ventures in the eastern regions of Muscovy (Russia) and Danish efforts in the East Indies.⁸⁷

A third mark of success was “revivals of the power and practice of religion.” As evidence he pointed first to the Pietist movement in Saxony under the leadership of Francke at the University of Halle. Edwards described the exponential growth of renewal from Francke’s collection of alms to buy books for the poor to the establishment of schools and orphanages. “And God,” reflected Edwards, “was pleased so wonderfully to smile on his design, and to pour out a spirit of charity on people there on that occasion....” Practical action culminated in religious change, “till,” said Edwards, “the last account I have seen this was accompanied with a wonderful reformation and revival of religion, and a spirit of piety in the city and university of Halle,” which thereafter spread to other parts of Germany.⁸⁸ He also made brief reference to recent events in New England, indeed among his hearers: “Another thing that it would be ungrateful for us not to take notice of, is that remarkable pouring out of the Spirit of God which has been in this part

⁸⁶ Edwards made no contrast with the Waldenses, but the impression here is of a diabolical opposite to the divine preservation of the Waldensian church through seclusion.

⁸⁷ Edwards, *HW*, 433–35.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 435–36.

of New England, of which we in this town have had such a share. But it is needless for me particularly to describe it, it being what you have so lately been eyewitnesses to, and I hope multitudes of you sensible of the benefit of.”⁸⁹ Again there was an assumed history, in this case for events which Edwards’ listeners had participated in and had seen documented in their pastor’s popular *Narrative*.⁹⁰

Edwards concluded his presentation of the period leading up to his own day with comments on recent losses and gains. On the negative side, significant territories in Europe had reverted to Catholicism. In addition he diagnosed a general “licentiousness in principles and opinions,” waning commitment to orthodoxy, and fading “power of godliness.”⁹¹ He singled out England, “the principal kingdom of the Reformation,” as unprecedented in its “apostasy” from “gospel light” to “infidelity” and outright mockery of the gospel under the influence of deism and other heresies.⁹² On diminishing godliness, he glanced back to the spiritual revival of the Reformation and judged of the present age: “But now there is an exceeding great decay of vital piety; yet it seems to be despised, called enthusiasm, whimsy, and fanaticism. Those that are truly religious are commonly looked upon as crackbrained. And vice and profaneness dreadfully prevails, like a flood that threatens to bear down all afore it.”⁹³

On the positive side, Edwards first of all repeated his belief that papal authority continued to diminish. Second, persecution appeared to be lessening in intensity, even

⁸⁹ Ibid., 436.

⁹⁰ An edition of the *Faithful Narrative* was published in Boston in 1738, one year after the original London edition. Engle, “Edwards as Historiographer”, 172, makes a different, but also plausible, argument that Edwards was purposefully exercising restraint in downplaying New England and Northampton in his presentation.

⁹¹ Edwards, *HWR*, 437–38.

⁹² Ibid., 438. Engle, “Edwards as Historiographer”, 39–40, 45, observes Edwards’ traditional understanding of England as the most reformed Protestant nation and of Puritans’ actions as attempts to further extend this reformation.

⁹³ Edwards, *HWR*, 438.

though it persisted in places and likely would endure until the Antichrist's downfall.⁹⁴

Edwards' third point, that learning was on the increase, reflected a prevalent emphasis in his day. Edwards clarified that with the majority learning brought "no good improvement." Nonetheless it was inherently good and had the potential, with God's help, to produce "great things for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ and the good of the souls of men." He drew a correlation between the roles of learning (amidst general immorality) in recent times and in the Greco-Roman era, first serving to uncover the weakness of human wisdom and then becoming a tool to explicate the Scriptures and Christian doctrine.⁹⁵

Before turning to an evaluation of Edwards' interpretation, it is useful to consider points in the *History* at which Edwards stepped back from his roughly chronological narrative to paint history in broad strokes, as these magnify his interpretive paradigm with particular clarity. First of all, as has already been indicated, Edwards construed the entire period from Christ's resurrection to Antichrist's downfall as an age of suffering for the church. In one instance, at the outset of his presentation of Christianity's history, he gave a sweeping historical interpretation which communicated that persecution was Christianity's normal, divinely-ordained context interrupted by brief seasons of respite:

For the first three hundred years after Christ the church was, for the most part, in a state of great affliction; the object of reproach and persecution, first by the Jews and then by the heathen. After this, from the beginning of Constantine's time, the church had rest and prosperity for a little while, which is represented in Revelation, [chapter] seven, at beginning, by angels holding the four winds for a little while. But presently, after the church again suffered persecution from the Arians and after that, Antichrist arose; and the church was driven away into the wilderness, and was kept down in obscurity and contempt and suffering for a long time under Antichrist before the reformation by Luther and others. And since the Reformation the church's persecutions have been beyond all that ever were before. And though some parts of God's church sometimes has [sic] had rest, yet to this day for the most part, the true church is very much kept under by its enemies, and

⁹⁴ Ibid., 439. Edwards suggested that in place of persecution, new opposition had taken the form of either ridicule or indifference.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 440–41.

some parts of it under grievous persecution.⁹⁶

This pattern would remain, he asserted, until the fall of Antichrist. Again after presenting the course of history up to his own day, Edwards reflected that opposition had always been strong against God's people, under both old and new covenants.⁹⁷ Scanning seventeen centuries of church history, he reiterated his view that persecution was Christianity's proper state: "...the spirit of the true church is a suffering spirit." This was demonstrated in the past by 'genuine' Christians' willingness to endure "dreadful torments." "History," he continued, "furnishes us with great numbers of remarkable instances, and sets in view a great cloud of witnesses." He then challenged his audience to self-evaluation, and concluded: "Every true Christian has the spirit of a martyr."⁹⁸

Corresponding with this was Edwards' portrayal of the historical 'true' church as a small, marginalized remnant which survived only through divine protection. Examples of this language abound. In his characterization of Christianity from the 'rise of Antichrist' to the Reformation, Edwards described the church as "in a state of great obscurity, like the woman in the wilderness, indeed almost hid from sight and observation."⁹⁹ Later, when reflecting on history up to the present, he emphasized the church's fragility, the strength of its enemies, and God's intervention when it seemed in critical danger. Particular moments highlighted this: the church's very beginnings as a "remnant" opposed by "the whole multitude of the Jewish nation"; its extension to Gentile peoples under the threat of the pagan majority; and its existence as "but a handful" during an antichristian medieval

⁹⁶ Ibid., 372–73.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 444.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 453–54. Erskine's edition contained a slightly longer personal appeal; compare Edwards, *HWR* (Erskine), 314–15. Zakai, *Edwards's Philosophy of History*, 181, contends that Edwards departed from the dualistic, oppositional approach of earlier Protestant historians such as Bale and Foxe. Edwards did indeed set the sufferings of the faithful against the encouraging backdrop of God's faithfulness and provision. But in light of Edwards' frequent reference in the *History* to the theme of persecution, Zakai's assertion that "Edwards's interpretation of sacred history left little room for the suffering of the martyrs..." is surprising. Edwards' view should be considered a revision of Protestant tradition rather than a marked departure.

⁹⁹ Edwards, *HWR*, 410.

period. The same pattern could be applied to all of sacred history: the perennial rescue of the faithful from “the brink of ruin” revealed strikingly God’s favour extended to the church. Edwards determined this to be a “remarkable fulfillment” of his main scriptural text: magnificent kingdoms had disintegrated with comparatively less opposition, whereas the church, most often “a very weak society” or “a little flock,” had persevered.¹⁰⁰ In his final sermon, Edwards described the church as “a little spark” or “a smoking flax” which human and diabolical forces together could not overwhelm, or as akin to “a number of little infants” who ultimately vanquished their enemies.¹⁰¹

Edwards, moreover, believed that the pattern of persecution and preservation was a progressive work rather than a cycle. On one side, growing redemptive work led in stages to Christ’s millennial kingdom and God’s glory; on the other, burgeoning sinfulness and opposition to God brought successive judgments culminating in final destruction. Part-way through the *History* Edwards asserted—demonstrating the importance of history for his theological stance—that the drawn-out growth of God’s kingdom through “particular successive manifestations” and long intervening seasons of diabolical influence made more visible God’s glorious wisdom than if his work were done in a ‘dazzling’ instant.¹⁰² A sense of development is evident in Edwards’ representation of dramatic rescues of the church when all seemed lost, from the tenth Roman persecution and sudden collapse of the heathen Empire through to the English Restoration period followed by the Glorious Revolution. In regard to the Reformation his language especially revealed an overarching view of upward mobility: “And at last God wonderfully revived his church in the time of

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 446–47; also 449–50.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 523.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 355–56. Edwards placed a high degree of importance on this observation: near the end of his sermon series, in a list of ten applications from the whole of his presentation, Edwards in the first place highlighted the “greatness” of God’s redemptive work, evinced in part by the number of “great events” composing the one work: “These mighty revolutions are so many as to fill up so many ages.” He then gave a brief synopsis of sacred history from the Flood to the Reformation and beyond, anticipating God’s final judgment and ushering of the church into heaven. Edwards, *HWR*, 511–12.

the Reformation, and made it to stand, as it were, up on its feet in the sight of its enemies, and carried it out of their reach.”¹⁰³ Stephen Clark perceives the “particular pattern of ebb and flow, progress and decline” operating in Edwards’ thinking on God’s work of redemption; “but each movement,” he continues, “carries the whole a step further.”¹⁰⁴ Engle likewise observes that Edwards’ theology gave him an optimistic view of history and of the contemporary Revival and thus a means of accounting for setbacks and downturns in history and in his own experience: these were anticipatory of future, more glorious, progressions.¹⁰⁵

Edwards’ overall portrayal of progressive movement was supported by eschatology. In the course of his historical narrative Edwards paused to construe the entire story of the church since the fall of heathen Rome as “a long series of wonders of divine providence”; much of the success, however, was yet to be seen, in Antichrist’s fall and “a far more glorious success of the gospel than ever was before.” The events of preceding history seemed to be only preliminaries.¹⁰⁶ Elsewhere Edwards’ perception of dramatically dark times just prior to past “glorious revivals of religion”—he specifically mentioned days prior to the time of Christ and the Reformation—led him to speculate that the present darkness of irreligion might be a sign of an imminent millennial kingdom.¹⁰⁷

Again near the end of his series, Edwards (like Prince the following year) imagined the growing population of the faithful who would ascend to heaven at the *eschaton*. There was a clear sense of exponential growth in numbers moving from Old Testament times to the days of the apostles, Constantine, the Reformation, and especially the millennium,

¹⁰³ Edwards, *HWR*, 448–49, quotation at 449.

¹⁰⁴ Stephen M. Clark, "Jonathan Edwards: The History of the Work of Redemption", *Westminster Theological Journal* 56, no. 1 (1994): 47.

¹⁰⁵ Engle, "Edwards as Historiographer", 104–105, 250.

¹⁰⁶ Edwards, *HWR*, 404.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 457, 458.

“when the whole earth shall for so many generations be full of saints.”¹⁰⁸ He also encapsulated his view using the analogy of a building under construction to represent redemption’s progress. After a brief synopsis of sacred history from the Flood to the final judgment and ascent of the church into heaven, Edwards wrote: “And now let us once more take a view of this building; now all is finished and the topstone laid. It appeared in a glorious height in the apostles’ time, much more glorious in Constantine’s [time, and] after [the] fall of Antichrist; but even in an immensely more glorious height, now it appears in its greatest magnificence as a complete, lofty structure whose top reaches to the heaven of heavens, a building worthy of the great God, the king of kings.”¹⁰⁹

With this eschatological vision in mind, Edwards traced the successive stages of construction through history. As we have seen, most interesting for him were the great advances in the building of God’s kingdom, namely unique spiritual effusions or revivals. Such instances and their supporting theology composed a pattern which re-emerged regularly and effectively unified Edwards’ historical narrative.

III. Features

Throughout we have seen a theological matrix in operation through which Edwards made sense of church history. His main Scripture text and doctrine established a vision of enduring opposition between evil and righteousness, and his overall structure revolved around points of divine justice and dramatic advances in Christ’s kingdom. The historical material fit within these parameters, with Edwards continually emphasizing themes of persecution and conflict between the ‘true’ church and diabolical forces, growing corruption, and the survival and periodic flourishing of the church through divine

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 499.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 512; see also 519.

assistance. He narrated history in relation to God's providence—both his general government of the world and its affairs and his direct intervention in particular, remarkable ways. Instances of the latter also gave a central role to the Holy Spirit in bringing individual conversion and widespread religious revival. Edwards' sermon series focused on redemption as the chief work of God which he carried on through each season of history. The key theme of Edwards' text—that 'righteousness' would ultimately prevail while the wicked perished—contributed a sense of development under God's design. This was amplified by Edwards' eschatology, which looked for a future millennium which would outshine previous times of the church's flourishing.

In many respects Edwards' interpretation corresponds with those of the writers treated in Chapter Two. Edwards' theological framework was much more prevalent; but his evangelical counterparts nonetheless approached history with theological presuppositions. Moreover, many of these presuppositions were shared: God's providence, the Holy Spirit's continued activity, the church as a spiritual entity often marked by suffering, and an eschatology anticipating a (possibly imminent) millennium. Non-theological aspects corresponded as well. Edwards like other early evangelicals displayed keen attention to the apostolic church and the Reformation as benchmarks of Christian vitality. Like his friend and associate Prince, Edwards had high praise for Constantine and benefits accrued to the church during his reign. He also gravitated towards the same line of protest which others had highlighted: Waldenses, Wycliffe, and the Bohemians Hus and Jerome. Correspondingly he emphasized growing corruption emanating from Rome which persisted within Catholicism. He also extended the pattern of corruption and renewal beyond the Reformation, finding cause for both praise and blame in European and New World Protestantism.

Differences also emerge, especially when comparing Edwards' work with Gillies'.

Edwards' more explicitly theological approach was only a difference of degree. The same is true in relation to use of biblical prophecy, examples of which appeared, although tangentially, in Gillies' history. They clearly diverged on the effect of Constantine's reign. Their opposite stances may have stemmed from ecclesiastical or political contrasts: Gillies, part of a reform movement within an established church, may have been predisposed to scorn powerful patronage and political meddling in church affairs; Edwards, on the edge of British civilization, may have longed for a more settled Christianity supported by political clout. Regardless, their interpretations soon merged again as Edwards found rapid corruption on the heels of Constantine's reign. Another difference between the two, again in degree, was the overall impression given of the 'true' church through the centuries. While they gravitated toward similar exemplars, Gillies' work allowed the possibility of vital Christianity appearing within the Catholic fold whereas Edwards' construal of Catholicism was unremittingly hostile. Again, cultural situation offers at least a partial explanation. Although Scotland experienced pangs of Catholic threat such as the Jacobite rebellion in 1745, Edwards' frontier existence was more precarious: real dangers of Catholic domination existed in the form of French and Spanish settlement and expansion in the New World.¹¹⁰

In important ways, Edwards' interpretation stood in profound continuity with traditional Protestant historiography. His use of Scripture as a foundation for his understanding, in its historical content, its prophecy, and its typological significance, remained firmly in line with Puritan forebears. This is true also in regard to his use of theology as a framework as well as his specific theological content, such as his emphasis on God's providence and his construal of the 'true' church as a spiritually-defined entity

¹¹⁰ Marsden observes New England's vulnerable position with (real or perceived) threats from France and Spain in the late 1730s, set within a discussion of Edwards' interest in God's use of "political agents" (p. 196) in service of his work of redemption. Marsden, *Edwards*, 197.

which typically existed as a persecuted faithful remnant. Edwards' traditional dependence on Scripture and theology in his approach to history is highlighted by Wilson.¹¹¹ Moreover, what Edwards articulated on particulars such as Pentecost, early persecutions, Constantine, the papacy, and the Reformation compare closely with what Foxe propounded a century and a half prior.

Yet in other respects Edwards' interpretation revised earlier historiography. Engle describes him as "a Reformation historiographer who had the advantage of writing at the very end of the period of post-Reformation developments" and one who thus served as a "bridge" between post-Reformation and modern eras.¹¹² Zakai observes the difference between Edwards' view of history and those of Foxe and New England Puritans who each were preoccupied with the struggles of their respective 'national' church institutions, chiefly against 'popery'.¹¹³ In Edwards' mind, the Holy Spirit could not be thus confined; God's work of redemption was something enacted around the globe and encompassing all of human history. Edwards in the 1730s was somewhat limited in his access to the raw data of this universal history, but this circumstance did not restrain his vision.

As with Gillies' and other early evangelicals' interpretations, it is difficult to assess the relationship between Edwards' view of history and Enlightenment understandings, since in the English world what we consider to be the classics of Enlightenment historiography began to emerge only around the 1750s—for example Bolingbroke's *Letters on the Study and Use of History* in 1752 and Hume's dissertation on the "Natural History of Religion" in 1757 and *History of England* in 1759.¹¹⁴ Edwards (and Gillies after him) made

¹¹¹ Wilson, "Edwards as Historian": 8–15.

¹¹² Engle, "Edwards as Historiographer", vii.

¹¹³ Zakai, *Edwards's Philosophy of History*, 19–20, 162, 163, 181, 254–55.

¹¹⁴ This point uncovers a problem with Zakai's recent analysis of Edwards' philosophy of history (relying chiefly on the *History*). Zakai construes Edwards as developing his historical framework directly in reaction against Enlightenment historiography, but either he asserts this without any evidence or he uses examples of Enlightenment histories which postdate Edwards' sermon series, such as the writings of Hume, Bolingbroke and Gibbon. For examples, see *Ibid.*, 4, 10, 11, 39, 40, 224–25, 226–27. While it remains likely that Edwards

no direct engagement with contemporary ‘enlightened’ history-writers.

But one can nonetheless perceive a reaction to ideas which we consider features of the Enlightenment. Edwards clearly viewed deistic thought as leading directly to atheism and moral bankruptcy, and his strongly providentialist reading of history was a sharp critique of a view of human affairs which made divine influence benign, remote, or absent entirely. Zakai views Edwards’ historical work as a critique of the “disenchantment of the world” brought about through the perception of God’s role as remote and through the elevation of private experience, subject to reason and scientific observation, over revelation as authoritative in religion as well as other spheres. Along these lines Zakai perceives in Edwards’ thought an attempt to reassert divine rather than human agency as the driving force in human history.¹¹⁵

In other aspects Edwards’ historical interpretation compares favourably with Enlightenment features. The most obvious is his view of general progress, with internal oscillations, which he perceived in God’s work of redemption over time. A correlation between Edwards’ and Enlightenment notions of progress is asserted by Zakai.¹¹⁶ That he saw the Revival as either a beginning or a foretaste of vast improvement in society (in spiritual terms, and culminating in the millennium) mimicked the optimism with which Enlightenment thinkers viewed their own day. Edwards even shared directly with the *philosophes* an appreciation for classical learning revived in the Renaissance and the eighteenth century. Akin to the Enlightenment attempt to extract universal principles in regard to human society through scientific observation, Edwards turned to another source—biblical revelation—to develop an account of God’s universal plan of redemption

reacted against ‘humanist’ or deist ideas which he encountered in his wide reading, Zakai’s construction of an active disagreement with leading Enlightenment historians is anachronistic. Active evangelical disagreement would come later, especially in the writings of Wesley, Milner and Haweis (see Chaps. Four through Six).

¹¹⁵ Ibid., xiii–ix, 133–38, 140.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 158, 201–202, 233–34.

and then used his own powers of observation for supporting evidence.¹¹⁷ Of course, he ventured beyond analysis of human history into a truly ‘universal’, or cosmic, perspective. However distasteful this ‘mythic’ quality was to Enlightenment intelligentsia preoccupied with rationality (as evidenced by the critical review cited at the outset of this chapter), Edwards’ assurance that he could discern God’s design for the created order matches, or perhaps outdistances, Enlightenment thinkers’ self-assured attitude. Stephen Holmes identifies Edwards’ “confidence, not just in the rationality of the world, but in his ability to uncover that rationality” as a dimension evident in the *History* which “marks Edwards most clearly as an Enlightenment thinker.”¹¹⁸

As with other early evangelical interpretations of church history, Edwards’ *History of the Work of Redemption* promoted ‘revival’ as a major theme. With Edwards this appeared not only as a means of narrating the history of Christianity, with revivals serving as the high points and dividing lines, but also as an interpretive theme containing much of the theology which Edwards highlighted. Instances of revival encapsulated Edwards’ emphasis on God’s providence, the Holy Spirit’s activity, Christ’s preservation of his church through dramatic rescues at the point of despair, and anticipation of the millennium. Moreover, they poignantly displayed, in his mind, the advancement of God’s work of redemption which he had been carrying forward since the very beginning. He established early on and supported throughout the notion that revivals were the chief instrument used by God to accomplish the building of his kingdom.

Joseph Conforti asserts that Edwards’ *History* “drew on scripture evidence and Christian history to place revivals at the center of the providential plan for human redemption.” What Conforti says of the work’s effect in the nineteenth century could be

¹¹⁷ See esp. Stout, “Edwards’ Tri-World Vision,” on this point.

¹¹⁸ Holmes, *Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 113.

applied for the last quarter of the eighteenth, that the *History* “served to ‘universalize’” revival by situating it within “a cosmic scheme of redemption.”¹¹⁹ Zakai similarly highlights Edwards’ effort to interpret *chronos*, human history, through occasions of *kairos*, the breaking in of God’s Spirit through special seasons of merciful revival or awakening. Revival became a tangible means by which to assert God’s direct involvement in human affairs.¹²⁰ In this manner Edwards rendered profound significance to the experience of his own congregants and heightened their expectation of greater things.¹²¹ When the *History* finally was published in 1774, its theologically rich, revival-centred account offered a convincing framework for an evangelical readership already attuned by various other sources to see revival as a key concept in understanding the Christian past.

¹¹⁹ Joseph A. Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, and American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 47. Conforti, interested in American reception of Edwards’ ideas, sees the *History* as having little influence until the 1790s onward coinciding with what is termed the Second Great Awakening. But Conforti’s analysis does not consider the influence of his publication in a transatlantic context or, for that matter, the dissemination of aspects of Edwards’ interpretation in his works published within his lifetime.

¹²⁰ Zakai, *Edwards’s Philosophy of History*, 13–14, 153–54.

¹²¹ Both Zakai and Marsden view the *History* as Edwards’ attempt to contextualize, and thus give greater weight to, revival in Northampton. *Ibid.*, 234–39, and Marsden, *Edwards*, 193–94. Along these lines, Yale editors Stein and Goen both claim that Edwards crafted the *History* in the hopes of instigating another revival in his congregation. Edwards, *Apocalyptic Writings*, 22, 24–25, and Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 47–48.

Chapter Four – The Progress of ‘Iniquity’ and ‘Godliness’: John Wesley’s *Concise Ecclesiastical History and Historical Sermons*¹

John Wesley’s keen interest in the Christian past can be seen early in his career as an itinerant preacher and organizer of Methodism. He represented church history in sweeping terms in a controversial sermon preached before St Mary’s Church, Oxford on 24 August 1744, in which he lambasted Oxford’s university establishment for their failure to demonstrate ‘Scriptural Christianity’. Wesley began his homily with a depiction of the spiritual character of early Christianity. Then he recounted the remarkable spread of the gospel but also the concomitant taking of offence by people concerned with pleasure, reputation or external religiosity. In the midst of storms of persecution God empowered his people to speak boldly and live faithfully, so that “the pillars of hell were shaken, and the kingdom of God spread more and more.” After this glimpse at the early church, Wesley emphasized how quickly the “mystery of iniquity” had grown up alongside the “mystery of godliness,” the devil occupying a place within the church and the faithful remnant, as prophesied in Rev. 12, escaping “into the wilderness.” He then cast subsequent church history as the story of conflict between forces of decay and renewal. “Here we tread a beaten path,” he declared in deference to inherited Protestant interpretations of the past, and continued: “...the still increasing corruptions of the succeeding generations have been largely described from time to time, by those witnesses God raised up, to show that he had ‘built his church upon a rock, and the gates of hell should not’ wholly ‘prevail against her.’” After this dramatic and oppositional historical picture, Wesley turned to contemplation of “greater things” to come when God, in

¹ This chapter is a more extensive treatment of the subject of an earlier article; see Darren W. Schmidt, "The Pattern of Revival: John Wesley's Vision of 'Iniquity' and 'Godliness' in Church History," in *Revival and Resurgence in Christian History*, ed. Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory, Studies in Church History, vol. 44 (Woodbridge, UK: published for the Ecclesiastical History Society by the Boydell Press, 2008), 142–53.

fulfilment of his promises, would cause vital Christianity to “prevail over all, and cover the earth,” a Christianity of which he believed his audience to be ignorant.²

Wesley’s evident historical interest as well as aspects of this early interpretation reappeared at various points throughout Wesley’s publishing career. No systematic gleaning of Wesley’s historical articulations from his vast corpus will be attempted here. But writings such as *A Letter to the Reverend Dr. Conyers Middleton, Occasioned by his late Free Enquiry...* (1749), in which Wesley turned to early Christianity to argue for the perseverance of miracles beyond the apostolic age, and his *Christian Library* (1749–1755), a fifty-volume compendium of “practical divinity” from patristic writings to Foxe and Clarke’s martyrologies to the spiritual works of seventeenth-century Puritans, display an enduring historical attentiveness. Records of Wesley’s reading demonstrate that history—ancient as well as more recent, ecclesiastical as well as national, political and military—composed a significant part of his literary intake.³

History and the theme of God’s hand in human affairs were prominent in Wesley’s writing in the last fifteen years of his life, after four decades and thousands of miles of itinerant ministry. In 1776 Wesley issued his first major historical work, a *Concise History of England, from the Earliest Times, to the Death of George II*, extracted from three English histories by contemporary authors.⁴ His Preface to this work made clear his goal to produce an English history which acknowledged God’s sovereignty and involvement in directing the nation’s course. Wesley stated of extant general histories that “they seem

² “Scriptural Christianity,” in John Wesley, *Works of John Wesley*, vol. 1–4, *Sermons*, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984–1987), 1:161–69, quotations at 168, 169. Note Wesley’s reference to Matt. 16:18 but also his insertion of the word ‘wholly’, effectively buttressing a more negative portrayal. For Outler’s discussion of the historical context and importance of this sermon, see 1:109, 113–16.

³ Randy L. Maddox, “John Wesley’s Reading: Evidence in the Kingswood School Archives”, *Methodist History* 41, no. 2 (2003), and Maddox, “Wesley’s Reading: Wesley’s House, London”.

⁴ John Wesley, *A Concise History of England, from the Earliest Times, to the Death of George II*, 4 vols. (London: printed by Robert Hawes, 1776), 1:vi–vii. Sources were histories by Oliver Goldsmith (1771), Tobias George Smollett (1758) and Paul Rapin de Thoyras (1725).

calculated only for Atheists; for there is nothing about GOD in them.”⁵ He admitted the difficulty of perceiving “among the multiplicity of visible causes ... Him that is invisible, the One Great Cause, sitting on the circle of the heavens, and ruling all things in heaven and earth.” But his work, he believed, filled a void: there would be “at least one History” of England which acknowledged God as King, “one *Christian* History, of what is still called (tho’ by a strong figure) a Christian Country.”⁶ In July 1781, after having just finished reading the second volume of William Robertson’s *History of America*, Wesley recorded in his journal his critical view that Robertson in this work and in his history of Charles V was “a Christian Divine writing a history, with so very little of Christianity in it.” “Nay,” Wesley continued, “he seems studiously to avoid saying any thing which might imply that he believes the Bible.” Robertson’s chief fault was “totally excluding the Creator from governing the world” and describing events in terms stripped of divine reference.⁷ History evidently turned Wesley’s mind to consideration of God’s active governance.

Our focus in this chapter is on Wesley’s writings on church history from the 1780s. In 1781 Wesley produced his most comprehensive work, the four-volume *Concise Ecclesiastical History, from the Birth of Christ, to the Beginning of the Present Century*. This was primarily an abridgment of Mosheim’s church history, with Wesley appending in the fourth volume his own “Short History of the People Called Methodists.” Over the next few years Wesley expressed his historical vision within the more candid and popular format of sermons. Three in particular are analysed here as sweeping portrayals of church history which serve to amplify features of Wesley’s interpretation gleaned more assiduously from his editing of Mosheim.

Despite the wealth of literature on Wesley, relatively few scholars have examined

⁵ Ibid., 1:v–vi.

⁶ Ibid., 1:xiii–ix.

⁷ Wesley, *WJW*, 23:213–14.

his interpretation of church history. Henry Rack's important biography makes brief mention of Wesley's *Concise Ecclesiastical History*, and several recent articles attend either to this work or to sermons in which he gave historical overviews.⁸ When these sources are treated together, however, one better appreciates the breadth of his historical reflection, its significant place in his thinking, and its correlation with other eighteenth-century evangelical interpretations. Moving from his 1744 sermon to his writings in the 1780s we find that Wesley held a consistent vision of church history which perceived the progress of both corruption and holiness through the centuries, up to and encompassing the history of the Methodist Revival itself.

I. The *Concise Ecclesiastical History*

We begin with Wesley's substantial effort at promoting an understanding of church history, his *Concise Ecclesiastical History*. He derived this publication from Mosheim's influential Latin history and Archibald Maclaine's English translation (with additional notes) entitled *An Ecclesiastical History, Antient and Modern, from the Birth of Christ, to the Beginning of the Present Century....* As we observed in Chapter One, Mosheim's work encountered its greatest popularity in the English-speaking world by way of Maclaine's translation. It was first published by prominent London publishers Millar and Cadell in 1765 and emerged from their printing press in two subsequent editions (1768 and 1774) prior to the publication of Wesley's volumes and twice more (1782 and 1790) before his death. In addition, the translation appeared in Dublin in 1767, and another abridgment (by a "layman," John Parkinson) was published in 1787.⁹

⁸ Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd ed. (London: Epworth Press, 2002), 348–49; articles dealing with Wesley's historical interpretation are referenced in subsequent notes. Significantly more academic attention has been given to the broader subject of Wesley's engagement with Christian tradition(s), but these sources typically make little use of Wesley's historical writings.

⁹ Information on Maclaine's editions is from ECCO and the ESTC. Wesley did not elucidate which editions he used; in his Preface, he spoke vaguely of Mosheim's work "published thirty or forty years ago," and

It might be assumed that the *Concise Ecclesiastical History* was a derivative work and thus inadequate as a measure of Wesley's own historical vision. But Wesley implicitly assented to what he included from his source. The spines of his volumes featured the shortened title "WESLEY'S ECCLESIAST HISTORY," effectively reinforcing his claim to the substance provided by Mosheim and Maclaine. Moreover, with close attention to how he abridged and edited it is possible to see his imprint. For the most part he quietly assumed the others' interpretation(s), working mainly to condense the text; but at points he omitted what he thought to be superfluous or unhelpful aspects, and in his Preface and on rare occasions in the text, Wesley interjected his own voice, usually in editorial disagreement. Although a comprehensive comparison of Wesley's work with those of Mosheim and Maclaine is beyond the scope of this study, a selective analysis taking into consideration Wesley's varied instruments in reshaping his sources—abridging, dropping, or explicitly countering—helps to elucidate his own perspective.

Why did Wesley choose the work of Mosheim for his representation of church history? We have noted in Chapter Two Wesley's assistance with Gillies' work on the *Historical Collections* and promotion of it within Methodist connexions. But clearly these volumes did not suffice for Wesley when he turned his mind to the circulation of a valuable church history. In his Preface Wesley singled out Mosheim's history as the only one of which he was aware that was worthy of the task of abridgment. He praised Mosheim's learning and "lively" writing style; the author's occasional 'Ciceronian' floridity or verbosity could be corrected through deletion. Wesley intentionally offered the reader an inexpensive alternative to Maclaine's edition.¹⁰ Wesley's sympathetic biographers Thomas Coke and Henry Moore, a few years after Wesley's death, wrote that since Wesley

Maclaine's translation published "a few years since." John Wesley, *A Concise Ecclesiastical History, from the Birth of Christ, to the Beginning of the present Century*, 4 vols. (London: printed by J. Paramore, 1781), 1:iii–iv.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:iii–iv, vi–vii.

“had not time to be original” in historical writing he industriously “chose the best he could find, ... and abridged, added or altered, as he believed the truth required, and to suit the convenience of the purchaser: his chief aim being to spread religious and useful knowledge among the poor or middling class of men.”¹¹ In Mosheim’s volumes Wesley found what he was looking for: a scholarly, respected church history which he could reshape and disseminate to a popular audience.

But Wesley’s Preface also made clear that he diverged from Mosheim in an important respect. Wesley’s declared intent in abridging was to draw out the internal vitality of the church, marked by “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” This was a corrective directed at Mosheim, whom Wesley speculated was not “much acquainted with Inward Religion.” Wesley took aim at Mosheim’s categories organizing his account and observed that he equated the church’s “internal state” only with its learning, government, doctrine, rites and ceremonies.¹² In response, Wesley sought to redeem “the Character of truly good men” to whom Mosheim and Maclaine had “not done justice.”¹³ Akin to other evangelical history-writers keen to identify instances of the Christian gospel’s success, Wesley’s design was to highlight exemplars of vital Christian godliness.

At the same time, Wesley prepared his reader with what appears as a somewhat pessimistic view. This slant had been in evidence in his 1744 sermon on “Scriptural Christianity,” which had placed the emphasis on the rise of sinfulness alongside godliness in the apostolic age, the steadily growing corruption in subsequent centuries, and God’s intervention to prevent hell from “wholly” overcoming the church. The language of Wesley’s Preface in the *Ecclesiastical History* connected back to this sermon and anticipated

¹¹ Thomas Coke and Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. Including an Account of the Great Revival of Religion, in Europe and America, of Which He was the First and Chief Instrument...* (Macclesfield, England: printed by Edward Bayley, [1795?]), 428.

¹² Wesley, *CEH*, 1:v–vi.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1:vii.

others: “As *the mystery of iniquity* began to *work* even in the days of the Apostles, so not long after they were removed from the earth, it brought forth a plentiful harvest. It overspread the face of the earth.” He emphatically warned that saints were few in number “in every age.”¹⁴

We turn now to the content itself. Wesley drew from Mosheim a description of the time of Christ’s birth as one of “darkness and corruption” with the Roman Empire’s jumble of superstitious and idolatrous religions and various philosophies which mixed sublime and absurd elements. Roman religious worship produced not “true virtue” but rather the opposite, “an universal corruption of manners.” At the same time, the Empire’s vast geographical reach, common language, and civilizing influence facilitated “the propagation of Christianity.”¹⁵ A similar two-sided judgment was made of the Jewish nation and religion. Corruption prevailed in both politics and piety. Yet the dispersion throughout the Empire of the Jewish people with their belief in the one true God shamed the surrounding superstition. It was Mosheim—copied by Wesley—who saw this Jewish witness against heathenism as “most wisely directed by the adorable hand of an interposing providence” in preparation for Christianity.¹⁶

After a brief recounting of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension and an assertion of his divine nature, the text turned to the subject of the apostolic period. Wesley followed Mosheim’s account of the disciples’ transformation through the power of the Holy Spirit, from ignorance and obscurity to wisdom and bold witness. Wesley’s source again attributed this reversal and the rapid spread of Christianity to providence as the only possible explanation: “When we consider the rapid progress of Christianity, and the feeble

¹⁴ Ibid., 1:vii–viii (emphasis in original). The phrase “mystery of iniquity” Wesley drew from 2 Thess. 2:7.

¹⁵ Ibid., 1:20–28, quotations at 20, 24 and 28. Throughout this section on the *History*, comparison has been made with Maclaine’s 1774 edition of Mosheim. Only in cases where Wesley altered the text will a specific reference to Mosheim be given.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1:29–35, quotation at 35.

instruments by which this amazing event was effected, we must naturally have recourse to an omnipotent hand, as its true and proper cause.” There appeared “undoubted marks of a celestial power,” such as the apostles’ powerful words, amazing miracles, prophetic ability, remarkable charity, simplicity and willingness to undergo suffering, and consistent holiness.¹⁷

On the subject of persecutions, Wesley adopted Mosheim’s view that Jewish opposition to Christianity led to divine punishment, at least in a passive sense: God “withdrew” his longstanding protection and “permitted” the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple and the slaying or enslavement of the Jewish people.¹⁸ In regard to Roman emperors’ actions, Wesley drew from Mosheim the assertion that the traditional picture of ten major persecutions was inaccurate; the number was less, if one’s criterion was a general or universal persecution.¹⁹

The *History* drew attention to Christian expansion in early centuries. The narrative traced Christianity’s acceptance among German, Spanish, British, French and Indian peoples and the Scriptures’ translation into Latin, Syriac, Egyptian and Ethiopian. It also reflected Mosheim’s judgment that the German claim that its church descended from St. Peter and the British claim for the Christian conversion of second-century king Lucius were “extremely doubtful.”²⁰ But Wesley also performed some subtle editing. Mosheim presented miracles and spiritual gifts as direct causes of the rapid growth of the church and expressed the view that these began to “diminish” in the second century after dissemination throughout the Empire had occurred. Wesley’s version, however, deleted the point about diminishing spiritual abilities and stated straightforwardly that “the

¹⁷ Ibid., 1:40–44, quotation at 43.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1:45.

¹⁹ Ibid., 1:46.

²⁰ Ibid., 1:78–80.

extraordinary gifts”—by implication *all* of them—continued.²¹

This subtle modification on the issue of the miraculous was amplified in the subsequent narrative. Both versions continued with an account of a rainstorm which refreshed the Roman Emperor Marcus Antoninus’s parched army (including, apparently, Christian soldiers) yet dealt thunder and lightning at its enemies. Mosheim had observed that the event was traditionally construed as a miracle but opined that to do so was “a pious sort of mistake” when one could find more mundane explanations: “...it is an invariable maxim universally adopted by the wise and judicious, that no events are to be esteemed miraculous, which may be rationally attributed to natural causes, and accounted for, by a recourse to the ordinary dispensations of providence....” This principle, Mosheim believed, applied without question to the story of the rainstorm. Wesley’s version retained acknowledgment of disagreement on whether the event was miraculous. But precisely where Mosheim had argued for an explanation via nature Wesley replaced this with a conclusion that “it was reasonable ... to attribute the deliverance of Antoninus and his army to a miraculous interposition of the true God.”²²

Wesley answered, in part, his design to redress traditionally maligned characters in discussion of those in early centuries who traditionally had been deemed heretics. Wesley dropped Mosheim’s assertion that in Montanism “ignorance reigned” as well as his characterization of Montanus as “ignorant fanatic” and “enthusiast.” Wesley’s text followed the original in presenting Montanus as one claiming “a divine commission” to bring the church towards moral perfection, which led him to promote ascetic practices and

²¹ Ibid., 1:80; Johann Lorenz von Mosheim, *An Ecclesiastical History, Antient and Modern, From the Birth of Christ, To the Beginning of the Present Century...*, new ed., 5 vols. (London: printed for T. Cadell, 1774), 1:123–24, but see also p. 198 for Mosheim’s assertion of continued (but declining) instances of “*especial and interposing providence*” such as visions, healings and other miracles (reflected in Wesley at 1:117).

²² Wesley, *CEH*, 1:80–81; Mosheim, *EH (1774)*, 1:124–25. Note the debate evident in comparison of Mosheim’s distinction drawn between the miraculous and the rational and Wesley’s construal of the faith-based explanation as “reasonable.” Another example of Wesley’s divergence from Mosheim on whether an event was miraculous can be found at Wesley, *CEH*, 1:236; Mosheim, *EH (1774)*, 1:401–402.

strict church discipline. Curiously, Wesley retained several critical descriptions of Montanus and his followers and, rather than editing these out, appended the following vindication: “Such is the account which is generally given of Montanus. But I have frequently been in doubt, whether he was not one of the wisest and holiest men who was then in the Christian church! And whether his real fault was not, the bearing a faithful testimony of the general apostacy from Christian holiness.”²³ Tertullian, sympathetic to Montanism, Wesley presented more favourably by dropping Mosheim’s assessment of his character as a mixture of true piety and sternness or melancholy and of intellectual brilliance and poor judgment or seemingly ignorant belief.²⁴ Wesley took a similar tack with Novatian. Echoing his assessment of Montanus, he wrote: “I have sometimes doubted, whether both Novatian and his doctrine have not been greatly misrepresented: whether he was not himself, one of the holiest men who lived in that century....” Like Montanus, Novatian appeared to have been castigated more for unpopular rather than heretical teaching, in his case “that *impenitent* sinners ought not to be retained in, or admitted into the church.”²⁵ Moving forward in history, one even more controversial figure, Pelagius, likewise garnered Wesley’s sympathy. “I doubt,” wrote Wesley in a footnote mindful of sixteenth-century critics of Calvin, “whether he was any more an Heretic than Castellio, or Arminius.” Without going into specifics of what might be appreciable in Pelagius, he drew attention to the absence of original writings and to the fact that what was known about him had been passed down from Augustine, “his furious, implacable enemy.”²⁶ All these various judgments by Wesley were couched in the language of speculation, but clearly his orientation was towards defending these historical characters

²³ Wesley, *CEH*, 1:113–14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1:96; Mosheim, *EH (1774)*, 1:148.

²⁵ Wesley, *CEH*, 1:145.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:248 n. ‘a’.

and/or their principles as misrepresented.

Wesley's stamp appeared quite heavily in regard to Constantine and the effect of this emperor on the church. On the matter of his Christian conversion, Mosheim had referred to the famous story of a vision of a cross in the sky as Constantine marched toward Rome with his army. "But," he wrote, "that this extraordinary event was the reason of his conversion, is a matter that has never yet been placed in such a light, as to dispel all doubts and difficulties." Wesley retained the reference to the reputed vision but offered a much blunter appraisal: "But this is very doubtful."²⁷ From Mosheim he drew a characterization of Constantine as indisputably zealous for the Christian religion but in action falling short of its principles. But Wesley ventured beyond this with his own harsher assessment of the Emperor and the church under his influence:

And as it is extremely doubtful, whether Constantine ever was a Christian or not, so it is no less doubtful, whether his professing himself such, was of any real service to Christianity. It cannot be denied, that he added much riches, and honour, and dignity to the Christian Profession. But was this of any service to real Christianity? To the religion of the heart? Rather it sapped the very foundation of it, and jumbled together nominal Christianity and real Heathenism.²⁸

As we shall see, Wesley pronounced even more thunderous judgments on Constantine in sermons written after the publication of the *History*.

Wesley maintained Mosheim's mixed portrayal of late-sixth-century pope Gregory I. Gregory was represented as mission-minded in his sending of Benedictine missionaries to Britain and his efforts to convert Jews but also as coercive and especially as over-ambitious for Roman supremacy over all Christians.²⁹ His personal character was perceived to be two-sided: he possessed both "a sound and penetrating judgment" and "the most shameful and superstitious weakness." Wesley adopted Mosheim's argument that

²⁷ Ibid., 1:151; Mosheim, *EH* (1774), 1:261.

²⁸ Wesley, *CEH*, 1:152.

²⁹ Ibid., 1:250–52.

Gregory's own writings proved him complicit in advancing his age's corruption of ancient, simple worship through the addition of a "motley mixture of human inventions" (such as purgatory and salvation by works) and superfluous rites and ceremonies (such as veneration of images, saints and relics).³⁰ This identification of vile and venerable qualities blended together in Gregory was not a new development. Rather, for Mosheim—and Wesley after him—Gregory prominently personified a corrupting trend which had been growing since the rise of councils, ascendancy of bishops and elaboration of ceremonies already in the second century; by the fourth century, "the number of immoral Christians began so to increase, that the examples of real piety were extremely rare."³¹

On the subject of monasticism, Wesley again demurred to Mosheim. He adopted Mosheim's critical characterization, articulated already within the discussion of second-century Christianity, of monks' creation of a "double rule of sanctity" by setting up monastic discipline as a superior Christian expression. Monastic vows and practices such as celibacy, penance, self-mortification, and isolation were characterized as "austere and superstitious," obscuring the "beauty and simplicity" of Christianity. The fourth century again seemed to evince a groundswell of corruption: "swarms of monks" preoccupied with inner, spiritual existence threatened to "overspread the Christian world."³² Exceptions could be made, as in the case of Benedict of Nursia, who was described as "a man of piety for the age he lived in."³³ The missionary exploits of the eighth-century English Benedictine monk Boniface, or Winifred, in Germanic lands were represented as successful, but at the same time he was considered overly zealous for the church hierarchy,

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:266–68; also 270–71: "The western churches were loaded with rites by Gregory the Great, who had a marvellous fecundity of genius in inventing, and an irresistible eloquence in recommending superstitious observances."

³¹ *Ibid.*, 1:94, 101–102, 181–82, quotation at 181.

³² *Ibid.*, 1:99–100, 178.

³³ *Ibid.*, 1:264.

guilty of coercive methods of conversion, and ignorant of “the true nature and genius of the Christian religion.”³⁴ Later Wesley adopted Mosheim’s account of Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux’s heated opposition to Henry of Toulouse, leader of a reformist movement (the Henricians) protesting against clerical corruption. Wesley added his own astonished exclamation on Bernard: “What kind of saint is this?”³⁵ Fourteenth-century Franciscans were portrayed as idolatrously devoted to their founder; in their “enthusiastic frenzy” they elevated Francis as a “*second* Christ” and promoted “the absurd fable” of his *stigmata*.³⁶

Wesley’s concern for disciplined holiness and his own asceticism might lead one to expect a more favourable assessment of monasticism. One nineteenth-century author saw Wesley and his Methodist societies and St. Francis and his fraternities as analogous and called the two men “brothers in spirit.”³⁷ Gwang Seok Oh in a recent study astutely acknowledges that a comparison can be made between aspects of medieval monasticism and Methodism but insists that evidence of a direct application of monastic ideals by Wesley is lacking. According to Oh, Wesley’s distaste for medieval mysticism, evident already in the 1730s, corresponded with his growing suspicion of Pietist quietism or ‘stillness’; Wesley rejected these because of his conviction that Christianity should be expressed outwardly or socially.³⁸ Whatever he might have shared with medieval monks was overridden by his relentless energy and his desire to transform society generally.

Wesley echoed Mosheim’s condemnation of Pope Boniface VIII (1294–1303). The *History* described him as an “unworthy prelate,” “a plague both to church and state, a disturber of the repose of nations,” nearly ‘frenzied’ in his attempts to extend the power of

³⁴ Ibid., 305–307, quotation at 307.

³⁵ Ibid., 2:212.

³⁶ Ibid., 2:305.

³⁷ Butler, *Wesley and Whitefield in Scotland*, 212–16, quotation at 214.

³⁸ Gwang Seok Oh, *John Wesley's Ecclesiology: A Study in Its Sources and Development*, Revitalization: Explorations in World Christian Movements; Pietist and Wesleyan Studies 27 (Lanham, MD, Toronto, ON & Plymouth, UK: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 30–34, 252–54.

the Roman pontiff.³⁹ Boniface's persecution of the Franciscan *fratricelli* was noted, and the latter portrayed (ironically, considering the previous judgment of the Franciscans) as austere, genuinely devout, and outspoken "against the corruption of the church of Rome, and the vices of the pontiffs and bishops."⁴⁰ Papal pretension was exemplified by Boniface's controversy with French monarch Philip the Fair and epitomized by his bull, *Unam Sanctam*.⁴¹ His papacy, it was claimed, marked the beginning of decline for the "papal empire" due to the rise of resentment against papal claims to power.⁴²

Wesley had followed Mosheim in identifying the papacy of Gregory VII (r. 1073–1085) as perhaps the height of corruption and in finding, from this time forward, Christians "who remained uncorrupted" and "who attempted the reformation of a corrupt and idolatrous church."⁴³ From Mosheim he adopted a traditional yet occasionally redressed cast of these protesters. The account of the Waldenses revealed that they had not been monolithic in their opposition: some saw the Roman Church as apostate but others considered it a corrupted but nonetheless true church.⁴⁴ At the same time, Wesley incorporated Maclaine's editorial view that Waldensian origins were to be found not via Peter Waldo in the mid-twelfth century but rather via the Vaudois of the French valleys of Piedmont.⁴⁵ By this he effectively subscribed to the traditional Protestant account of a more authentic Christian expression preserved from ancient times.

In comparison with Mosheim, Wesley gave a more favourable presentation of the

³⁹ Wesley, *CEH*, 2:252.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:259.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2:290.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 2:293.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2:141.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:216–17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:213–14, and especially 214 n. 'k'; Mosheim, *EH* (1774), 2:451ff, especially footnote pp. 452–53, the first thirteen lines of which are written by Mosheim, followed by Maclaine's contrary argument. Interestingly, Wesley left out Maclaine's poignant summary of the traditional view: "When the Papists ask us where our Religion was before Luther? we generally answer, in the Bible; and we answer well. But to gratify their taste for Tradition and human authority, we may add to this answer, and in the Vallies of Piedmont" (452–53 n.).

Albigenses in Italy, France and Germany. Maclaine's edition described these somewhat scornfully as capturing, throughout Europe, "the esteem and admiration of the multitude, by their sanctimonious looks, and the uncommon air of piety, which they put on with much affectation." Wesley edited the text to read simply that they "captivated the esteem and admiration of the multitude by their uncommon air of piety."⁴⁶ By the simple deletion of two phrases Wesley completely altered the interpretation. More explicitly, Wesley included from Mosheim a summary that the Albigenses "placed the whole of religion in the internal contemplation of God, and the elevation of the soul to divine things," but then inserted a characteristic footnote recording his speculative praise: "There is much reason to doubt, whether these were not real, spiritual Christians, who did not despise external Religion, while they laid the main stress upon Internal."⁴⁷ It is not difficult to see Wesley's comment on this medieval group as an indirect attempt to legitimize or defend Methodism, as similarly respectful of the English Church's institutions and liturgy alongside its preoccupation with 'religion of the heart'.

Wesley's accounts of 'proto-Protestants' Wycliffe, Hus and Jerome also came from Mosheim. As with the Waldenses and Albigenses, the presence of these figures in Wesley's *History* stood in accord with traditional Protestant renderings; but their accounts were nuanced. Wycliffe was depicted as a divine possessing "an enterprising genius, and extraordinary learning," who resolutely denounced encroachments by Dominicans and Franciscans and castigated their patrons, the popes. This led him to recognize and critique other "absurd notions" which contributed to religious superstition and to promote lay study of Scripture through his preaching and translation work. He managed to avoid punishment as a heretic due to "high regard" from the duke of Lancaster and other peers.

⁴⁶ Wesley, *CEH*, 2:151; Mosheim, *EH (1774)*, 2:346.

⁴⁷ Wesley, *CEH*, 2:152.

But persecution of his followers grew, culminating in the formal condemnation of his person and teachings at the Council of Constance.⁴⁸ On Hus, Wesley followed Mosheim in praising his sound doctrine, eloquence, holy living, and noble faith in the face of death but also in noting his stubbornness and lack of tact. Jerome, it was noted, initially wavered but ultimately displayed an “heroic constancy.” The entire presentation of their trial and judgment at Constance was framed by an assertion of gross injustice: the council’s transactions, “which no pretext, no consideration, can render excusable,” appropriately aroused “indignation.”⁴⁹ Although the account observed flaws, these figures maintained their traditional status as stalwart defenders of the faith in the face of corruption and persecution.

Discussion of Luther’s day was prefaced with a portrayal of the Catholic Church at the pinnacle of debauchery and abuse. After an extended section (roughly eleven pages) describing rampant corruption at every level, the text set the stage for a dramatic conflict. On one side was the papacy which considered itself unassailable. The force of its arrogance was matched by the strength of those desiring reform. Wesley derived from Mosheim the view that the revival of learning prepared the way for the Reformation but was insufficient in itself to overturn the state of religion: “...none had the courage to strike at the root of the evil,” namely papal claims to supremacy as Christ’s appointed head of the church.⁵⁰

The account of Luther’s emergence in 1517 emphasized his obscurity and the unexpected or surprising force of his attack on papal pride and power. But insignificant as he might have seemed, his character was nothing but extraordinary: he possessed remarkably “extensive” learning, a “vast and tenacious” memory, “incredible” endurance,

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2:303–304.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 3:14–21, quotations at 14, 18.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 3:52–54, 62, quotations at 53, 62.

and “invincible” generosity.⁵¹ His ninety-five theses, it was claimed, implicated not only Tetzel and the Archbishop of Mainz but also the Roman pontiff as ‘guilty’ in the matter of indulgences. This event was pinpointed as “the commencement of that memorable revolution in the church, which humbled the grandeur of the pontiffs, and eclipsed so great a part of their glory.”⁵² Yet the subsequent narrative did not treat the Reformation as inevitable. Rather, it presented Luther as submissive and moderate and reminded of the possibility that the religious controversy would be resolved without any breach.⁵³ As we have seen in other historical accounts, the spread of Luther’s reform throughout Europe was depicted as the dawning or diffusing of light.⁵⁴

References to providence in relation to the Reformation were sparse. Wesley’s text incorporated from Mosheim a statement on the Lutheran Church’s willingness to take “the name of the great man, whom Providence employed for its foundation.”⁵⁵ But Wesley did not noticeably colour Mosheim’s account with providential tones. Rare instances of editing can be found. For example, where Mosheim ascribed Melancthon’s ability to set aside his natural timidity and irenicism in support of the Protestant cause to “the force of truth and the power of principle”; Wesley changed this to “the grace of God.”⁵⁶

Wesley retained from Mosheim a brief account of the Anabaptist revolutionary kingdom at Münster. Wesley’s version dropped a few words or phrases which did not much alter the denunciatory tone. One change, however, seems to position Wesley as comparatively more sympathetic to Anabaptism in general. In Maclaine’s edition the story began with the arrival at Münster of “a certain number of *anabaptists*, who surpassed the

⁵¹ Ibid., 3:64.

⁵² Ibid., 3:65.

⁵³ Ibid., 3:65–74.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 3:98–100, 102, 104.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 3:195.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 3:76; Mosheim, *EH (1774)*, 3:317–18.

rest of that fanatical tribe” in their extreme claims and actions and “gave themselves out for the messengers of heaven.” Wesley’s *History* referred more simply to the arrival in the city of “a number of *anabaptists*, who gave themselves out for the messengers of heaven.”⁵⁷ Thus Wesley changed Mosheim’s broad disdain for Anabaptism as ‘enthusiasm’ into a more localized judgment. He retained Mosheim’s point elsewhere that after the destruction of Münster and execution of its Anabaptist leaders the majority “saved themselves from the ruin of their sect, and embraced the communion of those who are called Mennonites.”⁵⁸ Correspondingly, Menno Simons was presented as a simple, devout leader who effectively developed a more moderate and consistent form of Anabaptism.⁵⁹ A summary portrayed Thomas Müntzer, militant peasants, and the Münsterite kingdom as aspects of a seditious, fanatical Anabaptist branch contrasting other Anabaptists who held some false notions but otherwise displayed sound morals and true piety.⁶⁰ The persecution meted out against them punished both guilty and innocent.⁶¹

When Mosheim’s narrative turned to English Puritanism, Wesley’s own voice suddenly emerged in a passionate flurry, in defence but especially in critique of the subject. On Mosheim’s point that moderate Puritans under Queen Elizabeth “only desired liberty of conscience, with the privilege of celebrating divine worship in their own way,” Wesley exclaimed supportively, “And it was vile tyranny to refuse them this.” Yet only half a page later, where Mosheim discussed Puritans’ opposition to clerical use of vestments, which they deemed to be ‘popish’ “ensigns of Antichrist,” Wesley interjected, “Vile Superstition!” Seemingly he was castigating what he saw as a Puritan overreaction on a minor matter. Then, on Puritans’ critique of the Church of England’s hierarchical government as a

⁵⁷ Wesley, *CEH*, 3:111; Mosheim, *EH (1774)*, 3:363.

⁵⁸ Wesley, *CEH*, 3:210.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3:274–76.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:269–73.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3:112, 272.

departure from “that which had been instituted by Christ,” Wesley abruptly commented, “He instituted none at all that we know.” He responded similarly on the alleged Puritan claim that the pattern of church government was established by Scripture. Of the English system of cathedral churches with their beneficed archdeacons, deans, canons, and other officials, which Puritans found distasteful, Wesley said in defence: “To this no reasonable man can object.” Where Mosheim noted Puritans’ perception that their monarch was making compulsory religious observances on which Christ was “indifferent,” Wesley defended the monarch as “a competent authority” who should be obeyed.⁶²

Wesley’s edition kept a varied assessment by Mosheim of seventeenth-century Puritanism. The turmoil under Charles I culminating in his execution was the result of “zeal without knowledge,” a misguided “attachment to the external parts of religion,” and doctrinal misinterpretation. Oppressed Puritans, the text stated, quickly became oppressors.⁶³ Yet the rapid growth of Independency in the midst of strife under Charles I was attributed largely to their erudite leadership and disciplined holiness. They prospered, together with Presbyterians, under Cromwell’s favour but declined again after the Restoration.⁶⁴ Correspondingly, Wesley retained from Mosheim a section on English perceptions of growing iniquity and “infidelity” under the reign of Charles II.⁶⁵

This multifaceted perspective on Puritanism, and especially Wesley’s impassioned interjections, reflected a real tension in Wesley himself. Gwang Seok Oh’s recent study examines Puritanism’s influence, direct and indirect, on Wesley. He came from a family

⁶² Ibid., 3:246–47, 249, 251–52. On two points above, regarding vestments and the cathedral system, the meanings of Wesley’s curt exclamations could be taken the opposite way, i.e. that vestments were superstitious and that a dismantling of beneficed positions attached to cathedrals would be reasonable. However, the interpretation given above seems the most plausible, especially considering Wesley’s desire to remain loyal to the Church. Wesley in his 1783 sermon “The Mystery of Iniquity” expressed scorn—“Ye fools and blind!”—at early Protestants’ preoccupation with external religious matters. Outler interprets this comment as directed at Puritan protests over issues such as vestments and prelacy. Wesley, *WJW*, 2:465.

⁶³ Wesley, *CEH*, 4:107.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 4:109–110.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 3:320–24.

with a Puritan legacy but also from parents who as young adults had returned to the Church of England. That Wesley appreciated and drew from the Puritan tradition was exemplified best by the prevalence of Puritan ‘practical divinity’ in Wesley’s *Christian Library*. Wesley defended Puritans living under the oppressiveness of Charles II and his bishops and held up Puritan lives and especially their endurance in the face of suffering as exemplary and instructive.⁶⁶ Oh argues that “one clearly sees not only affinity but affiliation between Wesley and the Puritans” in theology and practice. But, as Oh points out, Methodists were accused of reviving Puritan sectarianism, a charge which Wesley consistently denied.⁶⁷ It seems that in his *History*, while Wesley defended Puritans’ right to worship according to conscience he also sought to distance himself (and Methodism) from association with Puritanism and to display his loyalty to the Church of England.

Wesley’s *History* also retained from Mosheim a two-sided account of German Pietism. The chief aim of Pietists was a “restoration” of “holiness.”⁶⁸ Spener was described as “pious and learned” and his early efforts praised as bringing religious renewal. Controversy resulted, however, when his religious societies seemed, according to Mosheim, to produce “a blind and intemperate zeal, instead of that pure and rational love of God, whose fruits are benign and peaceful.” Pietist meetings for religious instruction seemed to encourage practical, vital Christianity but soon were accused of indiscretions. Wesley adopted Mosheim’s assertion that the label ‘Pietist’ was applied both to those who displayed “eminent wisdom and piety” and those who were gross enthusiasts.⁶⁹

Wesley’s *History* concluded with special attention to the Methodist Revival in England. Mosheim, arriving at the subject of the eighteenth-century church, had admitted

⁶⁶ On Wesley’s view of the injustice of Charles II’s Act of Uniformity, see Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London: Epworth Press, 1970), 237.

⁶⁷ Oh, *Wesley’s Ecclesiology*, 66–77, quotation at 76.

⁶⁸ Wesley, *CEH*, 4:81.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 4:85–87.

that he was “greatly in the dark” in regard to varieties of English Christianity. He made no mention of Wesley, but did offer the following:

At present the ministerial labours of *George Whitefield*, who has formed a community, which he proposes to render superior in sanctity and perfection to all other Christian churches, make a considerable noise in *England*, and are not altogether destitute of success. If there is any consistency in this man’s theological system, and he is not to be looked upon as an enthusiast, who follows no rule but the blind impulse of an irregular fancy, his doctrine seems to amount to these two propositions—“that true religion consists alone in holy affections and in a certain inward *feeling*, which it is impossible to explain—and that Christians ought not to seek truth by the dictates of reason, or by the aids of learning, but by laying their minds open to the direction and influence of Divine Illumination.”⁷⁰

Wesley in his edition dropped Mosheim’s reference to Whitefield’s supposed formation of a community separate from other churches (likely Mosheim had misinterpreted the designation ‘Holy Club’ used for the Oxford Methodists). Wesley also deleted the phrases suggesting Whitefield might be an “enthusiast” guided by “irregular fancy,” and changed “not altogether destitute of success” to read “not destitute of success.” But surprisingly, a decade after Whitefield’s death, Wesley left the rest of this somewhat cynical portrayal of his former friend and Methodist associate intact. What remained left open for the reader’s judgment the possibility of theological inconsistency in Whitefield. And although Wesley had removed the explicit label “enthusiast,” the summary of Whitefield’s supposed emphases could easily be interpreted as enthusiasm or, at best, as anti-intellectualism.⁷¹

The person of Whitefield marked the conclusion of Wesley’s material from Mosheim; but Wesley proceeded to place Methodism within the sweep of church history by adding (with little introduction) his 112-page “Short History of the People Called Methodists.”⁷² Wesley’s effort was in part a rebuff to Maclaine, who already in his first edition added a table listing Wesley alongside Whitefield and the Moravian Brethren as

⁷⁰ Mosheim, *EH* (1774), 5:96.

⁷¹ Wesley, *CEH*, 4:167–68. It is difficult to interpret Wesley’s editorial decision: perhaps Wesley felt an enduring sting from debate over Calvinist principles with Whitefield and his associates.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 4:169–281.

eighteenth-century “Heretics or Enemies of Revelation.”⁷³ But beyond this personal grievance, Wesley had grander designs: in Rupert Davies’ words, he “clearly believed that Methodism was an important phenomenon in the history of the church, likely to become permanent and deserving a chapter in an *Ecclesiastical History*.”⁷⁴

Wesley’s inclusion of a history of Methodism reinforces the point that church history was not a peripheral curiosity but rather was fundamental to his understanding of his own career and the broader Revival. In this narrative, based on his journals, Wesley’s language forged a correlation for his readers between Methodists and historical reform movements which had experienced persecution. He gave prominent place to instances of hostility towards himself and other Methodists (but also of providential escape from injury).⁷⁵ More explicitly, he drew a parallel between the expulsion on 24 August 1662 of nearly two thousand ministers from the Church of England under Charles II and the negative reception exactly eighty-two years later, on 24 August 1744, to his Oxford sermon “Scriptural Christianity.”⁷⁶ Wesley framed the narrative with references to Maclaine’s accusation of “heresy” and concluded with biblical allusions to suffering for Jesus’ sake.⁷⁷ Finally, throughout he emphasized the inconspicuous growth of the Revival, implicitly linking Methodists with earlier Christians arising from obscurity to reinvigorate the church.

⁷³ Ibid., 4:169. Rupert E. Davies terms the “Short History” a “corrective” to Maclaine. He refers to Maclaine’s 1768 edition; but see Mosheim, *EH (1765)*, 2:624. For Davies’ comments, see John Wesley, *WJW*, vol. 9, *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature and Design*, ed. Rupert E. Davies (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 425 and 426 n. 3, also 426–503 for his critical edition of the “Short History.” Maclaine was a student at the University of Glasgow from the late 1730s through to taking his MA in 1746; one might speculate that his close proximity to the Cambuslang revival of 1742 which featured Whitefield shaped his view of evangelicals. For details on Maclaine’s career, see James K. Cameron, “Maclaine, Archibald (1722–1804)”, in *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17636> (accessed 14 April 2008).

⁷⁴ Davies, in Wesley, *Methodist Societies*, 425, echoed by Ken MacMillan, “John Wesley and the Enlightened Historians”, *Methodist History* 38, no. 2 (2000): 127.

⁷⁵ Wesley, *CEH*, 4:176–77, 178, 181–83, 185, 194–95, 200–201, 207–208 as examples.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 4:187.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 4:169, 280–81. Biblical allusions were to Matt. 5:11 and Acts 20:24; these also appeared at 4:176–77. Scripture references are identified in Wesley, *Methodist Societies*, Index.

II. Sermons

In the years following the publication of his *Concise Ecclesiastical History*, Wesley articulated his understanding of church history in several sermons. We will examine three in particular in which Wesley gave the most comprehensive or panoramic portrayals: “The Mystery of Iniquity” (1783), “The Wisdom of God’s Counsels” (1784), and “Of Former Times” (1787). Wesley included these sermons in the *Arminian Magazine* and then published them in 1788 as part of his four-volume addition (volumes five through eight) to *Sermons on Several Occasions*.⁷⁸ Our approach will be first to analyze the historical details of all three sermons in one chronology and then to highlight each sermon’s use of church history in relation to Methodism. These popular expressions of his thinking built on his edition of Mosheim by reflecting the interpretation sketched in his Preface and by frequently featuring the same details on which his editing marks had been most evident.

To begin, Wesley considered apostolic Christianity to be more simple and pure, for at least a brief season. Pentecost he called a dawning of genuine Christianity. In one place he considered the Christian faith and practice immediately following this effusion of the Spirit as superior to any other time. Yet he also found ample evidence in the New Testament that “the mystery of iniquity” was at work nearly from the church’s inception. Wesley exclaimed, “We have been apt to imagine that the primitive church was all excellence and perfection! ... But how soon did the fine gold become dim!”⁷⁹ Wesley

⁷⁸ These sermons appear in Wesley, *WJW*, 2:452–70, 552–66 and 3:442–53. Another of Wesley’s sermons entitled “On Attending the Church Service” (1787) contains a brief but characteristic summary of church history (3:469–70).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:455–61, quotations at 460–61; 3:448, 451. While Wesley’s interest in ‘primitive’ Christianity is evident in the source material, his statement here reminds that his primitivism can be overstated. Eamon Duffy, “Primitive Christianity Revived; Religious Renewal in Augustan England,” in *Renaissance and Renewal in Christian History*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell for The Ecclesiastical History Society, 1977), 287–300, at 299–300, contends that despite Wesley’s interest in ‘primitive’ Christianity in his early years, by 1738 he had largely set aside “the ideal of ‘primitive’ for that of ‘real’ Christianity.” But compare Luke L. Keefer Jr., “John Wesley: Disciple of Early Christianity”, *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19, no. 1 (1984): 28, 30, which acknowledges Wesley’s perception of the “mystery of iniquity” early in church history but maintains that his primitivism is “a hermeneutical key to his life.”

traced spreading spiritual decay through ensuing centuries, interrupted by occasional godly examples and “longer or shorter seasons wherein true Christianity revived” as a result of divinely-permitted persecutions. Montanus and Tertullian, in his estimation, lived holy lives “against the general corruption of Christians” and suffered as a result.⁸⁰ Wesley likewise sharply contrasted the characters of the fifth-century heretic Pelagius, whom he speculated should be ranked among the holiest of his day, and his opponent Augustine, whom he sarcastically called “a wonderful saint!” and described as “full of pride, passion, bitterness, censoriousness, and ... foul-mouthed to all that contradicted him.”⁸¹

Wesley reserved his harshest condemnation for the Emperor Constantine, castigating his alleged conversion as “the grand blow” which had done more damage to the church than all the Roman persecutions combined. From this point in history, “...the Christians did not gradually sink, but rushed headlong into all manner of vices. Then the mystery of iniquity was no more hid, but stalked abroad in the face of the sun.”⁸²

Overwhelming corruption stemmed from the wealth, power and prestige which the Emperor bestowed on the church. Several of the sermons criticized contemporary writers who envisioned, in reference to Rev. 21:2, a descent of the heavenly Jerusalem to earth under Constantine. Wesley countered this impression in the language of Rev. 9, speaking of Constantine’s time as akin to the billowing smoke or the coming of Satan and his army from the bottomless pit.⁸³

⁸⁰ Wesley, *WJW*, 2:461–62, quotation at 462; see also 555. Wesley also defended Montanus in a short essay which Outler dates from 1785. Albert C. Outler, “John Wesley’s Interests in The Early Fathers of The Church”, *The Bulletin* 29 (1980–1982): 14. Wesley’s essay distinguished Montanus from other ‘heretics’ espousing more suspect theology and, while acknowledging varied opinions, concluded that “Montanus was not only a truly good man, but one of the best men then upon earth.” John Wesley, “The Real Character of Montanus,” in *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 11 (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House, 1979), 485–86.

⁸¹ Wesley, *WJW*, 2:555–56.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 2:462–63.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2:464, 3:449–50; also repeated at 2:529, in “The Signs of the Times” (1787). Oh, *Wesley’s Ecclesiology*, 97, 108, 130, draws a correlation between Wesley’s and Spener’s views on Constantine. He argues that both associated the end of the ‘primitive church’ with Constantine’s day and saw in their respective church

Wesley gave little attention to the Middle Ages in these sermons. His portrayals typically jumped one millennium from Constantine to the Reformation.⁸⁴ One painted with a broad stroke the church from the end of the first century to the Reformation: “...for fourteen hundred years, it was corrupted more and more, as all history shows, till scarce any either of the power or form of religion was left.”⁸⁵ Wesley nonetheless mentioned that “a few individuals” stood against the tide or (in an echo of his 1744 sermon in Oxford) that God prevented hell’s gates from “totally” overwhelming the church by preserving a few seeds, chiefly those who were ostracized by the Christian majority caught up with wealth, honour and power.⁸⁶ A disregard for this period of history was typical of Wesley’s day, as has been demonstrated in Chapter One. Wesley’s aversion to the medieval Catholic Church may have been made more pronounced by current events. As recently as 1778 the English Parliament had passed the Catholic Relief Act. Wesley published two responses: his *Popery Calmly Considered* of 1779, identified by Colin Haydon as the most prominent pamphlet written on Catholicism after the Act’s passing, and his 1781 *Letter to the Printer of the Public Advertiser, Occasioned by the late Act, passed in favour of Popery*.... These represented Catholicism as generally dangerous to society and damaging to true holiness.⁸⁷

Yet as we move forward in Wesley’s historical presentation we find that any latent anti-Catholicism offers only a limited explanation, as Wesley extended the pattern of general declension interrupted with glimmers of hope into Protestantism beyond the Reformation. Henry Rack aligns Wesley’s interpretation with those of Anglican

contexts—Anglican and Lutheran—corrupting influences which corresponded with church conditions under the Emperor.

⁸⁴ Wesley, *WJW*, 2:464, 3:449.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:555, with allusion to 2 Tim. 3:5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:464, 555.

⁸⁷ Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England, c. 1714–80: A Political and Social Study* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), 210–11.

evangelicals Joseph Milner and Thomas Haweis (see Chapters Five and Six), who “picked out scattered sparks of light in the dark ages of popery which preserved the truth until the Reformation dawned.”⁸⁸ But running counter to this generalization, we find that Wesley construed the Reformation as a transient renewal rather than a dramatic resurgence of vital Christianity. He did consider Luther’s rise from obscurity to challenge and subdue the powers of Rome to be guided by a divine hand. “Yet,” he maintained, “even before Luther was called home the love of many was waxed cold.”⁸⁹ The Reformation ultimately was “exquisitely trifling” in that it had brought change externally, but not in “tempers or lives.”⁹⁰

The same pattern of flourishing and fading Christian faith Wesley perceived in British history. He held that from the reign of Henry VIII through that of Elizabeth there arose “real witnesses of true scriptural Christianity,” whose numbers swelled in the first part of the seventeenth century. He specifically identified “a wonderful pouring out of the Spirit” in 1627 in Scotland, the north of Ireland and parts of England, likely having in mind the ‘awakenings’ among Puritans and Presbyterians which Gillies had highlighted.⁹¹ But religious vitality ebbed thereafter, apparently coinciding with Puritans’ political ascendancy; Wesley blamed the change on a cessation of persecution and increase in “ease and affluence.” He most likely had in mind Puritan political efforts to reform the nation and the execution of Charles I when he spoke of “fine gold” being “mingled with worldly design, and with a total contempt both of truth, justice, and mercy,” resulting in a

⁸⁸ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 349.

⁸⁹ Wesley, *WJW*, 2:556–57.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:465; also 2:556–57, 3:449. In his 1787 sermon “On Attending the Church Service” Wesley tempered this judgment, holding that the Reformation did bring internal transformation and reintroduced “more of the ancient, scriptural Christianity” throughout Europe, although its results were not lasting (3:470).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 2:557.

“scandal” which disgraced the name of Christianity.⁹² Corruption only worsened with the Restoration, Wesley believed, ushering in widespread “infidelity” and “immorality” lasting into his own time. The saving grace of the past one hundred years had been the waning of “cruelty” in religious matters—in positive terms, the rise of religious tolerance.⁹³

In these sermons Wesley always sought to link the distant past with contemporary experience and especially that of Methodism. “The Mystery of Iniquity” highlighted the theme of religious declension. After a pessimistic portrayal of church history Wesley turned to several practical applications. First he pondered that the “general apostasy” evident in the past made necessary a future “general reformation” marked by widespread conversions and peace. Next he warned his audience against nominal religion and especially the love of riches, which he believed had “in all ages been the bane of genuine Christianity,” the chief cause of its corruption. Finally, he exhorted sincere Christians to be watchful in the face of “the wickedness which overflows the earth” and thankful for their preservation.⁹⁴

In “The Wisdom of God’s Counsels” Wesley more optimistically focused on ‘providential’ interspersions acting against the spreading tide of corruption and made direct application to Methodists. Church history served Wesley in placing the Methodist Revival within the panorama of God’s redemptive work, or his “wisdom” as demonstrated through the growth of the church. In his mind, however, the modern Revival was pre-eminent. He summarized: “We may in some measure trace this manifold wisdom from the beginning of the world: from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Moses, and from Moses to

⁹² Ibid., 2:557, 3:449. Outler (3:449 n. 26) reads the latter statement as Wesley’s disdain for corrupting influences in the Restoration period and first half of the eighteenth century; but the chronological organization of Wesley’s sermon clearly rules out reference in this section to his own century, and the language seems more applicable to the Cromwellian period than the reign of Charles II.

⁹³ Ibid., 2:557–58, 3:449.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 2:466–70.

Christ. But I would now consider it (after just touching on the history of the church in past ages) only with regard to what he has wrought in the present age, during the last half century; yea, and in this little corner of the world, the British islands only.”⁹⁵

In this sermon’s brief depiction of church history, Wesley connected seemingly inconspicuous individuals through whom, he believed, God had renewed the church: “meek, simple” early Christians, alleged “heretics” Montanus and Pelagius, the “poor monk” Luther, suffering Puritans, and Methodist societies which, spurred on by William Law’s *Practical Treatise on Christian Perfection* and *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, sprouted in Oxford and spread throughout the British Isles. Each historical instance of revival was followed by a downturn, as evidenced by New Testament churches, medieval Catholicism, second-generation Protestants, seventeenth-century English Christians, and even Methodist preachers and society members who had “declined from their first love” especially through the influence of materialism. He concluded hopefully, observing that God was continually ‘raising up’ new leaders possessing the zeal of their Methodist forebears and adding that even the falterers were not beyond God’s mercy.⁹⁶

Wesley’s sermon “Of Former Times” aimed to counter the apparently prevalent notion that society had declined from a distant golden age. After offering a bleak portrayal of civilization and Christianity from the early eighteenth century backward to apostolic times, he echoed what he had asserted in Oxford back in 1744 and in his *History*’s Preface: “So early did the ‘mystery of iniquity’ begin to work in the Christian church! So little reason have we to appeal to the former days, as though they were ‘better than these!’”⁹⁷ In

⁹⁵ Ibid., 2:554.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 2:554–65. Outler sets Wesley’s thoughts expressed in this sermon within the context of his journey in April 1784 from London to Edinburgh, during which he recorded his “mixed feelings about the uneven progress of the Revival, his alarm over various signs of weakened discipline within the Methodist ranks” (551).

⁹⁷ Ibid., 3:448–51, quotation at 451.

juxtaposition to what was past, Wesley praised signs of progress in his own day, such as an increase of religious tolerance and charitable works, both of these to an unprecedented degree.⁹⁸ Once again, chief in his mind was the Methodist Revival in Britain. He described its beginnings as obscure, like a “mustard seed” which had “now grown and put forth branches, reaching from sea to sea.” Its numbers, with God’s blessing, had grown from “two or three poor people” into “myriads.” His assessment of Methodism echoed the perspectives of other evangelicals in the midst of the Revival: “Now I will be bold to say such an event as this, considered in all its circumstances, has not been seen upon earth before, since the time that St. John went to Abraham’s bosom.”⁹⁹ Wesley concluded with a ringing eschatological note, calling the present “the day of his [God’s] power, a day of glorious salvation, wherein he is hastening to renew the whole race of mankind in righteousness and true holiness.”¹⁰⁰

III. Features

From consideration of Wesley’s sermons and *Concise Ecclesiastical History*, what were the key facets of his interpretation of church history? First, Wesley searched the past for examples of vital Christianity or godliness and typically found these among the relatively obscure, downtrodden, or marginalized: uneducated disciples of Jesus, supposed ‘heretics’ of early centuries and the Middle Ages, early Puritans, and humble Methodists. Persecution by authorities, seen as a divine instrument of renewal, was a consistent and prominent emphasis. A ‘remnant’ motif was amplified by his consistent portrayal of corruption among the generality of Christians and identification of the love of wealth as a primary

⁹⁸ Ibid., 3:449, 451–52.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 3:452–53. See “On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel” (1777), 3:577–92, esp. 587–89, for a parallel description of the Revival as unprecedented in English, possibly broader, church history.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 3:453.

cause of decay. Thus another line could be traced, including Ananias and Sapphira, Constantine, the Catholic hierarchy from Gregory I through Boniface VIII to the Reformation, Cromwellian Puritans, English Christians under Charles II, and Methodists distracted by worldly pursuits. As John Walsh observes, Wesley developed “the historical theory that all great religious revivals began on the edges of society among the poor and insignificant, rather than at the center, where power and prestige were located.”¹⁰¹ Gordon Rupp appears to suggest that Wesley somewhat flippantly adjudged historical characters when he writes that Wesley “had a ‘chip on the shoulder’ delight in going against the received views,” for example “reading his own situation back into Montanus and Pelagius.”¹⁰² Wesley clearly enjoyed surprising his readers and listeners, whether on these ‘heretics’ or on the generally revered Constantine; but this should not be seen as flippancy in historical judgment so much as an attempt to use the past in a prophetic sense. History could offer both encouragement and warning through its dual, opposing narratives of ‘godliness’ and ‘iniquity’.

At face value, Wesley’s interpretation appears rather pessimistic; true saints, as he said, always were few in number. But several latent theological factors alter this impression, paralleling the effect of Edwards’ more obvious theological framework on what also was a bleak historical portrayal on details. First of all, Wesley clearly believed that God was at work in the events of church history. A preoccupation with asserting God’s providence had appeared in his impressions of other histories written in his lifetime, as

¹⁰¹ John Walsh, “‘Methodism’ and the Origins of English-Speaking Evangelicalism,” in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond, 1700–1990*, ed. Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George A. Rawlyk, Religion in America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 19–37, 32.

¹⁰² Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688–1791* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 406. Maddox lists a 1740 edition of Arnold’s church history which may have been in Wesley’s possession at City Road, London and thus may have influenced his sympathies towards historical ‘heretics’. Maddox, “Wesley’s Reading: Wesley’s House, London”: 130. Already in the 1730s Wesley had associated with Pictists and learned German and through these avenues may have had opportunity to make use of Arnold’s work.

evidenced by his *History of England* and journal reflections. In the *Ecclesiastical History* he occasionally altered Mosheim's text to give divine action a more prominent place. And his sermons more obviously spoke of God directing human affairs, protecting the church and intervening to produce renewal and true godliness. In this characteristic, Wesley's interpretation of church history engaged with the intellectual and cultural currents of his day: he reacted directly against Mosheim's 'enlightened' attempt to find alternate explanations for historical events and sought to counter the general 'humanistic' focus of history-writers generally.¹⁰³

Wesley's belief in providence led him, as with other evangelical writers, to perceive a pattern of revival interrupting widespread corruption. His understanding of Scripture, specifically a verse such as Matt. 16:18, convinced him that genuine Christianity would always persevere. Thus seemingly overwhelming degradation was an immediate precursor to revival, a sign that God would soon intervene to bring renewal, through persecution or some other means. Prominent examples in Wesley's *History* and sermons were the time of Christ's coming and the founding of the Christian church, centuries leading up to the Reformation, and decades prior to the rise of Methodism. However much he placed emphasis on the force of iniquity, Wesley held to the conviction that it never could completely subdue Christianity, and the church would never sink into total apostasy.

His interpretation also revealed an optimistic eschatology. The sermon "Of Former Times" most explicitly offered an historical picture of progress which was implicit in other accounts: aside from a brief golden age in apostolic times which had never been equalled, the state of Christianity generally had been improving up to Wesley's day. The basics of his various historical portrayals supported this. The time of Constantine marked a

¹⁰³ On Wesley and Enlightenment historiography, see Ted A. Campbell, "John Wesley and Conyers Middleton on Divine Intervention in History", *Church History* 55 (1986), and MacMillan, "Wesley and the Enlightened Historians".

dramatic decline which only deepened in subsequent centuries; but in the late Middle Ages individuals and groups arose to testify against corrupt religion, and among Protestants from the sixteenth century forward vital Christianity reappeared with increasing frequency. The rise of Methodism signalled for Wesley that better things were ahead. Indeed, the prominence which Wesley gave Methodism in the context of his historical portrayals—in his sermons but also as an extensive finale to his abridgment of Mosheim—only heightened the sense of expectation.¹⁰⁴ Reginald Ward, in discussing Wesley’s sense that in Methodism one could see the foretaste or beginnings of the “latter-day glory,” uses as evidence Wesley’s 1744 sermon at Oxford (in which he criticized his audience for failing to recognize and welcome the dawning of a millennial age), his Methodist history appended to the *Concise Ecclesiastical History*, and his “cheerful eventide” expressions of eschatological hope in sermons in the 1780s.¹⁰⁵

Outler renders Wesley’s historical conception as presented in “The Mystery of Iniquity” pessimistically as “a tragic drama of fallings away and partial restorations from each of which, in its turn, there then followed yet another falling away.”¹⁰⁶ But when this sermon is placed alongside Wesley’s other reflections on church history in the 1780s, the oscillating pattern of ‘iniquity’ and ‘godliness’ takes an overall course of steady progress. Theologically Wesley was convinced, like his evangelical compatriots such as Gillies and Edwards, that burgeoning corruption meant that God would soon intervene to renew and advance his kingdom.

While oscillations featured in Wesley’s history commentary, these did not seem as

¹⁰⁴ For a scholarly defence of Wesley’s postmillennialism, see chap. 9 of Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), esp. pp. 235–41.

¹⁰⁵ W. Reginald Ward, *Early Evangelicalism: A Global Intellectual History, 1670–1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 134–35. Ward relies on two sermons from the 1780s—“The General Spread of the Gospel” (1783) and “Signs of the Times” (1787)—which, similar to those employed in this analysis, involved a degree of historical attention coupled with a view of Methodism’s rapid growth.

¹⁰⁶ Wesley, *WJW*, 2:451.

dramatic in comparison with other evangelical interpretations. Most noticeably, Wesley made less of common high points in church history: even Pentecost and the Reformation, in his view, were followed quickly by declension. Factors influencing this impression were his convictions that numbers of true believers historically were often small and that God's kingdom grew in quiet or imperceptible ways. Wesley's opposition to Calvinist precepts also played a role: God would intervene to foster godliness and renewal, but he would not overwhelm. John Walsh observes that Wesley contrasted more dramatic but short-lived revivals in Scotland and America and the steadier, longer-lasting progression of the Methodist Revival.¹⁰⁷ It was an English and a personal version of the Revival which gave shape to his historical view.

Thus in his sermons supported in turn by his *Concise Ecclesiastical History*, Wesley discerned a pattern in church history: a picture of the spreading tide of corruption pushed back by God's action in preserving or prospering 'genuine' Christianity, bringing examples of holiness and seasons of hope and renewal. But his theological convictions reminded him that the pattern was dynamic, and not completely predictable or comprehensible to human eyes—Wesley did speak, after all, in terms of 'mysteries'.¹⁰⁸ God had planted the church in obscurity and protected and tended it through the ages. The Methodist Revival confirmed that this divine work was continuing in a marvellous way. In "The Wisdom of God's Counsels," after setting Methodism within the expanse of Christianity's history, Wesley concluded his sermon with a rousing statement reflecting not only his revivalist vision but also a sense of awe surpassing any scrutiny:

You see here, brethren, a short and general sketch of the manner wherein God works upon earth in repairing his work of grace wherever it is decayed through the subtlety of Satan, and the unfaithfulness of men, giving way to the fraud and

¹⁰⁷ Walsh, "Methodism," 33.

¹⁰⁸ Joseph W. Seaborn Jr., "Wesley's Views on the Uses of History", *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 21 (1986): 130, observes Wesley's critique of David Brainerd, who in his journal (extracted by Jonathan Edwards) appeared to "usurp God's prerogative in prescribing the pattern for revival in the New World."

malice of the devil. Thus he is now carrying on his own work, and thus he will do to the end of time. And how wonderfully plain and simple is his way of working ... of repairing whatsoever is decayed. But as to innumerable particulars we must still cry out, “O the depth! How unfathomable are his counsels! And his paths past tracing out!”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Wesley, *WW*, 2:566.

**Chapter Five – Evangelicalism through the Ages: Joseph and Isaac Milners’
*History of the Church of Christ***

Around the turn of the nineteenth century the brothers Joseph and Isaac Milner produced what was undoubtedly the most rigorous and substantial church history among English-speaking evangelicals, the *History of the Church of Christ*. The original four volumes, published between 1794 and 1809 (the fourth in two parts, published in 1803 and 1809), comprised nearly three thousand pages extending from the apostolic church to circa 1529. The authors’ unfulfilled intent was to produce a history up to the eighteenth century. Joseph (b. 1745), Hull’s grammar school headmaster, lecturer at Holy Trinity, and vicar of nearby North Ferriby, died shortly after the publication of his third volume in 1797. Isaac (1750–1820) carried on the work with the help of his brother’s notes but was sidetracked by illnesses and especially by preoccupations as President of Queens’ College, Cambridge and Dean of Carlisle Cathedral.¹

The *History* was highly popular. No comprehensive publishing history exists, but resources such as the English Short Title Catalogue and library catalogues indicate the existence of at least five American editions (Boston and Philadelphia), sixteen publications in London and a further ten in Edinburgh in the first half of the nineteenth century. Nine of the London printings came from the prominent publishing house of Cadell and Davies.

¹ Statements of Isaac’s intent to continue the *History* further are located at Joseph Milner, *The History of the Church of Christ*, 4 vols. (York / Cambridge: G. Peacock / John Burges, printer to the University, 1794–1809), 4:v, 1164. For basic biographical accounts of the Milner brothers, see Bruce Hindmarsh, "Milner, Joseph (1745–1797)", in *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18792> (accessed 14 April 2008) and Kevin C. Knox, "Milner, Isaac (1750–1820)", in *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18788> (accessed 14 April 2008). Mary Milner, *The Life of Isaac Milner...* (London & Cambridge: John W. Parker and J. and J. J. Deighton, 1842), 105, 108, 125, 151–53, observes that Isaac assisted Joseph in stylistic editing of volumes two and three. This, combined with Isaac’s use of Joseph’s notes for the fourth volume, blurs identification of authorship. For practical purposes we adopt the approach used by Melaas-Swanson, "Life and Thought of Isaac Milner" to refer to the author simply as ‘Milner’; for discussion of volumes one through three this refers primarily to Joseph, and for volume four to Isaac. Where necessary, a first name is indicated. In analysis at the end of the chapter we continue usage of a singular reference, which when viewing the work as a whole can be taken to refer primarily to Joseph as author of the *History*’s design and the majority of its material.

Nelson and Brown appear to have been exclusively responsible for the Edinburgh publications, and their edition experienced a remarkable run of yearly publications between 1833 and 1840. German and Dutch editions appeared within only a few years of the original publication and again in subsequent decades. According to a letter from a German minister to Isaac in 1806, readers of the German edition spanned from the Volga to Greenland.² The Milners' work also inspired several abridgments and continuations.³ The most popular of the latter, judging by number of publications, appears to have been the Edinburgh edition (replicated twice in London in 1838 and 1840) which contained within one volume Milner's full history to the Reformation and the narrative of Thomas Haweis (see Chapter Six) from the Reformation into the eighteenth century.

An evangelical readership readily anticipated the appearance of Milner's *History* and responded with affirmation. The *History's* first volume included, at the back, a list of 445 subscribers accounting for over 600 subscriptions. Besides booksellers, subscribers included over one hundred and fifty ministers, nearly fifty academics especially from Cambridge, over thirty women (including three titled 'Lady'), as well as members of Parliament, clerical and book societies, a captain, medical doctors and surgeons. Notables included the Deans of Gloucester and Ripon, the Chaplain to the Earl of Peterborough, and prominent evangelical leaders such as Rowland Hill, John Newton, Charles Simeon, Thomas Scott, several of the Venn family, and Haweis. In response to John Gillies' public request in the mid-1790s for the names of influential Christians whose labours had been blessed by God, one individual mentioned Milner's *History* which after one volume

² Milner, *Life of Isaac Milner*, 334–35. John Walsh, "Joseph Milner's Evangelical Church History", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 10 (1959): 174, mentions Swedish and Spanish translations.

³ Abridgments appeared in Utica, NY in 1816, Andover, MA in 1817, and London in 1834 (the latter an extract covering from apostolic times to the rise of the papacy). One continuation by John Scott filled in the next decades of the Reformation and another by Henry Stebbing brought the narrative into the eighteenth century.

“promises to be a pleasing and useful work.”⁴ In his preface to the fourth volume, Isaac acknowledged “the great indulgence already granted by the Public” and “their frequent calls through the medium of the booksellers.”⁵

The *History* also had its public critics. The first of these was Haweis, who took exception to aspects of Milner’s interpretation and produced his own history in part as a rival account. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, the disagreement hinged on the issue of ecclesiastical loyalties, with Haweis arguing that Milner denigrated sectarian groups and advocated too strongly for adherence to an established Church. This issue again involved the *History* in controversy in the mid-1820s when the Congregationalist Board appealed to the Religious Tract Society not to carry through its intent to republish the *History* because of its Episcopalian slant and implicit critique of Nonconformity.⁶ And the *History* seems to have been embroiled in tensions between Anglican evangelicals and High-Church proponents in the 1830s. In 1834 Hugh Rose, chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury, critiqued Milner’s *History*, and, in a published letter to Rose, Lambeth Palace librarian and historian Samuel Maitland detailed strictures. These precipitated a debate with defenders of Milner which continued for several years.⁷

I. Preliminary Writings

Joseph Milner had considered writing a church history for some time: in Walsh’s words, the *History* had a lengthy “gestation period.”⁸ In the decade and a half prior to the

⁴ Gillies, *Supplement*, 11, 14; quotation at 14.

⁵ Milner, *HCC*, 4:iv.

⁶ Roger H. Martin, *Evangelicals United: Ecumenical Stirrings in Pre-Victorian Britain, 1795–1830*, Studies in Evangelicalism 4 (Metuchen, NJ & London: Scarecrow Press, 1983), 164–66.

⁷ Replies were by John Scott in 1834 and John King in 1835 and 1836. By 1801 Scott had essentially assumed Joseph Milner’s place in Hull, as master of the grammar school, lecturer at Holy Trinity, and vicar of North Ferriby. King had been a student under Joseph and went on to become the incumbent at Hull’s Christ Church. Donald M. Lewis, ed., *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography, 1730–1860*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Henrickson Publishers, 2004), 2:776, and Arthur Pollard, “Scott, Thomas (1747–1821)”, in *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24919> (accessed 2 August 2007).

⁸ Walsh, “Milner’s History”: 176.

publication of his first volume, Milner, through various writings, developed his approach to history in general and the history of Christianity in particular. First, in 1781 Milner published a 260-page critique of Gibbon's portrayal of Christianity in the initial volume of the *Decline and Fall* (1776).⁹ Sometime in the early 1780s, Milner wrote an essay entitled 'Observations on the Use of History'.¹⁰ Then in two works published in 1785 and 1789—a conversion account of one of his parishioners and a defence of 'evangelical' religion against the charge of 'enthusiasm', respectively—Milner turned his discussions to a critique of contemporary church histories and the need for a new history centred on genuine, Spirit-infused Christianity.¹¹ These sources, considered together, illumine factors which would feature in his *History*.

An important element in several of these writings was an advocacy of history's practical religious and moral value. Milner declared that history should be written towards "the amendment of the heart, and the support of true religion."¹² Modern historians such as Gibbon overlooked this utility and spent their analysis on social or governmental issues: "We are all statesmen," Milner quipped sarcastically in summary of the prevalent view.¹³ In 1785 Milner similarly contrasted his obscure subject, his parishioner's evangelical conversion, with those of historians who featured heroic warriors and rulers and who

⁹ Joseph Milner, *Gibbon's Account of Christianity Considered: Together With Some Strictures on Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (York: printed by A. Ward, 1781).

¹⁰ This essay was published posthumously in Joseph Milner, *A Selection of Tracts and Essays, Theological and Historical, from the Miscellaneous Writings of the Late Rev. Joseph Milner, A. M. ...*, ed. Isaac Milner (London: printed by Luke Hansard & Sons, for T. Cadell and W. Davies in the Strand, 1810), 441–62. That he referred to Gibbon and said nothing directly about intending to write a church history suggests a date in the early to mid-1780s. Isaac Milner's comment (p. 498) that this essay was written as a contribution to a learned society at Cambridge for the (unfulfilled) purpose of publication corresponds with Isaac's biographer's observation of his involvement in such a society existing from early 1784 to ca. 1786. Milner, *Life of Isaac Milner*, 19.

¹¹ Joseph Milner, *Some Remarkable Passages in the Life of William Howard, Who Died at North Ferriby, in the County of the Town of Kingston Upon Hull, March 2, 1784* (York: printed by A. Ward, in Coney-Street, 1785); Joseph Milner, *Essays on Several Religious Subjects, Chiefly Tending to Illustrate the Scripture-Doctrine of the Influence of the Holy Spirit* (York: printed by Ward and Peacock, 1789).

¹² Milner, *Tracts and Essays*, 443–44, quotation at 444; see also 446–47.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 442.

betrayed a lust for whatever was “splendid and turbulent.”¹⁴

Milner believed that the Bible itself exemplified history’s ability to teach moral principles. More strongly, themes of sinfulness and redemption in biblical accounts provided a proper understanding of humanity’s “fallen greatness” which could be applied to all of history, against the grain of “Infidel” writers who denied human depravity.¹⁵ Scripture also revealed the order of human history. In his response to Gibbon, Milner recommended the “sublime” Book of Revelation which offered “a regular and consistent scheme of God’s administration of the affairs of the world” against the powers of darkness “from St. John’s time to the end of all things.” He continued: “It is not, surely, beneath the dignity of Mr. Gibbon to use this method of Jehovah’s own recommendation.” Discerning prophetic fulfilment lifted one’s attention from seemingly disorderly human affairs to the beautiful and majestic purposes of a sovereign God.¹⁶

This led Milner naturally into the subject of providence in history. He specifically criticized the preoccupation of historians such as Gibbon with human causes: “To trace the movements of Divine Providence must, surely, be a more grand and useful employment than to examine the springs of human artifice, and investigate all the laborious, but impotent, schemes of sublunary ambition.” Had Gibbon used this approach he would have learned “how every thing in the history of the Church, of Mahometanism, of Pagan and Papal Rome, is only fulfilling the decrees of the Almighty exhibited in the Revelation.”¹⁷ In his undated essay Milner asserted God’s governance of the universe through both ordinary and extraordinary means. He also repeated his criticism of modern historians who diverted readers’ attention from “the Governor of the Universe.” Their

¹⁴ Milner, *Remarkable Passages*, 5.

¹⁵ Milner, *Tracts and Essays*, 447, 452, 454.

¹⁶ Milner, *Gibbon's Account*, 31–33; see also Milner, *Tracts and Essays*, 458, 459, 462.

¹⁷ Milner, *Gibbon's Account*, 33, 34; see also 172.

problem was one of overcompensation: even if God's actions were not "explicitly understood," they should nonetheless "be acknowledged as the efficient cause." He candidly admitted that "much caution is necessary"; "but surely," he added, "that is a strange and unwarrantable sort of caution, which would teach men to pay no attention to the voice of Divine Providence in the government of the world."¹⁸

Through his various writings Milner also sought to delineate a Christian 'essence' which would be important for the *History*. In 1781 Milner highlighted three doctrines which he saw as central: original sin, or human depravity; unmerited salvation to eternal life through Christ; and, resulting from this, spiritual regeneration producing holiness.¹⁹ In the same work he promoted justification through Christ as "the first and commanding doctrine of Christianity."²⁰ In affinity with Edwards, Milner linked Christ's justifying work with God's glory. When Gibbon misrepresented Christianity he was guilty of a greater charge, that of dishonouring God and his redemptive design.²¹ In 1785 Milner maintained that belief in justification and regeneration produced genuine conversion, in the example of his own parishioner as in every age of the church. What was needed, in his view, was a full historical account which gave precedence to Christianity centred in these essentials. Remarkably like Wesley only four years earlier, Milner recognized Mosheim's church history as excellent in many respects but deficient on this most important point: "...as he seems himself not to have understood the nature of christianity, all, or nearly all, his narrative is spent on external things."²²

The Christian 'essence' identified by Milner helped to define the 'true' church

¹⁸ Milner, *Tracts and Essays*, 454–57, quotations at 455–56.

¹⁹ Milner, *Gibbon's Account*, 94–97, quotation at 94–95. Milner referred inquisitive readers to none other than Edwards' *History of the Work of Redemption*. Martin, *Evangelicals United*, 15, drawing from Milner and Wesley, argues that these three emphases bound evangelicals together across denominational divisions.

²⁰ Milner, *Gibbon's Account*, 112–13; justification was the theme of pp. 101–117 and again at Milner, *Essays*, 38–52.

²¹ Milner, *Gibbon's Account*, 124, 140.

²² Milner, *Remarkable Passages*, 43–46; see also 47–48.

which he would trace historically. Distinctions along national, institutional, or sectarian lines mattered little. Milner explained succinctly: “Where Christ is really trusted in, and really loved, and where the scriptural marks of unfeigned attachment to him exist, there is the Church. A thousand circumstances of diversity prevent not the union of those, in whom resides the same simple spirituality; nor do a thousand circumstances of agreement unite in fellowship those who are *spiritual* with those who are *natural*.” Milner classified as “Infidels” all those outside of this spiritual connection, regardless of whether they lived under the name of Christianity.²³ Gibbon, in Milner’s view, had failed to make this distinction and thus had scorned genuine Christians along with superficial ones.²⁴ In 1785, this time reacting against Mosheim, Milner laid the foundation for his *History* by asserting that “in every century, from the Apostles’ days to ours,” there had existed “real” Christians who exercised faith in Christ and demonstrated practical godliness. They were “always opposed” but never succumbed to “the gates of hell.” Milner then declared emphatically: “The history of these ... is, properly speaking, the history of the church.”²⁵

Already at work in Milner’s understanding, within the boundaries of his conviction that the church always persevered, was a pattern of revival and declension. In 1785, immediately after reflecting on various historical seasons of renewal, Milner identified “particular instances of very extraordinary exertions of the grace of God” as the means of the church’s survival through the centuries.²⁶ Four years later, Milner countered the prevalent notion of steady human progress in religion with the view that the church would “prosper or decay” depending on the Spirit’s influence. This led him to the conclusion that

²³ Milner, *Gibbon's Account*, 166–67; see 164 as well as Milner, *Remarkable Passages*, 49 for similar definitions.

²⁴ Milner, *Gibbon's Account*, 173–76.

²⁵ Milner, *Remarkable Passages*, 47. Four years later, Milner acknowledged the “great difficulty” of discerning true Christianity through the Middle Ages, but his theological convictions sustained him: “Not but that Christ ever had a true Church; and there are faint marks of it perpetually.” Milner, *Essays*, 169–70.

²⁶ Milner, *Remarkable Passages*, 49.

“the history of the church is properly nothing else than a history of the effusions of the Spirit of God, and of the effects which they produce in the world.”²⁷ Similar to other evangelical interpreters, he held that the Spirit “loves oft to operate the deepest, when human wickedness and misery are at the greatest height.”²⁸ Milner then sketched out what he saw as four revivals superior to all others. These were early Christianity’s remarkable spread emanating from the events of Pentecost; the time of Augustine, who rescued the church from Pelagius’ influence and blessed subsequent ages through his writings on divine grace; the Reformation, which brought rapid changes but was followed by rapid decline; and finally the English Revival of the eighteenth century.²⁹

Milner anticipated that a history focused on the Spirit’s influence would be “hissed out of the polite and literary world.”³⁰ In both 1785 and 1789 Milner sought to defend the Spirit-revived church which he had delineated. With the English Revival in mind, Milner argued that what opponents scorned as ‘Methodism’ or ‘enthusiasm’ was the same Christianity as that of the Reformation and the early church. Through establishing this pedigree he could turn the tables, as John Foxe had done over two centuries previously, and declare that religious critics of the Revival rather than the participants themselves were the real innovators.³¹ He also sought to distance evangelicals from genuine ‘enthusiasts’ by recounting what he saw to be historical examples of the latter: Montanists, German Anabaptists, English Fifth Monarchists during the Interregnum, and religious fanatics on both sides of the Atlantic during the eighteenth-century Revival.³² Echoing Edwards, Milner bemoaned that enthusiasm frequently accompanied genuine Christian revival: it

²⁷ Milner, *Essays*, 163–64, 167.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 166.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 171–75.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 168; see also 170.

³¹ Milner, *Remarkable Passages*, 3, 53; Milner, *Essays*, 3, 4, 19, 32.

³² Milner, *Essays*, 118–20.

was “Satan’s usual after-game” to discredit a “success of real godliness.”³³

II. Prefatory Material

Many of the themes which Milner had worked out in preliminary writings appeared in the various prefaces of the *History of the Church of Christ*. Alongside many other eighteenth-century writers of history who claimed a novel approach, Milner declared his intent to produce “An Ecclesiastical History on a new Plan.”³⁴ This naturally raised the question of his relation to Protestant historiography. In prefacing his first volume Milner made passing reference to Foxe’s martyrology and the Magdeburg Centuries as the most useful of previous Protestant efforts. These works were some of the more successful, in his mind, in highlighting real “godliness” in history.³⁵ He also rested his account on the theological bedrock of these older interpretations, especially the twin strata of Christ’s preservation of the church and God’s providential action throughout history. On the first of these, Milner’s initial volume referenced Matt. 16:18 at the outset, and he inferred that “...a succession of pious men in all ages must therefore have existed....”³⁶ In introducing the third volume which dealt with the “long and gloomy period” of the Middle Ages, he clearly believed that the difficulty lay in tracing the ‘true’ church as an historian, not in proving its existence. Again his case hinged on Christ’s promise “that the gates of hell shall never prevail against his Church.”³⁷

Milner fused the first theme of the continual presence of genuine believers with

³³ Ibid., 118, 120.

³⁴ Milner, *HCC*, 1:ix.

³⁵ Ibid., 1:xii n. *. As observed in Chap. One, Loades finds that from the late eighteenth century Foxe’s martyrology enjoyed something of a renaissance among Anglican evangelicals. Loades, “Afterword,” 281–82, 285.

³⁶ Milner, *HCC*, 1:xiii.

³⁷ Ibid., 3:iii. A statement at the end of the second volume (2:553–54) reveals more obviously Milner’s theological presupposition: “...it is my duty to show, that even in a superstitious age, godliness did exist....” For similar assertions, see 3:296, 298, 457; 4:282, 283.

the second, that of God's government. He would trace "the goodness of God by his Providence and Grace, in every age, taking care of his Church."³⁸ The third volume's preface reinforced a theocentric approach: attentiveness to the past could bring instruction in "the power, wisdom, goodness, and faithfulness of God."³⁹ Isaac prefaced the fourth volume, on the subject of Luther and the early Reformation, with an explanation of his and his brother's shared interest in the role of divine action. The Reformers were "the chief instruments of Providence in bringing about important ecclesiastical revolutions." Isaac contrasted most modern historians, who were preoccupied with secondary, human causes, with Joseph, who "saw the FINGER OF GOD in every step of the Reformation."⁴⁰ The "single object" of the *History* was "the celebration of the honour of the Divine Government, as made manifest in the conversion of sinners and the extension of the kingdom of Christ."⁴¹

But despite retaining these traditional elements, Milner saw the views of his Protestant forebears as inadequate in some respects. In his initial preface he opined that the Magdeburg Centuries retained some value but also lacked or poorly presented some Christian essentials and overemphasized nonessentials.⁴² More importantly, early on he indicated his disinterest in the "*external*" banner under which 'real' saints could be found.⁴³ This posture became most pronounced in his third volume which treated the sixth through the twelfth centuries. He portrayed the whole of this period as "long and gloomy," thus reflecting the traditional notion of the 'Dark Ages'. Yet Milner (like Mosheim) intended to 'enliven' and 'illuminate' an epoch of church history rendered

³⁸ Ibid., 1:xiii.

³⁹ Ibid., 3:v.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 4:viii, ix, xii.

⁴¹ Ibid., 4:xiv.

⁴² Ibid., 1:xii n. *.

⁴³ Ibid., 1:ix.

“extremely uninteresting” by other writers.⁴⁴ He challenged his reader not to disregard characters simply because they were Catholic: the “real Church” might wear “a Roman garb.” He clarified that the medieval Church indeed was corrupted by “superstition”—“the predominant Evil of those times, as profaneness is of our own.” But there was an important distinction to be made, in his view: the former might “co-exist” with genuine faith whereas the latter could not.⁴⁵ Part of the *History*’s mandate, then, was to revise traditional Protestant historiography.

Heightening the sense of uniqueness were the Milners’ criticisms of other contemporary historians. Again in a fashion similar to Wesley, Joseph castigated Mosheim for having completely misunderstood or overlooked the essence of Christianity: “...the disagreeable effect which the reading of Mosheim had on my own mind is probably no singular case, that real religion seems scarce to have had any existence.”⁴⁶ In his preface to the fourth volume, Isaac critiqued modern historians’ capitulation to “the irreligious taste of the times” or to “the actual contagion of modern scepticism and infidelity.” He warned of the “dangerous” work of philosophical historians (such as Gibbon, for whom “FAME” was the chief object) who lacked “some practical, experimental knowledge of the nature of pure Christianity” and thus were “embarrassed in contemplating the conduct of good men.” These were blind guides.⁴⁷ Joseph reacted against their sceptical spirit in part by claiming to treat ancient historical sources more sensitively than his contemporaries who would immediately suspect their credibility. He pinpointed their prideful, presumptuous

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:iii, v (emphasis in original, as hereafter).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3:iv.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:xi. Elsewhere (3:404 n. †) Milner indicated that his references to Mosheim were to Maclaine’s English edition. A difference between Wesley and Milner lay in the fact that Wesley sought to rework Mosheim’s history whereas Milner (see Walsh, “Milner’s History”: 174) aimed to supplant it. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Maclaine’s edition was reissued in England at least thirteen times (www.copac.ac.uk [accessed 6 Feb 2008]), thus bested but certainly not replaced by Milner’s *History*. For specific examples regarding Milner’s criticism of Mosheim, see Milner, *HCC*, 1:487, 2:518.

⁴⁷ Milner, *HCC*, 4:ix–xi.

sense of modernity: "...we seem to imagine, that we are without any parallels in understanding; we are amazed, that our ancestors should so long be deluded by absurdities, little suspecting how much some future age will pity or blame us for follies of which we imagine ourselves perfectly clear." Milner claimed that since it was impossible to be free of "the torrent of prevailing opinions" he himself was unlikely to be guilty of superstition.⁴⁸

An interest in experiential, vital Christianity was the essence of Milner's new approach. He articulated at the outset his intent to focus on "*real*, not merely *nominal* Christians," those who demonstrated their Christian beliefs through their lives.⁴⁹ This meant that he would ignore many of the very categories which formed the organization of Mosheim's history, "*external*" aspects of the church such as rites and ceremonies, church government, religious controversies, heresies, and particular institutions or denominations. "Nothing," he stated, "but what belongs to Christ's kingdom shall be admitted, and genuine piety is that alone which I intend to celebrate."⁵⁰ He would also avoid undue attention to heresy, a fault which he perceived in extant histories: "An history of the perversions and abuses of religion is not properly an history of the Church; as absurd were it to suppose an history of the highway-men that have infested this country to be an history of England."⁵¹

Milner's interpretation, rather, would be fuelled by his vision and understanding of

⁴⁸ Ibid., 1:xiv–xv. Later in the volume, Milner poignantly warned against elevating "the eighteenth century as a Pope to judge the foregoing seventeen" (275) and chastised those who disdained the past based only on their reading of "a monthly review or magazine" (294). For similar general statements resisting the anachronistic imposition of modern sensibilities and standards, see 1:133–34, 527, 2:v–vi, 3:77, 4:307, 367–68.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 1:ix.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 1:ix–x.

⁵¹ Ibid., 1:xii n. †; see also 1:148, 3:22–23, and, on the irresponsibility of reclaiming particular heretics, 3:401. Milner's poignant statement, above, mirrors remarkably the English Jesuit writer Robert Parsons' critique of Foxe's "ridiculous succession" which he likened to a history of London based on "the lives of all the criminals hanged at Tyburn in the past few centuries." Parsons, *A Treatise of Three Conversions*, 3 vols (n.p., 1603), cited by Cameron, *Waldenses*, 289–90.

Christian doctrine and life. The *History* was not simply historical narrative but was, as Walsh says, “an Evangelical *apologia*.”⁵² Milner articulated his aim to delineate “what the Gospel is, and what it is not” and to trace its doctrinal ‘essence’ and practical results through the centuries.⁵³ He captured this approach in the preface to his second volume: “What real Christianity is, I mean to exhibit historically....”⁵⁴ This view persisted through to the fourth volume, where Isaac wrote in the preface that other historians had failed to observe “the powerful energy of the essential doctrines of Christianity, as, through the gracious assistance of the Holy Spirit of God, they efficaciously influenced the conduct of the first Reformers.”⁵⁵ It was this approach which the Milners believed distinguished the *History* as a new and necessary contribution to church historiography.

III. Interpretive Details

Joseph Milner began his *History* with the New Testament church established after Christ’s ascension. Scripture, explained Milner, suggested that the church would be more successfully established through the Spirit, after Christ’s departure; thus he would thus largely pass over the Gospels and focus on accounts in Acts and the Epistles.⁵⁶ He did briefly establish the Old Testament age as “that dark and preparatory dispensation” and characterized a period of “dismal night” just prior to Christ’s coming, enveloping the Jews as well as heathen Romans. Within the vista of Old Testament ebb and flow, Milner asserted that “the darkest season was chosen for the exhibition of the Light of Life by him, ‘who hath put the times and seasons in his own power.’”⁵⁷

⁵² Walsh, "Milner's History": 177.

⁵³ Milner, *HCC*, 1:xiii–xiv; compare 3:iii. This approach was inspired by John Newton’s design in his *Review of Ecclesiastical History* (1770), which Milner acknowledged at 1:12 n. *. See Chap. Six for a summary of Newton’s interpretation.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:vi.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 4:viii–ix.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:40.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:2–3.

Then came Pentecost, “the critical moment, when it pleased God to erect the first Christian church at Jerusalem.” Milner considered this “the first of those ‘outpourings’ of the Spirit of God, which from age to age have visited the earth, since the coming of Christ, and prevented it from being quite overrun with ignorance and sin.”⁵⁸ Such outpourings would be a significant feature of his narrative, so at this point he carefully defined the term as referring to “a more remarkable display of Divine Grace at some particular season” in distinction from miraculous occurrences.⁵⁹ Milner emphasized the church’s divine origin in part by highlighting the frailties and foibles of early Christians.⁶⁰ The experience of Pentecost revolutionized the understandings of Christ’s disciples who had been transfixed with visions of a majestic earthly dominion.⁶¹ At the heart of this dramatic change were the doctrines of repentance and forgiveness of sin, through Christ, leading to internal “renovation.”⁶² Soon after arose an “enmity” against these doctrines and the work of the Holy Spirit which would persist through “all ages.” But persecution providentially was turned into blessing: the gospel spread, and “what was meant to annihilate it, was overruled to extend it exceedingly.”⁶³ Milner traced this geographical expansion for roughly one hundred pages, based primarily on New Testament accounts.

Milner emphasized that, as with opposition, corruption in doctrine and practice quickly followed renewal. Examples were the worldliness of Ananias and Sapphira, the early misunderstanding of justification at the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), and warnings against declining faith in the books of James and Hebrews. In his view this could be

⁵⁸ Ibid., 1:3–4.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 1:3, 4 (notes). This allowed Milner to avoid, for the most part, debate over the cessation or continuance of miracles in the church.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 1:155–56.

⁶¹ Ibid., 1:5, 6, quotation at 5.

⁶² Ibid., 1:4, 8.

⁶³ Ibid., 1:15, 18–20, quotations at 15, 20; see also 10–11 for Milner’s expectation that opposition would ‘naturally’ come.

expected, as revivals typically lasted only thirty years.⁶⁴ He identified the first localized “general declension” in the account of the Sardis church (Rev. 3). Here Milner paused to expound universal principles that Christian godliness was most pure “in the infancy of things” and that an effusion eventually subsided through the effects of fanaticism followed by an overcorrection which established a more subtle abuse.⁶⁵ Based on New Testament evidence, Milner asserted that “declension” had taken root more widely by the end of the first century in the form of vices such as “austerities and superstitions,” “self-righteousness,” mixture of the gospel with philosophical notions, and outright heresy.⁶⁶

In Milner’s final judgment, Pentecost and the Christianity’s initial spread constituted the greatest spiritual effusion in history. He said in summary of the first century:

Thus have we seen the most astonishing revolution in the human mind and in human manners, that was ever seen in any age, effected without any human power legal or illegal, and even against the united opposition of all the powers then in the world; and this too not in countries rude or uncivilized, but in the most humanized, the most learned, and the most polished part of the globe, within the Roman empire; no part of which was exempted from a sensible share in its effects.⁶⁷

The remarkable growth of the church demonstrated to Milner a divine impetus: no other explanation seemed plausible.⁶⁸ Milner perceived residual effects of this spiritual effusion lasting up to the fifth century.⁶⁹ At the same time, early Christianity was not an enduring ‘golden age’ in his mind. Soon after the above summary, Milner again reminded his reader of his view that effusions characteristically lasted for no more than a generation and were diminished by sinfulness, division and heresy.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Ibid., 1:14, 28–29, 37, 39.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 1:104; repeated at 1:156–57, 3:210.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 1:147–48; see also 292.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 1:154; on the final point, Milner qualified in a footnote that evidence was lacking for Christianity’s propagation into France, Britain, or Africa in this century (155).

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1:155.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1:545, 2:323.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 1:156–57.

Milner, intent to highlight genuine godliness and not heresy, gave brief attention to groups in early centuries traditionally seen as heterodox. He viewed Montanus and his followers as genuine “enthusiasts” who possessed a pretended spirituality and set a pattern for all subsequent fanaticism.⁷¹ Milner was more cautious with Tertullian, criticizing his sternness and his alignment with Montanism but also praising his earnestness and vigorous defence of orthodox Christianity. Here he echoed one of his established interpretive principles intended to critique his own times: “Superstition and enthusiasm are compatible with real godliness; prophaneness is not so.” Milner believed that towards the end of his life Tertullian received “that humbling and transforming knowledge of Christ” necessary for salvation.⁷² But based on this discussion Milner portrayed, on one hand, a general church which exemplified “a much greater degree” of Christian faith and godliness, and on the other, a heretical group which harboured “some good persons.”⁷³ At a later point, Milner observed in the martyrdom of a Montanist alongside a more obviously (in Milner’s eyes) orthodox Christian the possibility that truly devout persons might be among the sectarian group, supporting his principle that godliness was not restricted to any one denomination.⁷⁴

Milner portrayed the Novatians, emerging in the third century, more positively as “the first body of christians, who, in modern language, ought to be called *Dissenters*.” These were no different doctrinally from the rest of the church and displayed “great purity of life and doctrine.” However, their stern refusal to readmit lapsed Christians demonstrated declension through an “excessive severity” and a “pharisaical pride.” In his view Novatians’ separation from the church was unjustifiable, but he held to his spiritual

⁷¹ Ibid., 1:277, 284–85, 304.

⁷² Ibid., 1:302–306, quotations at 305–306.

⁷³ Ibid., 1:305–306.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 1:437–38.

ecclesiological principle: “I feel not the least inclination to partiality concerning them, for I am conscious that God is not confined to any particular modes of church-government.”⁷⁵ Again within his discussion of fourth-century Christianity he found reason both to praise their spiritual character and goodwill towards other Christians and to criticize a persistent narrow-mindedness on marginal issues which produced further divisions.⁷⁶ Thus on ancient sectarian groups Milner sought balance, though from the vantage point of a Churchman. He scorned schism over perceived non-essentials and was careful to distinguish real ‘enthusiasm’, but he also discerned signs of vital godliness which according to his design called for the inclusion of individuals such as Tertullian and larger ‘dissenting’ sects.

Divisiveness was part of Milner’s broader depiction of decline through early centuries. He specified “the first grand and general declension” arriving around the middle of the third century.⁷⁷ Besides internal strife, factors such as worldly distraction in seasons of peace and prosperity, lax church discipline, and love of philosophy combined nearly to quell the spiritual effects of the first effusion at Pentecost.⁷⁸ This overall characterization gave a unique angle to his view of Roman persecution of Christians. Whereas other Protestants had given a somewhat hagiographical account, emphasizing Christians’ strength of character in enduring suffering and cruel death, Milner’s version featured Christians’ doctrinal weakness and placed the source of whatever strength they demonstrated firmly in divine hands. In discussing the severe persecution under the emperor Diocletian, Milner wrote: “...we shall see cause to admire the grace of God, who yet furnished out a noble army of martyrs in a time of so great Evangelical

⁷⁵ Ibid., 1:400–402, 404; see also 426–29.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 2:96, 168 n. †, 262.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 1:364.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 1:530–31; see also 2:29–30.

declension....”⁷⁹ The state of Christianity during this season suffered greatly, in Milner’s view, as a result of both persecution and corroded faith; but “man’s extremity” was God’s “opportunity.”⁸⁰ Persecution, indeed, could be a scourge used by God to purify and renew the church.⁸¹ The theme of a divine rescue of the church was inherent as well in Milner’s characterization of the deaths of various persecutors or corrupters of Christianity as God-ordained punishments.⁸² Genuine Christians, to his mind, were distinguished throughout this period much more by their sincerity and faithful action than doctrinal rigour or consistency.⁸³ For earlier historians such as Foxe, Christian willingness to suffer had been a proof or ‘mark’ of true faith. To a degree Milner held to this; but his interest in doctrinal alongside practical vitality led him to de-emphasize these persecutions.⁸⁴ An historiographical posture between extremes of credulity and scepticism is displayed in his comment on the subject of martyrdom accounts, that Catholic historian Fleury was “ready to believe every thing” and Gibbon “nothing.”⁸⁵

This perspective also informed Milner’s characterization of Constantine. Unlike Edwards, Milner shied away from portraying Constantine’s reign as a high point in the church’s history. But he also avoided the opposite view maintained by Wesley. He did defend the traditional account of Constantine’s miraculous conversion and asserted that the Emperor “firmly believed the truth of Christianity.” But he added his speculation that this belief might not have been internal or heartfelt. Constantine together with the church in general appeared to lack “the spirit of godliness.”⁸⁶ At a later point he contrasted Constantine’s semi-Arianism with the “real love to the truth as it is in Jesus” displayed by

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:17.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:30, 31, 38.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1:399, 439–40, 2:6, 80.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 2:77, 552.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 2:21, 22.

⁸⁴ For examples of Foxe’s view reflected in Milner, see *Ibid.*, 1:512–13, 2:177, 548.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:503.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:44–46.

fourth-century emperor Jovian.⁸⁷

One might have expected Milner, as a loyal Establishment clergyman, to be more effusive with praise for Constantine's royal favour towards Christians. Contrary to those who would directly associate Constantine's influence with the decline of the church, he did at one point advance the modest assertion that Christianity's establishment under Constantine slowed the creeping tide of corruption.⁸⁸ But he also believed that Constantine failed to live up to the standard of Christian orthodoxy and practical godliness.

Milner found his example of a godly emperor in Theodosius (r. 379–395), who outlawed pagan religious practice and firmly established Christianity. Presumably on the basis of these actions Milner held that Theodosius exemplified “the triumphs of the cross” and outshone all preceding emperors.⁸⁹ Tellingly he followed this discussion with a twenty-page essay extolling the benefits of religious establishments. Here he used the example of Theodosius to advocate established churches which in his view protected society against atheism and its attendant evils: “...without an establishment provided by the state, the greater part will scarce have any religion at all...”⁹⁰

More interesting for Milner were particular characters through whom he believed God had enacted widespread spiritual renewal. Cyprian of Carthage he called “a star of the first magnitude,” whose life evinced “real simplicity and piety” and spiritual power facilitating other conversions. Milner found in Cyprian's writings compelling evidence that

⁸⁷ Ibid., 2:154, esp. n. *.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 2:235–36.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 2:224.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 2:240. The essay, entitled “Reflections on Ecclesiastical Establishments,” encompasses pp. 225–46; it was published separately in 1835 (ESTC). Its content formed a key part of debate between Isaac Milner and Thomas Haweis (Chap. Six).

“miraculous influences” such as exorcisms persevered.⁹¹ Cyprian’s area of influence “continued long after one of the most precious gardens of christianity.”⁹² Milner’s account of Cyprian ran to nearly one hundred pages.

Milner identified a much more substantial revival in the fifth century budding in the presbyter Simplician and flowering through his students Ambrose of Milan and Augustine. Through these leaders, Milner claimed, God intervened to reverse overwhelming declension and rescue the church from the brink of collapse.⁹³ In this renewal, Augustine was central. Through his own experience, as described in the *Confessions* (which Milner abridged in seventy-three pages), Augustine was equipped with a proper understanding of justification by which he could stem the notions of Pelagius, indeed as a providential “scourge” against the latter.⁹⁴ Contrasting Wesley’s view, Milner defended Augustine the controversialist as, if anything, excessive in leniency rather than in harshness; Augustine’s notions fostered humility whereas Pelagius’ produced pride.⁹⁵ The revival brought about through Augustine, in Milner’s mind, was not a dramatic burst of flame like Pentecost but rather a slow burn which long preserved the true gospel against corruptions.⁹⁶ Milner regretted being unable to provide a proper revival account due to a

⁹¹ Ibid., 1:351, 357–58, 361. Milner extended his argument in regard to miraculous occurrences to say that patristic witness to the continued occurrence of exorcisms was so prevalent that it could not be denied without discrediting the church fathers themselves (357).

⁹² Ibid., 1:499.

⁹³ Ibid., 2:188, 323. See 2:559 for the same claim that revivals providentially spared the demise of the church.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 2:400; also 385 n., 503. Milner treated the *Confessions* as a kind of conversion narrative, a powerful medium of eighteenth-century evangelical identification inherited from Puritanism. Milner’s abridgment is at Milner, *HCC*, 2:323–99; see esp. 323–24, 328 n., 372 n. *, and 384–85 for his evident interest in tracing a morphology of Augustine’s conversion. At times Milner’s language sounds remarkably similar to Edwards’ *History of the Work of Redemption*. Hindmarsh asserts Milner’s use of Edwards’ writings to refute Mosheim’s portrayal of Augustine. Bruce Hindmarsh, “The Reception of Jonathan Edwards by Early Evangelicals in England,” in *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons*, ed. David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 201–221, at 215.

⁹⁵ Milner, *HCC*, 2:410, 417, 483, 483 n., 508 n. Milner likely had Mosheim’s characterization in view; no direct evidence has been found of familiarity with Wesley’s *Concise Ecclesiastical History*.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 2:401.

lack of material on Augustine's ministerial labours.⁹⁷ He never doubted, however, the revival's occurrence, with Hippo as its epicentre. Evidence appeared in all that was good in medieval Western Christianity: in Augustine's theology one could pinpoint origins for "the views of the best and wisest Christians in Europe from that period to the days of Luther."⁹⁸

To Milner, it was especially monks who kept alive the spark of Augustine's teaching on grace through "times extremely unfavourable to improvement" to the Reformation and beyond.⁹⁹ Walsh sees Milner's view of medieval monasticism as "remarkable,"¹⁰⁰ an accurate assessment when we compare it with other evangelical leaders' interpretations. Monastic separation he described as stemming from a justifiable and pious desire to retain purity amidst an overwhelmingly corrupt and hostile society. He stated succinctly: "That holy men, who see and feel the evil of the world, should be tempted to seek for solitude and retirement, is so natural, that one does not wonder at the growth of the monastic spirit."¹⁰¹ For Milner it was mistaken for Christians to make separation and celibacy a standard way of life, and he made clear that monasticism eventually would produce "enormous evils." But he reasserted his overriding principle that godliness could co-exist with superstition. The pure, if naïve, original purpose of monasticism was depicted in the life of the hermit Anthony, who took "literally" Christ's injunction to sell possessions to benefit the poor: "Say that he was ignorant, and superstitious; he was both: but he persevered to the age of an hundred and five years in

⁹⁷ Ibid., 2:493.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 2:501; see also p. 561 for Milner's view of a *bona fide* revival stemming from Augustine.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 2:401; also 501.

¹⁰⁰ Walsh, "Milner's History": 181.

¹⁰¹ Milner, *HCC*, 1:439, 2:252; quotation at 2:252. Milner's statement may have an autobiographical flavour: Milner himself was unmarried, and, based on descriptions by his brother, he gravitated to solitary study and lacked some social graces. See Isaac Milner, *An Account of the Life and Character of the late Rev. Joseph Milner, M.A., Master of the Grammar School, and Vicar of the Holy Trinity Church, in Kingston upon Hull*, new ed. (London: printed by J. & E. Hodson for E. Mathews, Strand, and J. Deighton, Cambridge, 1804), ii, lxiii.

voluntary poverty with admirable consistency.”¹⁰²

Milner went on to draw a geographical distinction in terms of monasticism’s effect: in regions which had already received Christianity, monastic superstitions could only be “poison”; but in other “altogether profane or idolatrous” regions, monks were instrumental in spreading the gospel.¹⁰³ This set the stage for his treatment of medieval Christianity which highlighted the missionary activity of monks in settings distant from Rome, such as France, Britain, Germany, and Scandinavia. In relation to his theme of revival, however, Milner found reason to be critical:

While the world proceeded in its usual wickedness, those who were best calculated to reform it, had a strong tendency to live a recluse life; and false fear and bondage kept many from the pastoral office, who might have been its brightest ornaments. The mischief of this was inexpressible; the extension of the gospel was checked; and every circumstance shewed, that the spirit of God was no longer poured out, in his fulness, among men.¹⁰⁴

Somewhat paradoxically, Milner located among monks the strongest Christian vitality—especially a missionary spirit—within medieval Christendom, and yet he believed that the monastic habit of withdrawal hindered Christianity’s renewal and spread. His godly examples shone, perhaps, in spite of their circumstances rather than because of them.

Milner’s treatment of medieval centuries also featured a significant number of ecclesiastical dignitaries: abbots, bishops, even popes. These included Gregory I. Interestingly, Milner refused to refer to him as a ‘pope’, apparently in reaction against Protestants’ anachronistic tendency to impose a vision of the late medieval papacy (with its attendant corruptions) on earlier incumbents. He explained his terminology: “I appropriate the term Pope to Antichrist, who did not, accurately speaking, exist as yet in the Western church.”¹⁰⁵ Milner admitted Gregory’s own efforts in favour of the Roman See against

¹⁰² Milner, *HCC*, 2:101–102; see also 290.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 2:263.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:282.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 3:50, 77, 94.

perceived usurpations by the bishop of Constantinople, but he ascribed these to the human weakness of jealousy. On the whole, he believed, Gregory's life rather displayed great humility.¹⁰⁶ Milner depicted Gregory as a pious man caught between the solitary monastic life and the increasingly secular distractions of papal oversight.¹⁰⁷ He overcame this tension, Milner claimed, through his remarkable pastoral activism, unequalled since the apostles or in any subsequent age of the church.¹⁰⁸ Gregory occupied a firm place within Milner's overall design: "I rejoice to find in him such vivid tokens of that spiritual sensibility and life, which it is the great business of this history to delineate, as it appeared from age to age in the church, and which distinguishes real Christians as much from nominal ones, as from all other men."¹⁰⁹ At a later point Milner likely had Gregory in mind when he criticized Protestant historians who had dated the rise of Antichrist too early and who thus had "condemn[ed] unjustly several Romish pastors, whom I have attempted to vindicate."¹¹⁰

At the outset of his third volume Milner declared his intention to specify to the best of his ability the point at which the Catholic Church's hierarchy crossed over from mere superstition into Antichristian idolatry.¹¹¹ In his narrative, Milner identified the year 727, when hostilities began between the bishop of Rome and the Greek emperor, as "the most proper date, that I know of, for the beginning of popedom," by which he meant an antichristian leadership.¹¹² Milner interpreted this point as the start of the prophetic forty-two-month "dominion of the beast" (Rev. 11 and 13) which would extend as 1260 years, nearly to the turn of the twenty-first century.¹¹³ Milner listed "idolatry, spiritual tyranny,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 3:58, and throughout Milner's description, 38–50.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 3:35–36.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 3:52, 94; also throughout 38–50.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 3:44.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 3:517 n., repeated at 532.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 3:iv.

¹¹² Ibid., 3:161.

¹¹³ Ibid., 3:187.

and the doctrine of the merit of works” as the “discriminating marks” of an antichristian papacy. He believed that the “seeds” of these corruptions had already been “vigorously shooting” under Gregory I, ironically through his great reputation.¹¹⁴ It was the papacy of another Gregory, the Second (r. 715–31), which evinced an “open avowal ... of idolatry” and thus the ‘maturity’ of the Antichristian plant.¹¹⁵

Milner anticipated that from this point onwards the ‘real’ church which was the subject of his attention was not to be found “in the collective body of nominal Christians.” Rather, he said, “I either travel with faithful Missionaries into regions of heathenism, and describe the propagation of the Gospel in scenes altogether new, or dwell with circumstantial exactness on the lives and writings of some particular individuals, in whom the Spirit of God maintained the power of godliness, while they remained ‘in Babylon.’”¹¹⁶ Milner took obvious delight in locating a broad array of godly examples within the Catholic pale and thus revising Protestant tradition. He specifically criticized “writers, who seem to think an indiscriminate aversion to the Church of Rome to be one of the principal excellencies of a protestant historian.” True Christians, he reminded, could wear “a Roman dress.”¹¹⁷

The overwhelming majority of Milner’s medieval Catholic ‘saints’ were either missionary monks or bishops active in areas far from the centre of ecclesiastical power, especially northward and westward. In a section touching on the existence of a vital Christianity in Britain prior to Saxon invasion, Milner echoed the perspective of Thomas Prince’s sermon on the geographical advance of Christianity: “Thus, while the gospel was

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 3:95. Compare, however, Milner’s earlier statement: “Antichrist had not yet formally begun his reign, nor would have been known at Rome to this day, had all the bishops resembled Gregory” (3:38 n. ‡).

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 3:172–73. This assertion fell within a chapter section which Milner titled “The maturity of Antichrist” (161).

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 3:iv; see also 187. Earlier Milner had stated that tracing the ‘propagation of the gospel’ “should be the favourite object of a Christian historian” (2:109).

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 3:107 (incl. n. *).

rapidly withdrawing from the east, where it first arose, God left not himself without witness in the most distant parts of the west.”¹¹⁸ His narrative’s gravitation to the periphery of the European continent was explainable by virtue of the pattern of revival and declension: the purest faith appeared among the newest churches.¹¹⁹

In Milner’s view, monks from Britain and, to a lesser extent, Ireland and France were prominent in the story of Christian expansion in Europe.¹²⁰ Their missionary zeal in these supposedly ‘dark ages’ could be used to shame modern Protestant indifference.¹²¹ He acknowledged the paradox that many of his godly missionary monks were sent by a hierarchy which he had deemed antichristian. Within the same chapter which had identified full-grown idolatry under the papal system, Milner praised missionaries who, “by the adorable Providence of God, ... entered not into the recent controversies, but were engaged in actions purely spiritual” and who “were patronized and supported in preaching Christ among foreign nations, by the same popes of Rome, who were opposing his grace in their own [nation].”¹²²

His discussion featured a wide range of other ecclesiastical figures, again typically from the West and especially Britain. He presented the monks Bede and Alcuin of York (prominent in Charlemagne’s court) as the eminent Christian minds of their days. Examples such as these led Milner to declare emphatically: “The people, who served the Lord in the greatest purity and sincerity, seem to have been OUR ancestors, and the inhabitants of some other regions, which had but lately received the Gospel.”¹²³ Other exemplars selected by Milner were the ninth-century English prince Alfred, who founded

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3:30–31; also p. 143, in reference to Matt. 16:18: “God will have a Church upon earth, and it shall be carried to the most despised regions rather than extinguished entirely.”

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:542, 3:184, 186, 253, 272, 289.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:122; for specific examples, see 3:264, 289, 321–26.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 3:iv, 295, quotation at iv.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 3:188.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 3:146–47, 149, 154, 158–59, 210–11, quotation at 158–59.

Oxford and whose model Christian leadership, in Milner's estimation, dwarfed Charlemagne's; the Culdees originating in St Andrews in the ninth century who possessed "a devotional, and, probably, an evangelical spirit"; and the eleventh-century Queen Margaret of Scotland, "a woman of the rarest piety, and of a character fitted to throw a lustre on the purest ages."¹²⁴

Milner devoted nearly one hundred pages to Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux. Milner's aim was to navigate between the extremes of Catholic and Protestant historiography: "...Papists represent him as an angel, and Protestants as a narrow bigot, or a furious zealot..."¹²⁵ He sought to vindicate Bernard's perceived faults. Bernard's attachment to the papacy was ascribable to the spirit of his age; Milner reminded that even Luther came to his perception of the papacy "by slow degrees." On Bernard's vehement opposition to truly pious persons, Milner held that he was misinformed and under different circumstances might have been their leader rather than their judge.¹²⁶ "It will be one of the felicities of heaven," he wrote, "that Saints shall no longer misunderstand one another."¹²⁷ Despite his flaws, Milner contended, Bernard displayed real Christian humility, pastoral wisdom, "evangelical piety" or "vital godliness," and a sound understanding of Christian life and doctrine.¹²⁸

Besides Bernard, Milner's presentation of the high Middle Ages distinguished a surprising number of ecclesiastical dignitaries. Bernard's student who went on to become Pope Eugenius III (r. 1145–1153) deserved brief mention as a virtuous character.¹²⁹ Milner gave pride of place to English exemplars, offering chapter-length treatments on Anselm of

¹²⁴ Ibid., 3:218–21, 333–34.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 3:448.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 3:359, 403, 433.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 3:414–15.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 3:365, 433, 435, 438–41, quotations at 438–39.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 3:366.

Canterbury, bishop of Lincoln Robert Grosseteste (who evinced a solid grasp of only the bare essentials), and Oxford divine and short-lived archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Bradwardine (who was elevated as a providential harbinger of revival in England).¹³⁰ A separate chapter on thirteenth-century individuals who to Milner were clandestine Christians within an antichristian Church included bishops at Paris and Dunkeld, Scotland, an archbishop of York, a divine at the Sorbonne and University of Paris, French king Louis IX, and another pope, Celestine V (r. July–December 1294).¹³¹

Tempering the reader's surprise at the numerous high-ranking Catholic figures filling the ranks of the 'true' church was Milner's tendency to either highlight or to artificially superimpose a quality of opposition between them and the 'antichristian' hierarchical system. Several of his selected figures had criticized church practices or resisted papal demands. Anselm was prevented from being forced to adjudge the pope as Antichrist by "circumstances" which led Rome to "cherish and honour" him.¹³² Bradwardine's reputed simplicity and holiness which contributed to his election as archbishop were precisely what Milner thought made him unsuitable for the position, and his death only a few weeks after his advancement was most likely "a providential mercy."¹³³ The success of Eugenius and Celestine as godly characters in Milner's eyes involved their respective failures as pope.

In the midst of highlighting thirteenth-century saints, Milner briefly turned his attention to harshly castigate Celestine's successor, Boniface VIII, and the newly-formed Franciscan and Dominican orders. Boniface he portrayed as despotic, arrogant beyond

¹³⁰ Ibid., 3:331–33, 335–57, 4:44–65, 81–94. Considering Milner's portrayal of Wycliffe (see below), it may be that he viewed Bradwardine rather than Wycliffe as a 'morning star' of the English Reformation.

¹³¹ Ibid., 4:16–23, 28–38, quotation at 36. See also Milner's sympathetic comments on Adrian VI (r. 1522–23), successor to Leo X, at 4:675, 680–81.

¹³² Ibid., 3:345.

¹³³ Ibid., 4:81, 83, quotations at 83.

measure and hypocritical.¹³⁴ Francis of Assisi Milner described as “extraordinary” in a negative sense, as a proud ascetic or even a purposely deceptive enthusiast under Satanic influence. Milner attributed to Dominic similar characteristics and considered his devotional practice mechanistic externalism.¹³⁵ For Milner, their followings were preoccupied with gaining wealth and power so that by the sixteenth century they became “the pillars of the Papacy.”¹³⁶ Part of what shaped his view of these two orders appears to have been his loyalty to religious establishment and structure: he saw them as disruptive in supplanting clerical roles and driving a wedge between these and the lay people. His depiction of Franciscans preaching in town and country seemed to contain a subtle barb at any itinerant proclamation thus implicating Methodists and ‘irregular’ clergy of his own day; indeed in one place he condemned this practice more generally as “an unworthy practice too common even in the best times of the Church!”¹³⁷

Milner for the most part praised the medieval reformist groups known as Cathars, Albigenses and Waldenses. He treated these essentially as one movement emanating from the same locale, the famous valleys of Piedmont. This conflation appears to have been a reaction against a Protestant historiography too preoccupied, in his mind, with delineating various proto-Protestant groups, painstakingly seeking to untangle threads and ignoring the centrifugal force of godliness. Milner would search for “the presence of God ... among them” and not concern himself with historical intricacies.¹³⁸ Their likely originator, he ventured, was not Peter Waldo but rather Claudius, ninth-century bishop of Turin. Milner found evidence of his activism, opposition to papal corruptions, and view of Christ

¹³⁴ Ibid., 4:37–38, 69.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 4:24–28.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 4:3–4.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 4:4–5, 22.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 3:408–409. For Milner’s associations of the various groups see 3:420 n., 456, 474–75, 503–504, 523 n. †.

as sole mediator and described him as the “first Protestant Reformer.”¹³⁹ He claimed that Claudius’ avoidance of martyrdom came providentially from magisterial protection.¹⁴⁰

Milner described these groups as simple people benefitting from divine favour. Illiterate Cathars espousing potentially dangerous communitarian ideas nonetheless exemplified a love for Scripture, a desire to emulate Christ and the apostles, and a holiness which earned them the derogatory name ‘Cathar’, equivalent in Milner’s mind to the usage of ‘Puritan’ in his day.¹⁴¹ Milner concluded of the Cathars that they were the most “striking proof of that great truth of the divine Word, that, in the worst of times, the Church shall exist, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”¹⁴² He repeated this in relation to the Waldenses, and added that “in them very particularly God Almighty chose the weak and foolish things of the world to confound the wise.” From their example Milner asserted of the ‘true’ church that “her livery is often sackcloth, and her external bread is that of affliction, while she sojourns on earth.”¹⁴³ Because of the Waldenses’ simple circumstances, he claimed, their Christian qualities had to be seen more through the character of their lives and sufferings than through articulations of belief.¹⁴⁴ The only explanation for their faithful testimony to “evangelical truth” while the “great, splendid, and wise ... wandered in miserable darkness” was a work of God, confirming Christ’s promise in Matt. 16:18.¹⁴⁵

A picture of God’s power displayed through humble Christians was strengthened through Milner’s correlation of Waldenses and the ancient church. Waldo he associated with second-generation Christian leaders and described in biblical language: “...as in every light he had no reward upon earth, he appears to have been eminently one of those, of

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 3:232–42, esp. 233, n. †, 239–40; see also 4:8. In establishing Claudius’ character Milner relied on the work of the Catholic historian Fleury (1640–1723).

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:241.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 3:409–415, 417.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 3:422.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 3:484, 497.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:498, 501, 502, 553.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3:519.

whom the world was not worthy;—but he turned many to righteousness, and shall shine as the stars for ever and ever.”¹⁴⁶ As in early centuries, persecution spread the Waldenses and multiplied them through “a powerful effusion of the Holy Spirit.” Poignantly Milner wrote: “Every thing relating to the Waldenses resembled the scenes of the primitive Church. Numbers died praising God, and in confident assurance of a blessed resurrection; whence the blood of the martyrs again became the seed of the Church....”¹⁴⁷ Finally, Milner associated their suffering at the hands of “all the power and wisdom of the world” with Rev. 11:3’s image of the witnesses prophesying in sackcloth.¹⁴⁸

Milner also emphasized that these groups should not be seen as sectarian. The Cathars could be praised for distinguishing between gold and dross in the Church and remaining within it “so far as the iniquity of the times would permit.”¹⁴⁹ The same could be said of the Waldenses and Albigenses: they submitted to governments and only separated from the Church when it became fundamentally anti-Christian. Milner proposed this as the policy of “the best and wisest in all ages” who feared “schism” more than “a defect in discipline.”¹⁵⁰

Milner had gone to such pains to locate godly examples in the medieval Church; yet he ascribed vast significance to ‘Waldensianism’ within the broader historical panorama. Milner blamed Roman Catholic polemicists for the theory that Waldensian roots lay with Waldo and not in more distant centuries.¹⁵¹ Elsewhere Milner construed the Waldenses as an historical bridge and a key plank within his overall plan:

Thus largely did the “King of Saints” [Rev. 15:3] provide for the instruction of his Church, in the darkness of the middle ages. The Waldenses are the middle link,

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 3:482. The latter allusion is given as Dan. 12[:3]; the first, unidentified by Milner, is to Heb. 11:38. Milner narrated Waldo’s career as directed by providence; see 3:474–79.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. Milner repeated the dictum from Tertullian at p. 527 and the comparison with early Christians at p. 540.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 3:483; at 3:537 the reference to ‘witnesses’ was applied to the Albigenses.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 3:418.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 3:497.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 3:475.

which connects the primitive Christians and fathers with the reformed; and, by their means, the proof is completely established, that salvation, by the grace of Christ, felt in the heart and expressed in the life, by the power of the Holy Ghost, has ever existed from the time of the Apostles till this day; and that it is a doctrine marked by the Cross, and distinct from all that religion of mere form or convenience, or of human invention, which calls itself Christian, but which wants the Spirit of Christ.¹⁵²

Moving forward towards the Reformation, Milner continued to link together several reform groups as part of a larger ‘Waldensian’ movement. He asserted, for example, that Walter Raynard, or Lollard, was a Waldensian, that the Lollards did not constitute a society of believers distinct from Waldenses, and that Raynard may have influenced Wycliffe.¹⁵³ Later, in discussing the Bohemian reformers Hus and Jerome of Prague, Milner pointed out that it was an advocate of Waldensian beliefs, Peter of Dresden, who brought teaching on communion in both kinds to Prague. This course of events Milner attributed to “the providential effects of Waldensian light and knowledge in spiritual things.”¹⁵⁴

Milner’s portrayal of Wycliffe is one of the most obvious instances of his attempt in the *History* to nuance and revise extant historiography. His characterization of Wycliffe was decidedly mixed, in contrast to the traditional Protestant conception of him as an early reformer anticipating the Reformation. Barely into his chapter on Wycliffe, Milner highlighted inconsistencies, such as his brash criticism of the pope alongside his unwillingness to suffer persecution, and his public condemnation of the Church’s possession of property alongside his benefit from a clerical living at Lutterworth.¹⁵⁵ He similarly faulted Wycliffe’s use of political means towards religious ends.¹⁵⁶ Wycliffe’s theology, although seemingly orthodox, was in Milner’s view scant on gospel essentials,

¹⁵² Ibid., 3:553–54.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 3:552, 4:67–68.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 4:212–13, quote at 213.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 4:101–102; also 119–21.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 4:128.

confused on several points, and overly scholastic.¹⁵⁷ Milner concluded: “I know no person of Ecclesiastical eminence, whose life and character have cost me more thought and care, than Wickliff’s. And after all, there is not much to record that deserves the peculiar attention of godly persons. I have consulted the best authorities, and in scrutinizing their contents have been mortified to find, that I could not conscientiously join with the popular cry in ranking this man among the highest Worthies of the Church....”¹⁵⁸ Milner expressly distanced himself from Protestant historians who chiefly because of Wycliffe’s opposition to Catholic corruptions had represented him in rose-coloured hues, “almost blind,” said Milner, “to the faults, errors, and defects, of their favourite Ecclesiastic.”¹⁵⁹

At the same time, Milner praised elements of Wycliffe’s character and positive results from his actions. Venerable qualities were Wycliffe’s religious activism, sound understanding of certain fundamental Christian tenets, love of truth, well-founded criticisms of the Roman See, earnestness, innocence and integrity.¹⁶⁰ Milner challenged Hume’s representation of Wycliffe as an enthusiast opposing a superstitious Church. At this point he specifically situated his own perspective between “unbounded applause” for Wycliffe and “the uncandid and injurious representations of a profane historian.”¹⁶¹ Milner especially prized the effect of Wycliffe’s English Bible. Despite wishing for more abundant historical records, Milner declared that Wycliffe’s translation brought widespread conversions: it “conveyed instruction to great numbers,” and “there was an effusion of the Divine Spirit.” This ‘revival’ filled the ranks of the English Lollards. However faint the “Evangelical” light from Wycliffe, it was enough to pierce the prevailing darkness.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 4:111–12, 117–19.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 4:104–105; also 103: “Whoever carefully examines the original records, will be convinced that the merits of this Reformer have been considerably exaggerated.”

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 4:125–27.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 4:98, 103.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 4:124. Milner on other points could agree with Hume (see pp. 122–24).

¹⁶² Ibid., 4:114–16, 121, quotations at 121; see also 134.

The Lollards, in Milner's view, tempered Wycliffe's ideas and surpassed him in Christian faithfulness.¹⁶³ Milner praised their constancy in martyrdom. Recounting the death at the pyre of "simple artificer" John Badby under the eyes of the Prince of Wales, soon to be crowned Henry V, Milner exulted in an ironic contrast between secular and spiritual powers: "What are all HIS [Henry's] victories and triumphs, of which English history is so proud, compared with the grace which appeared in Badby?"¹⁶⁴ Milner believed that enduring persecution of Lollards, under the guiding hand of providence and in fulfilment of prophecy, produced a desire for reform and popular rejection of papal excesses and evils culminating in the English Reformation.¹⁶⁵

As mentioned previously, Milner perceived a path leading from Wycliffe and the Lollards to Hus and Jerome of Prague. In a chapter on the Council of Constance, Milner devoted the bulk—over seventy pages—to narrating the trials and condemnations of these two Bohemian leaders.¹⁶⁶ Again Milner presented a varied portrait. At an early point he claimed that Hus's gradual reception of Wycliffe's "evangelical views" was the result of none other than the Spirit's personal work which overrode prejudices and human nature. This work, Milner believed, produced in Hus a bare minimum of belief in timeless essentials which God graciously guided "to the best practical purposes."¹⁶⁷ Milner highlighted Hus's teaching on a vital faith producing Christian charity and service. This faith was "the spark of Divine Fire, which inflamed the heart of the Bohemian martyr" and which distinguished him as a true "child of God."¹⁶⁸ Whatever Hus's doctrinal weaknesses, these were overcome, in Milner's mind, through Hus's character at his life's

¹⁶³ Ibid., 4:103, 139.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 4:142.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 4:167, 168, 176.

¹⁶⁶ Milner did point out that the Council's chief purpose was to resolve the papal schism. He held that its reform efforts were unsuccessful but nonetheless, by subverting papal authority, providentially paved the way for sixteenth-century reformers. Ibid., 4:180–82; see also 200, 246, and esp. 257–58.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 4:188.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 4:193–94, quotation at 194.

end. Milner portrayed events of his trial and execution as some of the most “completely iniquitous” in history and their victim as “one of the most upright and blameless of men.” His actions in the face of death, moreover, carried the stamp of divine approval: “...the grace of God was marvellously displayed in supporting and strengthening the martyr, who appears indeed to have exhibited all the graces of a true disciple of Christ.”¹⁶⁹ Jerome, like Hus, Milner suspected of possessing only enough of Christian fundamentals to enable his humble faithfulness to God in suffering and death.¹⁷⁰ The fifteenth century could be described as a “gloomy season” in which Hus and Jerome, themselves somewhat deficient in Christian faith, were condemned by a council supposedly convened to bring reformation.¹⁷¹

In a subsequent chapter Milner gave a similarly mixed portrayal of the Bohemian followers of Hus and Jerome. Milner differentiated between two strands of ‘Hussites’ and castigated the Calixtines who advocated revolution for the sake of Eucharistic change. This led him to issue a general warning (perhaps with seventeenth-century Puritans in mind) against “those professors of godliness, who have been so far misled by false zeal, or the love of the world, as to take the sword in defence of religion” and who thereby injured their religious cause.¹⁷² The other strand, the Taborites, more successfully maintained the spirit of Hus by enduring persecution and could be classed as “genuine followers of Christ.” Nonetheless they “failed to promote the spirit of godliness in so great a degree as they had expected” because they overlooked the first step of doctrinal renewal.¹⁷³ Milner concluded, however, that they rightly separated from the Catholic Church for the sake of “the genuine faith of the gospel, and purity of worship.” They “were not mere schismatics,

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 4:230–31.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 4:245.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 4:248–50.

¹⁷² Ibid., 4:259–60, 262.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 4:261–62.

but properly reformed Protestants” who demonstrated through their perseverance that “they had not received the grace of God in vain.”¹⁷⁴

Milner worked somewhat against the Protestant tendency to hold up these various medieval reformers as embryonic Protestants. He cast doubt on the supposed prophecy associated with Hus’s martyrdom that a century after the roasting of a goose (Hus) would come an invincible swan (Luther).¹⁷⁵ In anticipation of the sixteenth century he described both Hussites and Waldenses as “defective in evangelical LIGHT.” These Christians, rather than offering a “luminous, attractive, and powerful” presentation of the gospel which would garner attention and bring transformation, were viewed by others as “forbidding and austere.” These were but dim rays anticipating “the light of the reformation.” Milner explained further that his fifteenth-century details qualified for inclusion only inasmuch as they were “directed by Divine Providence with a particular subserviency to the reformation.”¹⁷⁶ Elsewhere he construed medieval reform attempts through analogies of tearing down without building, or pruning branches without removing “the bitter root.”¹⁷⁷

The early Reformation was a high point soaring far above much of church history. In the preface to the fourth volume, Isaac wrote of his brother’s admiration for Luther and belief that “no scenes, since the Apostles’ days, were more instructive.”¹⁷⁸ That he followed with well over one thousand pages informed by Joseph’s notes proved the point. Heightening the perceived majesty of the Reformation was a depiction of prior decades as shrouded in overwhelming, even unequalled, darkness: “The sixteenth century opened

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 4:264.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 4:(43) [pt. 1]. Both parts 1 and 2 of vol. 4 include prefaces with lower-case Roman numeral pagination and appendices with bracketed pagination, thus the part (pt.) will consistently be indicated. Otherwise page numbers continue from the first part to the second.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 4:266–68.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 4:77–78, 275–77, quotation at 276; the latter reference named Claudius of Turin, the Waldenses, Wycliffe and Hus.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 4:xi–xii, xxi [pt. 1]; Isaac apparently was quoting Joseph from another, unidentified, source. For other expressions of the Reformation’s eminence in the sweep of church history see 4:276, 475–76.

with a prospect of all others the most gloomy, in the eyes of every true Christian.

Corruption both in doctrine and in practice had exceeded all bounds; and the general face of Europe, though the name of Christ was every where professed, presented nothing that was properly Evangelical.”¹⁷⁹ Shortly thereafter Milner detailed the perceived depths of corruption and characterized Pope Leo X as “perhaps more strikingly void of every sacerdotal qualification than any pontiffs before him.”¹⁸⁰ He did praise Renaissance developments such as renewed classical scholarship, scientific interest, the printing press, and advanced critical thought (exemplified by Erasmus) but emphasized that though these providentially laid a foundation for the Reformation they produced few results in the fifteenth century.¹⁸¹

Milner portrayed Luther as emerging remarkably rather than inevitably out of this foreboding scene. He reminded his readers: “...first, advert to the prevailing ignorance and errors of the clergy in the days of the reformer; and then, with pleasure and surprise, he will observe the immense strides, towards a complete system of Christian principles, which were taken by an Augustine monk during the year 1519, in the midst of his persecutions....”¹⁸² Several other passages emphasized Luther’s continued monastic habit beyond his initial protest and his obscurity and frailty in contrast to the power of the religious hierarchy.¹⁸³ These can be seen as attempts by Milner to re-historicize Luther for a Protestant audience which perhaps was accustomed to a static view of him as a powerful and heroic defender of Protestant principles from 1517 onward.

That Luther’s actions were heroic Milner fully assented to; but he consistently

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 4:275.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 4:278–83, 286, quotation at 286.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 4:269–70.

¹⁸² Ibid., 4:402.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 4:291, 310, 475. Milner’s reference at p. 475 to Luther as an “excommunicated monk” indicates a curious intent to carry an impression of his monastic habit beyond Leo’s condemnation.

identified the source of this strength as divine rather than human. At the start of his discussion of the Reformation Milner laid down that Luther was “the instrument rather than the agent.” Reflecting his picture of Luther’s gradual progress, Milner continued: “He was led from step to step, by a series of circumstances, far beyond his original intentions; and in a manner, which might evince the excellency of the power to be of God and not of man [2 Cor. 4:7].”¹⁸⁴ Providence, indeed, Milner held to be the first cause and foundation of Luther’s character and actions: “ONLY the Wise Disposer of all events, for the glory of his own name and for the revival of true religion in Europe, by the effectual operation of his Holy Spirit, could have produced, at the season when most wanted, so faithful a champion, and possessed of so much vigour of intellect, of so daring a spirit, and of so truly humble and Christian-like a temper.”¹⁸⁵ Milner carried this providential reading through the various political twists and turns and other factors influencing the course of Luther’s reform.¹⁸⁶ In reaction to Robertson’s *Charles V* which emphasized Leo’s bull anathematizing Luther as an instigating factor of the Reformation, Milner castigated what was a main feature of Enlightenment historiography: “An habitual attention to SECONDARY CAUSES, where the mind has not obtained, from divine revelation, any true knowledge of the FIRST GRAND CAUSE, nor been duly humbled on account of internal depravity, has been observed, in many instances, sadly to increase a sceptical, profane, and atheistical turn of thinking.”¹⁸⁷

Milner had juxtaposed aspects of medieval reform movements with the Reformation, such as their acrimony and preoccupation with externals; at the heart of the

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 4:276. See also pp. 292, 301, 388, and 437 for expressions of the idea that divine intentions led Luther well beyond his own.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 4:310.

¹⁸⁶ For examples, see Ibid., 4:363–64, 371, 458–59, 485–90, 549, 592, 633, 703, 962–63.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 4:458–59, quotation at 459; see also 632–33, 755–56, 971–72. At p. 972, Milner accused modern historians of being disinterested in truth and “forming perverse and groundless conjectures.”

Reformation's success for Milner was doctrinal renewal. Milner wrote: "...the peculiar excellency of the revival of godliness now before us lay in this, that it was conversant in fundamentals of doctrine, rather than in correction of mere abuses of practice..." Soon after, Milner singled out justification as "the most capital object of the reformation" and characterized this tenet as an "Apostolical doctrine" which, with the collapse of indulgence-hawking, re-emerged "in all its infant simplicity."¹⁸⁸ To our eyes the limelight on doctrine and specifically justification might seem predictable; however Milner felt that this core feature in Luther's dealings largely had been overlooked by previous church historians. Milner exclaimed with irony: "They are abundant in praising him, for his exertions against papal tyranny and superstition, but scarcely a sentence escapes them in commendation of his peculiar Christian tenets. Hence many have been taught to admire the reformation, while they remain ignorant of its fundamental principles."¹⁸⁹ At the outset of volume four Milner specifically targeted Robertson's portrayal of Luther in *Charles V* for inexcusably overlooking the doctrine of justification as "the main spring both of his private and his public conduct."¹⁹⁰

Several other aspects to Luther also prompted revisionist work by Milner. As with other figures such as Wycliffe, Milner seemed to aim for a balanced portrayal of Luther between rival Protestant and Enlightenment accounts. Against a Protestant tendency to immortalize Luther, Milner brought out his faults, such as "a disposition to anger, and an indulgence in jesting." These flaws differentiated Luther from the consistently humble character of Luther's "favourite author," Augustine, and soured his relationship with Zwingli.¹⁹¹ Milner also felt compelled by "the rigorous laws of history" to mention

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 4:276–77, 282.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 4:497.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 4:xv–xix, quotations at xviii–xix.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 4:308–309 and, on Zwingli, 990, 1001.

Luther's unjustifiable distaste for the Book of James.¹⁹² On the other side, Milner felt that some modern writers had treated Luther unfairly in characterizing him as brash: "How little of the real spirit of Luther appears in our ordinary histories of these times! By many this pious reformer is thought not only to have been bold and enterprising, but also headstrong, seditious, and revengeful." Milner in turn cited Luther's letters to oppressed Lutherans for instances of his "profound humility, sober confidence in the providence of God, and unfeigned resignation to his will."¹⁹³ He also worked to portray Luther as peaceable and non-revolutionary, for example citing his revulsion to iconoclasm at Wittenberg under Carlstadt and to the Peasants' War. At the outset of a section on the war in 1525, Milner wrote: "The more scrupulously we examine the principles of Martin Luther, the more opposite we always find them to a spirit both of enthusiasm and sedition." Elsewhere he connected Luther's pacific recommendations with "the powerful influence of Evangelical principles."¹⁹⁴ His unique perspective was summed up aptly in two pages where he criticized Catholic polemicists who imposed false motives on Luther's opposition, modern authors who scorned him in light of contemporary sensibilities, and Protestant writers who found no fault whatsoever.¹⁹⁵

Throughout the fourth volume Milner referred to the Reformation led by Luther as a revival *par excellence*. Previous volumes had established the pattern that revivals were purest at the outset, and Milner reasserted this in view of his concentration on the early years of Luther's activity up to the Diet of Augsburg.¹⁹⁶ At the start of his final chapter, he spoke of this period in the language of a spreading revival: "The progress of Divine

¹⁹² Ibid., 4:402.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 4:770–71; see also 1051–52.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 4:603, 785, 1092, quotations at 785, 1092; see also pp. 809 and 1049–64, the latter a section entitled "Luther's sentiments on war and defence."

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 4:307–308.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 4:619.

knowledge, the genuine conversion of souls, and the abolition of abominable superstitions, were carried on with no great interruption for the space of ten years, and upwards; that is, till the year 1529, reckoning from the year 1517.... The success of the Gospel, if we except the apostolic age, was perhaps in this period unexampled.”¹⁹⁷ Other references to the Reformation as a ‘revival’ were frequent. In one instance he applied the parabolic language of the synoptic gospels, speaking of “the good seed, sown under various circumstances,” which “was springing up and bearing fruit in almost every corner of Germany.” Here he called for what would amount to a ‘faithful narrative’ of the geographical progress of evangelical doctrine and practice.¹⁹⁸ In the midst of recounting events at the Diet of Worms, Milner wrote: “This was a glorious season. The Spirit of God was at work with many hearts....”¹⁹⁹

Features accompanying the Reformation as with other Christian revivals, in Milner’s view, were persecution and excesses. Although his (incomplete) narrative did not feature many Protestant martyrdom accounts (a handful appeared in an appendix to the final volume), Milner made clear that with the successful spread of Luther’s reforms naturally came suffering. The “blood of the martyrs” reflected “the native vigour of the reviving Church of Christ”; the “cross” was “the constant attendant, in some shape or another, of true religion.”²⁰⁰ Even in the midst of apparent success with the spread of the Reformation, persecution marked its true character: suffering, for Milner, was the way of genuine Christianity. He also pointed to what he saw as real examples of heresy or enthusiasm. Based on correspondence between Luther and radical pastors in Antwerp, he construed the latter as “a striking instance of Satan’s activity, in raising up false teachers,

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 4:1143.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 4:593.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 4:568.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 4:xiii (pt. 2), 724.

whenever his kingdom is in peculiar danger from remarkable revivals of Christian truth.”²⁰¹

Milner described most sixteenth-century Anabaptists in Germany and Switzerland as “seditious” revolutionaries, antinomians, and “deluded” or fanatical “zealots” and included Müntzer and the Zwickau Prophets as representative.²⁰²

Milner did leave room, however, for individual ‘true’ believers within early Anabaptism. He asserted: “...we cannot doubt that of the vast multitudes included under that denomination, there must have been many persons of sincerely pious and pacific dispositions, though probably unlearned, and liable to be led away by impassioned enthusiasts or artful incendiaries.”²⁰³ He recounted several martyrdoms of people supporting Anabaptist principles (including Michael Sellarius, or Sattler), and declared in the midst of this narrative that it was difficult to determine which of the Anabaptists “were truly humble Christians.” He continued: “We cannot however doubt of the REALITY of the sufferings of the unfortunate victims....”²⁰⁴ Using the example of Anabaptists, Milner advocated a principle of religious tolerance.²⁰⁵

Although the *History* was not carried beyond 1529, it contained scattered hints of his interpretation for events beyond this point. Evidently he would have seen what is called the Protestant confessional age as a period of decline following the sixteenth-century revival. In a footnote towards the end of his fourth volume Milner wrote: “It is true enough, that in no very great length of time after Luther’s decease, many of his followers, who still preserved the denomination of LUTHERAN, departed materially from the principles of their master; and I wish that in so doing it might be found they did not

²⁰¹ Ibid., 4:987.

²⁰² Ibid., 4:501 n., 643 n., 713, 1095–97, 1105. In his footnotes Milner distinguished the English Baptists of his day from Anabaptists.

²⁰³ Ibid., 4:1096.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 4:1144, 1147, quotation at 1147.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 4:1097, 1113.

also lose the Spirit of the Gospel.”²⁰⁶ In discussing the sacramentarian controversy between Luther and Zwingli, Milner anticipated growing factionalism among Protestants.²⁰⁷

He made other statements anticipating declension on British soil. One suspects a mixed view of Civil War Puritanism lying behind Milner’s comment, in the context of discussing Luther’s views on war, that “...if real Christians have, on any occasion, been active in promoting revolutions by violence and iniquity, all we can say is, their evidence of belonging to Christ’s little flock must, at that particular season, be deemed very slender and suspicious.”²⁰⁸ He identified the reign of James II (1685–1688) as the time when a morality-based notion of religion sprouted and the period from the Restoration to roughly the early 1740s as one during which a moralistic church and increased learning were dwarfed by general immorality and division.²⁰⁹ Finally, an early passing comment (in the context of his discussion of second-century persecution of the church) provided a sweeping lineage of genuine believers up to the English Revival through the lens of opposition: “The name Christian has long ceased to be infamous. But the words Lollard, Puritan, Pietist, and Methodist, have supplied its place.”²¹⁰

IV. Features

Many aspects of the *History of the Church of Christ* were shaped both by tradition and the present context. This was true of the theological lenses shaping the interpretation. In continuity with early Protestant historians such as Foxe and evangelical forerunners such as Edwards and Gillies, Milner saw the Bible as foundational. He adopted the use of

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 4:925 n.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 4:1009.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 4:1064.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 1:289–90; compare Milner, *Essays*, 22, 54.

²¹⁰ Milner, *HCC*, 1:247 n. †.

biblical prophecy to demarcate the course of post-biblical history. Scripture also revealed the standards of belief and practice which formed the 'essence' by which Milner selected his characters. While this echoed Protestant biblicism it also stood against a perceived modern erosion of the Bible's centrality in church and society. In addition, his view that true Christianity always precipitated opposition but also always persevered because of God's intervention, in fulfilment of Scriptural promises (especially Matt. 16:18), stood in accord with preceding Protestant historiography. At the same time this emphasis was intended to encourage an evangelical readership which had experienced scorn, at the least, in its contemporary cultural context. Frequently the narrative turned to discussions of 'enthusiasm', revealing defensiveness over the corollary eighteenth-century charge against evangelicals. He sought to counteract the label positively by tracing an historical continuity of orthodox, vital Christianity and negatively by highlighting examples which he saw as genuine enthusiasm (such as Montanists and revolutionary Anabaptists). Throughout, when he was critiquing the historical views of 'infidels' Gibbon and Hume or 'nominal' Protestants Mosheim and Robertson he was fundamentally seeking to vindicate evangelicalism.

Other doctrinal matters similarly involved traditional and contemporary concerns. In his frequent use of the language of providence Milner stood in line with Protestants of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; but the forcefulness by which he asserted divine involvement was driven by controversy with an 'enlightened' historiography. Essentially Milner sought to reorient his readership against an historiographical current which focused on human rather than divine causation. That the debate over causation was a live and pressing one can be seen through Milner's prefatory identification of the issue as central to his work and through his running dialogue with Enlightenment historians. Supporting this,

Hindmarsh construes the *History* as an outgrowth of Milner's critique of Gibbon in 1781.²¹¹ Certainly his employment of justification as a determining factor for his godly examples hearkened back to the Reformation. But Milner, like other evangelical leaders, believed that he was resurrecting this doctrine after a period of neglect by Protestants and in the face of scorn by deists and atheists. The same was true of the other doctrines—human depravity and sanctification through the Spirit—which combined with justification to form a core of evangelical belief. Although Protestants historically had ascribed to these, in Milner's view they had not informed traditional interpretations of church history. And they were being overlooked or derided by leading historians.

Milner's interest in tracing a spiritual church marked by vital belief and practice also had past and present historiography in mind. Early Protestants had developed a new ecclesiology in which the church was defined as an invisible entity rather than a physical, institutional one. Yet Protestant historians quickly made this church visible by following specific historical groups—ancient church fathers and medieval protesters especially—which confirmed the Protestant churches of which they were a part. Milner retained the ecclesiology but, partly in reaction against Protestant historiography, produced a church history much more palpably unhinged from institutional strictures. In essence he took the notion of a spiritual church more literally and for the most part avoided the dogmatic loyalties which operated so powerfully among Protestants through the confessional age. Schaff, who pairs Milner's history with Gottfried Arnold's as examples of 'pietistic' church history, also considers Milner's to be "almost entirely free from the polemic spirit, with which Arnold's overflows."²¹² To Milner, the Christian church could be divided between genuine and nominal practitioners, by means of doctrinal standards coupled with evidence

²¹¹ Hindmarsh, "Milner, Joseph".

²¹² Schaff, *Apostolic Church*, 71–72. Schaff also saw Milner's interpretation as less favourable than Arnold's towards "the inward, contemplative life" and currents of mysticism.

of experiential faith and godly living. His adoption of this approach was as much a critique of recent trends as it was a revision of Protestant historical writing. Tracing vital Christianity through the centuries was a corrective both to modern Protestant historians such as Mosheim concerned with external trappings and to philosophic historians preoccupied with political, economic and social developments.

The same concurrent dialogue with past and present concerns was displayed in another unique feature of the *History*, Milner's sensitive approach to medieval Christendom. We found reason in Chapter Four to question Rack's aligning of Wesley with Milner and Haweis on a view of the Reformation as a glorious dawn; our analysis here also distinguishes Milner from the other two on the medieval Church. Schaff overlooked Milner's uniqueness when he judged that Milner treated the medieval period "with very little favor."²¹³ In our historical analysis above we have treated strands separately; but it is important to remind that for much of the narrative Milner's reader could never quite know what to expect next: monk, ecclesiastical dignitary, obscure peasant, king, or martyr. Milner's decidedly optimistic coterie of medieval Catholic figures elevated as godly representatives was a striking revision of Protestant historiography. That it was a surprising one as well, coming from the pen of an evangelical, has been suggested by recent scholars.²¹⁴ Yet he deftly remained in accord with tradition by retaining an overlay of opposition between these characters and an antichristian papal hierarchy and by attributing a key place in church history to the Waldensian movement. He included the traditional catalogue of medieval reformers—Wycliffe, the Lollards, Hus and Jerome—but also attempted to nuance the perception of these as proto-Protestants. His reclaiming effort effectively went against the grains of traditional Protestant and Enlightenment

²¹³ Ibid., 71.

²¹⁴ Walsh, "Milner's History": 179–81; Ralph Brown, "The Evangelical Succession? Evangelical History and Denominational Identity", *Evangelical Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (1996): 4–5.

thinking, both of which tended to ignore or derogate the medieval period. One suspects that the *History*, had it ventured up to the eighteenth century, would have praised signs of religious progress; but Milner's stated appreciation for ancient sources involved rejecting a degree of the Enlightenment sense of superiority. His overriding principle that superstition could coexist with godliness, while profanity could not, was aimed as a prophetic arrow directly at his own times.

Many of Milner's emphases were threaded together through the theme of revival and declension. The phenomenon of revival gathered under one concept his theological emphases of a God who intervenes and who brings repentance from sin, conversion through belief in Christ, and holiness through the influence of the Spirit. Instances of revival served in dramatic fashion to support Milner's belief that the church would endure with God's help despite all opposition. Throughout the narrative, the pattern outlined in evangelical writings from the 1730s onwards was at work: revivals were purest at the outset and often lasted one generation; their effects eroded through human depravity, excesses and worldly influence; when corruption seemed to threaten to overwhelm, another revival could be anticipated to stem the tide. The *History* maintained three of the dominant historical peaks which Joseph had identified in 1789: Pentecost, Augustine, and the Reformation. The fourth, the eighteenth-century English Revival, clearly was prominent in Milner's mind as he identified 'evangelicals' in every century and portrayed evangelical beliefs and practices as the epitome of vital Christianity through the ages. Between these mountains ran ridges with smaller peaks: Cyprian, Claudius of Turin, Waldenses, Bradwardine, Lollards and, in the distance, Puritans and Pietists. An interest in revival influenced Milner's gravitation to Catholics in regions distant from Rome, among missionary monks and new churches. Prior to beginning his work on the *History* Joseph had defined church history at its best as the history of spiritual effusions, and the

published result followed this course.

Evangelical emphases such as a doctrinal triumvirate (human sinfulness, justification through Christ, and sanctification), a spiritual church, and interests in ‘heart religion’ and seasons of revival were central to his *History* and formed the basis of his claim to a novel approach. His combination of doctrine with practice led him to deemphasize persons or periods which traditionally had been highlighted: for example, Christians suffering persecution under Roman emperors and Hussites clamouring for change in Eucharistic practice appeared to Milner to be doctrinally deficient and thus less worthy of praise. Conversely this interest led him to exalt persons who in his view brought a sound doctrinal understanding, chiefly Augustine and Luther. These characters, because of their theological labours, could be called instruments of revival. Milner’s notion of a spiritual church enabled him to allow for godly persons on either side of ecclesiastical fault lines who had been shunned or ignored by earlier Protestants. On occasion this meant finding laudable characters who in history opposed each other, such as in the case of Cyprian and the Novatians, Bernard and the Albigenses, and sixteenth-century magisterial reformers and Anabaptists. This displayed his situation in an age of evangelical cooperation and greater religious tolerance.

At the same time, the *History*’s mixture of ecclesiastical and sectarian figures reflected real tensions which existed for evangelicals in the Church of England around the turn of the nineteenth century. Several scholars have elucidated the dilemma facing clergymen such as Milner. Ursula Henriques, using Joseph’s sermons as evidence, contends that Anglican evangelicals were “perpetually torn” between their loyalties to a Church and clergy which they wanted to revive and their sense of connection with

Methodists and Dissenters with whom they often had more in common.²¹⁵ Roger Martin and Grayson Carter in separate studies speak of the unifying power of evangelicals' vision of a spiritual 'church of Christ' transcending denominational divisions. Martin specifically points to Milner's *History* which traced an "evangelical succession through the centuries," giving evangelicals of different stripes a sense of common identity through their shared religious experience. This same bond, however, produced "conflict of mind and heart" for evangelical Anglicans as they were poised between commitment to the national Church and association (or, one could add, affinity) with Dissent.²¹⁶ According to Carter, evangelical Anglicans' vision of a spiritual church raised inner uncertainties, as well as external questions, in regard to their loyalty to the institution.²¹⁷

Martin and Carter find around the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries among the majority of evangelical Anglican clergymen a renewed emphasis on 'regular' ministry within the establishment and respect for order. Factors in this turn were the disorder and atrocities of the French Revolution, Jacobin threats in Britain, and the growing possibility that swelling numbers of English Dissenters would press for the Church's disestablishment.²¹⁸ One statement by Carter in regard to evangelical Anglican clergymen at the turn of the century captures the sentiment which infused Milner's *History*: "Although their catholic spirit could readily countenance fellowship with evangelical Dissenters, they regarded the Church as immeasurably superior to Nonconformity. Dissent was seen as unbalanced and prone to constant schism."²¹⁹ Soon after, Carter includes reference to Milner's *History* as an example of Anglican evangelical defensiveness

²¹⁵ Ursula Henriques, *Religious Toleration in England, 1787–1833*, Studies in Social History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 219.

²¹⁶ Martin, *Evangelicals United*, 14–16.

²¹⁷ Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Secessions from the Via Media, c.1800–1850*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1, 9.

²¹⁸ Martin, *Evangelicals United*, 7–8; Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals*, 2, 12, 13, 22–23, 35, 41–42.

²¹⁹ Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals*, 16.

of the establishment.²²⁰ Defensiveness, however, is produced by anxiety rather than security; Carter himself, although he observes growing confidence in regard to increasing numbers and ascending stations in the Church, asserts that the situation for evangelical clergymen in 1800 was still one of “tension.”²²¹

This context informed the content of the *History*. It shaped Milner’s obvious preference for establishment (as in regard to Cyprian and Theodosius) and a parallel distaste for sectarianism (as with the Montanists, Novatians, and reclusive monks) or disorderly practice (such as with Franciscans and Dominicans who overstepped ecclesiastical boundaries). Characters such as the Waldenses and Luther were portrayed as peaceable and submissive until a breach was unavoidable. The *History* did receive criticism from Haweis and from Dissenting groups for this slant. But these critics seem to have overlooked Milner’s explicit attempts to be charitable towards sectarian groups which displayed, in his mind, vital Christian faith and practice. Issues such as religious establishment and church government played a part in the historical presentation, but these were dwarfed by an ambitious project to confirm the perceived essentials and spiritual unity of evangelicals *en masse*. Hindmarsh’s biographical entry on Joseph asserts: “Milner’s history did more than inform evangelicals: it gave them a pedigree and helped to forge their identity.”²²²

The influence of Milner’s presuppositions and social and ecclesiastical context is abundantly apparent; Walsh observes appropriately that Milner’s claim to impartiality was unsuccessful.²²³ Our modern perspective, however, should not obscure Milner’s moderate posture. The analysis above has identified Milner’s continual effort to revise tradition and

²²⁰ Ibid., 23.

²²¹ Ibid., 35.

²²² Hindmarsh, "Milner, Joseph".

²²³ Walsh, "Milner's History": 177. For examples of Milner’s assertion of impartiality, see Milner, *HCC*, 2:466 n., 3:525, 4:402–403.

respond to new trends. We have seen examples where he navigated between various perspectives: traditional Protestant, traditional Catholic, and Enlightened humanist. In many instances he very carefully worked out his own view in suspension between what he saw as overly hagiographical or sceptical tendencies. Despite the biases which he retained, his interpretation was studied and astute. Milner kept many of the individuals and groups which featured in traditional Protestant interpretations, but at the same time he sought to dim hagiographical colourings and to weaken or unravel perceived threads of continuity between medieval and sixteenth-century reformers. In effect he began, at least, to re-historicize these figures. On the other side, Milner reasserted a providential reading of church history against the secularist tendency of leading historians. On both counts Milner sought a 'revival' of sorts: the refreshing of an outmoded Protestant historiography, and a spiritual infusion into modern humanistic historiography. That he was able to manoeuvre between, and dialogue with, these different spheres and produce a readable account speaks to his ability as a history-writer.

Milner had proposed in earlier writings that an account of Christian revivals would constitute a proper history of the church. We have seen the prevalence of revival and declension in the language of Milner's *History* to the extent that this was a major unifying factor in his narrative. In this Milner stood firmly in line with other evangelical history-writers. But Milner's interpretation was also more detailed and nuanced, such that his claim to a novel approach filling an historiographical gap remained valid. His *History* represented the persistence but also the flowering of an evangelical interpretation. The *History*'s popularity, moreover, commends it as important for understanding eighteenth-century evangelicalism and historiography.

Chapter Six – Evangelical Church History Reprised: Thomas Haweis’ *Impartial and Succinct History*

In 1800, midway between the publications of Milner’s third and fourth volumes, a three-volume, thirteen-hundred-page work appeared from the pen of Thomas Haweis (1734?–1820) entitled *An Impartial and Succinct History of the Rise, Declension, and Revival of the Church of Christ; from the Birth of Our Saviour to the Present Time*. Haweis was the longstanding evangelical clergyman at All Saints, Aldwinckle in Northamptonshire as well as an itinerant within the Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion.¹ His broad associations included (besides the Countess) John Guyse, the Wesleys and Whitefield, Henry Venn of Clapham, and John Newton. For several years beginning in 1790 Haweis hosted at Aldwinckle a yearly conference of Anglican evangelical clergymen; in 1790 this included Venn and a young Charles Simeon. Haweis was a central figure in the formation of the interdenominational London Missionary Society in the 1790s and instigated a mission to the South Pacific; his modern biographer, Arthur Skevington Wood, claims for him a place among the fathers of the British Protestant missionary movement.² His *History* was popular enough to undergo two editions in America, in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1803 and Baltimore in 1807.

Haweis’ claim to ‘impartiality’ in the title of his church history reminds one of Gottfried Arnold. However, it is unlikely that Arnold’s volumes directly inspired Haweis’

¹ According to A. S. Wood, there was an eight-year hiatus in the 1780s in Haweis’ association with the Countess’ network after she decided to register her chapels as Dissenting congregations. His typical schedule, maintained until his death, was to spend summer and early autumn at Aldwinckle and late autumn to spring itinerating in London, Brighton, Bath and Bristol. Wood, *Haweis*, 109, 152, 157–58, 168. For basic biographical information, see Edwin Welch, "Haweis, Thomas (1734?–1820)", in *DNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12642> (accessed 14 April 2008).

² Wood, *Haweis*, 75–76, 175, 267. According to Roger Martin, Haweis also participated in Eclectic Society meetings which led to the formation of the Anglican Church Missionary Society, but in Martin’s view he and several others from the LMS did so “largely in order to protest against a fresh organization which would rival their own.” Martin, *Evangelicals United*, 52.

effort.³ One finds, in fact, many English-language precedents for Haweis' title dating back well over a century. The English translation of Louis Ellies Du Pin's church history of the sixteenth century entitled *A New Ecclesiastical History of the Sixteenth Century...* added for the first volume (1703) the subtitle "Containing an Impartial Account of the Reformation of Religion," and for the second volume (1706) "Containing an Impartial and Succinct History of the Council of Trent." A more immediate precedent was the *Concise and Impartial History of the American Revolution*, published in 1795. Well over one hundred titles of histories published in the eighteenth century contained a claim to 'impartiality' (and nearly as many to brevity, using the terms 'concise' or 'succinct').⁴

Recently historians in passing comments have paired Haweis' history with Milner's as examples of evangelical historiography.⁵ According to Haweis' biographer, through his role in encouraging John Newton's attempt Haweis deserves indirect credit for Milner's production of a church history.⁶ Eighteenth-century sources, however, indicate that the emergence of Haweis' volumes created a sense of competition. In his first volume Haweis identified Milner as an historian whom he generally appreciated but with whom he also disagreed on "many" points, and he appended a twenty-eight page dissertation countering Milner's argument on the issue of religious establishments.⁷ The year of Haweis' publication Isaac Milner issued a second edition of Joseph's first volume, and barely into his editor's preface he felt it necessary to state that the *History of the Church of Christ* as it

³ No indication has been found that Haweis knew German. Once in the *History*, in discussing Pietists, Haweis spoke of Mosheim's view that Arnold's church history was "too partial to heretics." The indirect manner of his comment would seem to indicate unfamiliarity with Arnold's work.

⁴ Searches on ESTC and ECCO (accessed 27 June 2008). Du Pin's history was among those listed by Newton as potential sources in a letter to Haweis in November 1763. Arthur Skevington Wood, "John Newton's Church History", *Evangelical Quarterly* 23 (1951): 55.

⁵ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 349; Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 4.

⁶ Wood, *Haweis*, 96. On Haweis' collaboration with Newton, see Wood, "Newton's Church History": 53–56.

⁷ Thomas Haweis, *An Impartial and Succinct History of the Rise, Declension, and Revival of the Church of Christ...*, 3 vols. (London: printed for J. Mawman, 1800), 1:vii and 351–78 (dissertation).

currently stood was “by no means, superseded by a late publication of the Rev. Dr. Haweis.” He pronounced that “no discerning reader can possibly be disposed to infer much resemblance between these two writers of Ecclesiastical history.”⁸ Haweis published a rejoinder, and this was followed by one additional critique by Milner and response by Haweis in 1802.⁹ Primarily these tracts were a squabble over the issue of religious establishment and the allegation by Isaac that Haweis had misrepresented Joseph’s argument. But as shall be seen, this disagreement also did produce tangible differences on historical details.¹⁰

I. Newton, Haweis, and Gospel-Centred Church History

That Haweis perceived the need for an evangelical church history at an early stage is evidenced by his prompting of Newton. In 1763 Newton recorded in his diary that Haweis had convinced him to write a church history focused on “trac[ing] the Gospel spirit, with its abuses and oppositions, through the several ages of the Church.” Newton added that the idea was his own but he “little expected to have it devolved on” himself, perhaps implying a wish that Haweis would commit himself to the task.¹¹ Newton and Haweis corresponded on the structure and themes of the planned work, and thus it is pertinent to examine these as part of the formative process for Haweis’ thoughts on

⁸ Joseph Milner, *The History of the Church of Christ*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Cambridge: printed by John Burges, printer to the University, 1800), xx.

⁹ Isaac Milner’s preface appeared separately as well, as *Animadversions on Dr. Haweis’ ... History of the Church of Christ...* (1800). In 1801 Haweis issued *A Reply to the Animadversions of the Dean of Carlisle on the Succinct and Impartial History of the Church of Christ*, to which Isaac replied with *Further Animadversions on Dr. Haweis’ misquotations ... of ... Milner’s History of the Church of Christ*, followed by Haweis’ *Second Reply to the Dean of Carlisle’s Second Animadversion...*

¹⁰ This historiographical rivalry is only cursorily acknowledged by the two modern scholars who have analyzed these church histories: see Wood, *Haweis*, 230–32, which focuses on the respective dissertations and pamphlets on religious establishment rather than differences on historical detail, and Walsh, “Milner’s History”: 184, which includes only a brief reference to Haweis.

¹¹ J. Bull, *John Newton: An Autobiography and Narrative*, 120, cited by Wood, “Newton’s Church History”: 54. Wood comments that Newton “had impressed upon Haweis the desirability of an Evangelical Church History, probably in the hope that Haweis himself would undertake it.”

church history three decades prior to his own publication. The link is confirmed by a passing statement by Haweis in his own *History*: “Had he [Newton] pursued his work, it would have rendered my labours unnecessary.”¹²

The intent agreed upon between Newton and Haweis was for the writing not of a comprehensive ecclesiastical history but rather a history of the “Gospel spirit,” as highlighted above. Newton sent an outline to Haweis which began with a section on “The Character and Genius of the Gospel Doctrines” which had been “taught and exemplified” by Christ. He also planned to demonstrate through history that these doctrines had always been opposed. The chief doctrine which he identified was that of justification by faith; he sought to prove that this belief supported every “revival of practical religion” which had occurred.¹³

The outline which Newton sent to Haweis also anticipated what the pivotal points in church history would be. The initial section on Christ’s teachings and an account of his followers up to Pentecost was followed by another on “The State and Progress of the Gospel” from Pentecost to the end of the Scriptural canon. Subsequent sections covered larger expanses of time, implying a greater emphasis on, and reverence for, early Christianity. His third section carried the history up to Constantine, and the fourth traced “The Decline of the Gospel” to the time of Gregory I. From this point Newton planned to travel with the proto-Protestants, in a section “From the Waldenses to Wyclif” followed by one on “Wyclif, Huss and Jerome.” The next section would concentrate on the early decades of the Reformation, specifically Luther and the English Reformation up to the death of King Edward VI. The final two sections would take the narrative from the time of Edward to “the Revolution” (likely meaning the Glorious Revolution of 1688) and then

¹² Haweis, *ISH*, 1:105.

¹³ MS. Letter, Newton to Haweis, 17 October 1763, cited in Wood, “Newton’s Church History”: 54–55.

up to the present day.¹⁴

The volume which Newton did publish, in 1770, set out themes which would be important for Haweis' history. The full title read: *A Review of Ecclesiastical History, So Far as it Concerns the Progress, Declensions and Revivals of Evangelical Doctrine and Practice; With a Brief Account of the Spirit and Methods by which Vital and Experimental Religion have been Opposed in All Ages of the Church*. This was a possible source for Haweis' own focus on the church's "Rise, Declension and Revival." Prominent also were tandem emphases on true Christian belief and practice and perennial opposition to these. This notion of enduring conflict was established on the title page with the citation of Gal. 4:29—"But as then he that was born after the Flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now"—and buttressed by a Latin phrase from Horace depicting the sun's daily rise as at once new and unchanging ("Aliusque & Idem Nasceris").¹⁵ Newton's Introduction made central the assertions of human depravity and continual opposition to the gospel, and he included among true Christianity's enemies those who practiced its form but despised "the power of godliness." Persecution was inevitable and could be used as a mark of true Christianity, based on Christ's declaration to his disciples that they should expect suffering.¹⁶ This situation of conflict led Newton to his task of defending the true faith against its enemies and counterfeits, in his words "to attempt the apology of Evangelical Christianity, and to obviate the sophistry and calumnies which have been published against it."¹⁷

Newton then identified seven points which he intended to feature. The first five, roughly mimicking the outline which he had sent to Haweis, were as follows: a delineation

¹⁴ Ibid.: 54.

¹⁵ John Newton, *A Review of Ecclesiastical History, So Far as It Concerns the Progress, Declensions and Revivals of Evangelical Doctrine and Practice...* (London: printed for Edward and Charles Dilly, 1770), title page. One source translates the Latin phrase, from Horace's "Carmen Saeculare," as "unchanged, yet ever new"; see Horace, *The Odes and Carmen Saeculare of Horace*, ed. John Conington (London: Bell and Daldy, 1865), <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/dsndc10.txt> (accessed 14 July 2008).

¹⁶ Newton, *Review of Ecclesiastical History*, v–xii, quotation at vii.

¹⁷ Ibid., xiii.

of the essential Christianity which always garnered offence and hatred and was accompanied by excesses; a correlation of patristic doctrine with that of evangelicals (who thus could be exonerated of the charge of ‘enthusiasm’); the parallel narratives of a church corrupted through affluence and power under a ‘Christian’ emperor and the constant presence of true Christians (however much affected by surrounding corruption); prominent conduits of revived Christianity such as the Waldenses, Wycliffe, the Lollards, Hus, Jerome of Prague, and Luther; and renewal efforts within Protestant lands subsequent to the Reformation (he identified especially Germany, Britain and America). His other two points applied to church history generally: he would highlight, first, those persons especially used by God despite weaknesses and, second, derisory terms applied to genuine Christians, such as Lollard, Huguenot, Gospeller, Puritan and Pietist.¹⁸

Newton concluded his Introduction by setting his ecclesiastical history apart from others. Whereas other writers for the most part focused on “what the passions, prejudices and interested views of men have prompted them to perpetrate, under the pretext and sanction of religion,” Newton would elucidate a vital Christianity opposed in every age but also secured through God’s power so that “the gates of Hell have not, cannot, shall not prevail against” it.¹⁹

Haweis, as shall be demonstrated below, adopted many of these emphases in writing his own church history. In addition, several themes emerged in Haweis’ writings prior to his historical publication which shed light on his interpretation. In a treatise on the nature of Christianity published in 1790, Haweis commented on church history in connection with his point that the truly Christian character is loving, humble, and upright. He perceived that “the history of what is called the Church of Christ” contained many

¹⁸ Ibid., xiii–xvi.

¹⁹ Ibid., xvii–xviii.

opposite examples of rulers under the Christian name who promoted the church “by the power of the secular arm.” Haweis identified the Catholic Church as the “chief” offender, with reference to the apocalyptic vision of a prostitute drunk with the saints’ blood and seated on seven hills (Rev. 17). But he added: “The church Protestant as well as Papist, leaning on the sword of state, exhibits, whatever party hath been uppermost, a scene of oppressions, cruelties, injustice, imprisonments, exiles, murders, that would be a disgrace to any religion.” Remarkably for a Church of England clergyman, he pointed to “the history of all national churches” for a catalogue of faithful Christians “most unjustly maligned, censured, oppressed” and “in every age stigmatized with enthusiasm, schism, and heresy.”²⁰ Clearly Haweis was sensitive to the issue of coerciveness in religious matters, and this would figure prominently in his church history.

A few years later Haweis found opportunity again to contrast a vital Christian minority with a nominal majority, this time in prefacing a collection of hymns which he had written. He characterized primitive Christians who sang of “a crucified Jesus,” bringing them joy and strength in the face of a martyr’s death. But to “our more enlightened modern divines,” continued Haweis, this kind of devotion was considered fanatical and had been replaced largely with “more rational, more manly, more fashionable notions.”²¹ True Christianity, however, resided among those who worshipped Christ crucified: “From these, and these alone have arisen the faithful Confessors and noble army of Martyrs, in every age, and among every people; whilst the rest were lost in supineness—sunk in corruption—bound with the shackles of superstition—asleep in formality—or

²⁰ Thomas Haweis, *Essays on the Evidence, Characteristic Doctrines, and Influence of Christianity* (Bath: printed by S. Hazard, 1790), 273–75, quotations at 274–75.

²¹ Thomas Haweis, *Carmina Christo; or, Hymns to the Saviour: Designed for the Use and Comfort of those who Worship the Lamb that was Slain...*, 2nd ed. (London: printed for T. Chapman, 1795), iii.

carelessly swimming down the stream, in infidel indifference about all religion.”²²

II. Prefatory Material

What did Haweis highlight in setting up his *History*? He began his first volume with a Dedication addressed to the leadership of the London Missionary Society, which he had helped to form in 1795. This dedicatory address had significance for his historical presentation. He recorded that the LMS had given him “patronage” and encouragement in the belief that the history might “promote the great objects we have in view.” He had in mind especially the Society’s interdenominational make-up and its purpose to foster unified missionary efforts.²³ His missionary interest emerged also in an historical overview which he offered, patterned after his three major divisions of rise, declension and revival. He spoke of the quick spread of Christianity in early centuries, against all odds and through a multitude of martyrs; this was followed by a long season of declension and apostasy during which “the progress of the true Church of Christ” was limited; finally, true Christianity revived in the Protestant Reformation and continued to advance in the march towards the “consummation” when “all flesh shall see the salvation of our God.”²⁴ That Haweis also approached his survey of church history with a heightened sense of eschatological expectation was evident: “You will see in these pages,” wrote Haweis, “what God hath done, you know in his Book what he will do, and you have every reason to hope, that the time is come when he shall take to himself his great power and reign.”²⁵ He concluded with a rousing appeal that his history might awaken and unite Christians “around the banner of the Cross” in a contest “against the mighty powers of darkness.”²⁶

²² Ibid., vi.

²³ Haweis, *ISH*, 1:v (Dedication).

²⁴ Ibid., 1:vi.

²⁵ Ibid., 1:vii.

²⁶ Ibid., 1:vii–viii.

Haweis' Introduction following the Dedication especially highlighted the theme of Christian unity across denominational divisions; this would be the feature which set his history apart from what Haweis called the "immense" number of "volumes of ecclesiastical history, under which our shelves already groan."²⁷ He articulated that his search for true spiritual Christians would lead him not only to "those denominated *orthodox*," but also to "*separatists*" and even to "some who have been branded with the opprobrious name of *heretics*."²⁸ Although he pledged his loyalty to the Church of England and its episcopal form of government (to the extent that it mirrored a more primitive model), he seemed especially sensitive to defend those seen as excluded from the establishment: "Certain it is," he declared, "that many of them afford as eminent instances of the most rigid virtue and self-denial, and submitted as cheerfully to martyrdom for Christ's name sake, as any of their revilers."²⁹

Haweis cited a definition of the true, spiritual church as resting on the "foundation" of Christ's atoning death, with its "superstructure" formed through the influence of the Holy Spirit. This sounds much like Milner's purpose to trace a church defined by its inner principles rather than external trappings. Indeed, Haweis acknowledged here that despite disagreement with Milner on details, "in the main point we are cordially united."³⁰ In his second volume, Haweis claimed "peace upon earth, and good-will towards men" as Christ's "great design" in his descent to earth. Haweis hoped that his church history would help to promote a unity among denominations irrespective of geographical location, ecclesiastical structure or difference on marginal issues. He added that vital Christians had appeared under various banners, "the Papists themselves not

²⁷ Ibid., 1:i (Introduction).

²⁸ Ibid., 1:vi (emphasis in original, as hereafter).

²⁹ Ibid., 1:vi–vii, ix, quotation at vi–vii.

³⁰ Ibid., 1:vii; see also p. ix.

excepted”—a telling statement in a volume which would cover the fifth century through to the Reformation.³¹

Haweis also made clear his view that corruption and opposition arose at an early stage. Mirroring Wesley, Haweis referred to the “*mystery of iniquity*” which “began to work in the earliest days,” even in the time of Paul. Early church fathers such as Clement, Ignatius and Polycarp exuded true “zeal and simplicity” but many others, in his view, lost these characteristics especially through the influence of philosophy. While their writings evinced “all *the great fundamentals*” these were obscured by many errors and weaknesses.³² A few pages later Haweis asserted his interest in following Christianity’s “progress” through both “storms of persecution” and “fearful defections from the power of godliness.” The true church, in his view, would continue to persevere and prosper by means of a refining fire:

Contemptuous infidelity, proud philosophy, bigoted superstition, atheistical immorality, heretical pravity, and political christianity, may unite their powers against the child Jesus, and his everlasting Gospel, but the gates of hell shall never prevail. His persecuted Church will rise, like the phœnix from her ashes, and coming forth from the furnace of temptation, leave only the dross behind.³³

However this battle between iniquity and godliness might endure through the centuries, Haweis maintained the paradigm of rise, declension and revival established by his title and dedicatory address. At the end of his Introduction, Haweis recounted his partitions matter-of-factly: “The history of the Church naturally divides itself into three great periods. / The first comprising its rise and progress in the four first centuries, till the exclusive establishment of Theodosius. / The second, the deep decline and fearful apostacy of the eleven succeeding ages. / The third, the happy revival of evangelical

³¹ Ibid., 2:v–vi.

³² Ibid., 1:iv–v.

³³ Ibid., 1:viii–ix.

religion, from the times of the Reformation to the close of the present century.”³⁴

Through his emphasis on early decline, persecution, and a spiritually-defined church marked by its sufferings and its vital godliness, Haweis’ work reflected that of his friend Newton three decades earlier. But other influences had emerged as well. For one, the issues of church government and religious establishment were more pressing for Haweis than for Newton. Moreover, the vision of Christian unity in belief and practice across denominational divisions—which Newton clearly espoused—in the 1790s took shape in a missionary excitement not in evidence in Newton’s volume. For Haweis, history served to amplify the ‘signs of the times’ that the church was advancing into a glorious new season.

III. Interpretive Details

Haweis began his history by characterizing a period of overwhelming spiritual darkness prior to Christ’s coming, in both the heathen and the Jewish worlds.³⁵ He found very few positive responses to Christ during his earthly ministry; even the disciples had misunderstood his design and expected an earthly kingdom. In Haweis’ view, although many were interested in Christ, very few were willing to acknowledge him as the Messiah and follow him.³⁶ Pentecost, however, altered this state of things dramatically; Haweis considered the events of Acts 2 to be a divine initiative which atomized the disciples’ notion of a temporal kingdom.³⁷ He used the language of revival, calling Pentecost the sending of a “mighty effusion of his [Christ’s] Spirit on the witnesses whom he had chosen.”³⁸ In dramatic terms, Haweis began a chapter on the “rapid spread of the gospel”

³⁴ Ibid., 1:xv–xvi; solidi reflect the original line breaks, which gave the statements greater force.

³⁵ Ibid., 1:25–26.

³⁶ Ibid., 1:21.

³⁷ Ibid., 1:22.

³⁸ Ibid., 1:55.

from Pentecost onwards thus: “When Jesus glorified poured out his Spirit from on high upon his disciples, according to his promise, a flood of light instantly broke forth on a benighted world. The Sun of Righteousness arose, and from Jerusalem darted his bright beams on every side through the known world.”³⁹ Correspondingly, Haweis displayed a keen interest in the rapidity and geographical scope of the early church’s spread which proved for him a divine influence. He marvelled at the missionary labours of Paul, “unequaled in the records of the Christian Church.”⁴⁰

Haweis, echoing Newton, emphasized that opposition to true Christianity immediately arose. Pentecost itself produced persecution from Jews and dispersion of Christians which effectively spread the Gospel.⁴¹ From the experience of the early church Haweis produced general rules: that “persecution often tends to spread the truth it meant to destroy,” and also that genuine Christianity necessarily arouses opposition because of its offence against human depravity.⁴² Haweis explicitly countered Gibbon’s argument that Nero’s persecution of Christians was confined to Rome; in Haweis’ view, Nero was a “monster” who enacted widespread Christian suffering.⁴³ Shortly thereafter he again criticized “our modern infidel philosophers” who would seek to redeem the characters and actions of Roman persecutors.⁴⁴ Haweis praised Christian faithfulness and meekness under suffering and contrasted the scorn and hatred of their oppressors. This was a timeless feature, in Haweis’ opinion: “Read Pliny, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, and remark how exactly coincident their views are of Christianity!” He surmised that if the moderns were placed in ancient circumstances they would persecute just the same.⁴⁵ Beyond the emperors’

³⁹ Ibid., 1:25.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1:29, 35–36, 52–53.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1:27–28.

⁴² Ibid., 1:64, 99–100.

⁴³ Ibid., 1:109, 111–13.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1:121; see also 217–18, 270.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1:127–28, quotation at 127. Haweis appended to volume one a dissertation (pp. 389–440) entitled “On Infidelity, against Gibbon” which denounced Gibbon’s representation of Christianity point by point

enactments, Haweis viewed persecution as a divine punishment for Christian disunity and corruption and also, paradoxically, as an instrument by which the church expanded (as a result of the testimony of faithful martyrs) and as evidence for divine protection of the church.⁴⁶

Like Edwards and Milner before him, Haweis marked the transition in his sources at the juncture between the first and second centuries: “We are stepping from the blaze of day into the regions of doubt and twilight. The moment we quit the oracles of truth, we are left to grope our way through the feeble glimmerings of works, which have been handed down through a succession of ages; whose authenticity has been disputed by some, and which by more have been charged with interpolations....” He anticipated being “obliged oftener to doubt than believe.”⁴⁷ Haweis gave no indication of the utility of biblical prophecy in the interpretation of post-biblical events, although as we shall see he later interspersed prophetic referents especially in regard to an increasingly powerful church hierarchy.

Haweis identified a very early fall of the main body of Christians into corruption, especially through doctrinal error, accommodation with philosophy, and the ascendancy of its hierarchical leadership.⁴⁸ He found hints of the latter already among second-century bishops such as Ignatius. At this early stage Haweis began to suggest a sharp division between the larger nominally professing institution and a true Christianity forced to the fringe: “The flood-gates of evil were however now opening, and ready to deluge the Christian Church. Error and persecution were about to drive the woman with the man

and also briefly took aim at Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, and Robertson; see pp. 423–40 for Haweis’ counterargument to Gibbon on the severity and scope of early persecutions.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 1:146, 149, 175; the sense of paradox becomes more pronounced with the observation that the varied interpretations were all articulated in relation to the same persecution under second-century emperor Trajan.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 1:107, 108; see also 1:31.

⁴⁸ See Ibid., 1:184 for Haweis’ delineation of “two great sources of Christian corruption,” doctrinal and practical errors.

child into the wilderness, where though existing, they were to be hid for a time, and times, and half a time.” Revered leaders such as Ignatius, Clement and Polycarp were situated on the cusp of this decline, according to Haweis.⁴⁹ Key aspects of decline were the influences of power and wealth; Haweis frequently repeated themes of primitive humility and simplicity as ideals which quickly eroded among the generality of Christians.⁵⁰

What of ancient groups traditionally viewed as heterodox? Haweis did not treat Montanus, but on Tertullian he corresponded closely with Milner’s two-sided characterization. “Tertullian,” said Haweis, “is a striking instance, how much wisdom and weakness, learning and ignorance, faith and folly, truth and error, goodness and delusion, may be mixed up in the composition of the same person.”⁵¹ Haweis claimed that Tertullian, after he became a Montanist, forgot his own flaws and unmercifully condemned those of others; his writing “breathes a harshness of censure, the very reverse of Christian mildness and patience.”⁵² Haweis concluded, based on Tertullian’s life, that faithful Christians could be found among those deemed heretics but on the whole were located among the “lower orders of clergy” and laity in the general Church, which despite “spots and blemishes” was “as yet . . . a glorious Church.”⁵³

The history of the third-century rivalry between Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, and the Novatians produced Haweis’ first significant disagreement with Milner. Observing that Milner described Cyprian “in the most glowing tints of admiration and respect,” Haweis admitted that Cyprian was indeed praiseworthy for his wise pastoral letters from exile and his cautious, biblical means of readmitting lapsed Christians into fellowship.⁵⁴ Later he

⁴⁹ Ibid., 1:160–61; the prophetic reference was to Rev. 12:13–14.

⁵⁰ For examples see Ibid., 1:140, 149, 161, 167–69.

⁵¹ Ibid., 1:192.

⁵² Ibid., 1:193.

⁵³ Ibid., 1:207, 209, also 197–99.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 1:226, 232, 236, 245, quotation at 232.

attributed to him piety and wisdom as well as a “greatly blessed” ministry which brought about a dramatic “revival of Christianity,” and he defended his character against aspersions by Gibbon.⁵⁵ But Haweis also emphasized perceived flaws, especially Cyprian’s promotion of episcopal authority. He viewed this bishop of Carthage as culpable more than anyone before him for contributing towards the eventual arrogance of “Popery.”⁵⁶ Haweis also considered Cyprian’s reputed visions and miracles such as healings and exorcisms to be false. His rebuttal on this point was strong: “And far, very far, am I from believing those pretensions of Cyprian, to which Mr. Milner and many Papists give implicit credit.”⁵⁷

Haweis worked to free Novatian from a charge of schism. He portrayed his election as a bishop of Rome rivalling the election of another (Cornelius, whom Cyprian supported) as legitimate, not “irregular” in any way. Here he paused to observe: “I am longer on this point, because Mr. Milner calls these the first *dissenters* from the Church, not a tittle of which I can perceive....”⁵⁸ Haweis countered Milner’s notion of separation as a sign of religious declension and expressed wonderment that the Novatians’ strict discipline could be viewed as a “decline of zeal and purity.”⁵⁹ He then castigated Milner’s favour towards Cyprian over Novatian:

The insolence, the abuse, and the condemnation heaped on the devoted heads of all that presumed to differ from a bishop of Carthage, Mr. Milner may excuse, vindicate; I utterly condemn it, fully persuaded, that the peace, the unity, and purity of the *true Church*, will be a thousand times better preserved, by leaving our brethren who may differ from us to themselves, bearing and forbearing, than by all the anathemas hurled against them....⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Ibid., 1:257, 434–35.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 1:244; see also p. 140 for an earlier hint of this view.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 1:232–33; also 236–37. Milner, in discussing Cyprian’s reputed exorcisms, had vouched for their legitimacy for the reason that “the testimony of the Fathers in these times is so general and concurrent, that the fact itself cannot be denied without universally impeaching their veracity.” Milner, *HCC*, 1:357. Haweis (p. 233), in direct contradiction, declared: “I am, I own, little satisfied with the testimony of the fathers of that age. They appear highly superstitious and credulous.”

⁵⁸ Haweis, *ISH*, 1:240.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 1:241–42.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 1:243.

After presenting Novatian as a pious example, though admittedly severe on the issue of church discipline, Haweis exclaimed: “When I hear Cyprian anathematizing such a man, I can only say, I would rather be under the curses with Novatian, than utter them with Cyprian.”⁶¹ With his principle of spiritual Christian unity in mind, he observed the irony that both men died “faithfully” as martyrs in the same persecution (under Valerian) and speculated that at Christ’s “right hand” they “must be ashamed of their harsh spirit, and their harsh speeches.”⁶² Ancient sources which cast aspersions on the character of Novatian and his followers could be set aside briskly as unreliable.⁶³ In a statement sounding remarkably like Wesley’s speculations, Haweis said of the Novatians who persevered as a separate church that he had “always been led to suspect” them as being “true members of the Church of Christ, and perhaps, the closest walkers with God” in that day.⁶⁴

Following on the heels of this discussion Haweis commented on the third-century church in general as a “mixed multitude” composed of many who were Christians in name only and a few who were genuinely faithful. The former sought to follow after both “God and Mammon” and succumbed to worldly influence; the latter constituted “a remnant according to the election of grace” which preserved Christian simplicity and persevered through the assaults from hell’s gates. This vision could be applied to the church present as well as past. In this regard Haweis asserted: “We should greatly err, if we thought the former days were better than our own. I believe with some fluctuations, great declensions and alternate revivals, Christianity subsists now, as in the days of the Apostles.”⁶⁵ This statement is important for our analysis, as it nuanced or added complexity to his tripartite

⁶¹ Ibid., 1:225–26, 239, 241, 246, quotation at 246.

⁶² Ibid., 1:247–48.

⁶³ See Ibid., 1:240–42 for several instances of this dismissal.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 1:243; see 258 for a similar approbation.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 1:259–63, quotations at 261, 262–63.

periodization. The two patterns could coexist, one within the other: the grand sweep might be characterized as the rise and spread of a glorious apostolic church, many centuries of decline, and renewal from the Reformation forward, but smaller-scale ebb and flow appeared upon more detailed examination.

Complementing his view of persecution as an instrument of purification or renewal, Haweis had established that seasons of peace and prosperity were detrimental to Christian vitality.⁶⁶ Correspondingly, like Gillies, Wesley and Milner before him, Haweis shied away from portraying Constantine's reign as a high point in church history. Curiously, he initially characterized Constantine's rise to power after a period of persecution against Christians as a divinely-ordained deliverance "in the very moment, when the light of Israel was threatened with extinction." After recounting the Emperor's steps to complete dominion over East and West, Haweis asserted the direction of God's "own right hand and his mighty arm." He then expanded this into a view of God's constant providential reign over "all events" and human "hearts," but added in reference to Constantine: "Nor is it less a mark of his [God's] universal dominion, that the instruments employed, were often very far from sharing themselves the real benefits of that Christianity, which they were the means of establishing."⁶⁷

Haweis was critical both of Constantine's supposed 'Christian' character and the effect of his favour on the church. In a glance at Constantine's being called 'the Great', Haweis judged that this title "usually marks the most destructive, the most tyrannical, and the most murderous of mankind; and I am sorry to say, I can see no more of true Christianity in Constantine, than in Henry the VIIIth."⁶⁸ Haweis cast doubt on Constantine's reputed vision of a cross and dream of Christ, not ruling it impossible but

⁶⁶ For example, *Ibid.*, 1:219: "Abundance, as it always has done, proved a snare."

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 1:271, 273.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:274.

surmising, “I can hardly conceive a man of his character would be thus singularly favoured.”⁶⁹ Essentially he was calling into question Constantine’s conversion to Christianity; later he held that the Emperor “made the Church appear great and splendid; but I discern not a trace in Constantine, of the religion of the Son of God.”⁷⁰ Haweis applied another of his dramatic contrasts: “I would rather have been the meanest Christian in a cottage, than Constantine THE GREAT.”⁷¹

Of Constantine’s effect on the church, Haweis scorned his action in establishing Christianity universally and suppressing other religions. At work was a strong principle of religious toleration: “I see no right to compel even an idolater, contrary to his conscience.”⁷² Constantine’s favour was the chief cause of “the awful debasement and declension of true religion.”⁷³ Earlier in the *History* Haweis, in similar fashion to Wesley, anticipated Constantine’s “union of Church and State” as a crucial moment signalling the death-knell of Christian simplicity and piety and ushering in degradation and “anti-christian tyranny.”⁷⁴ This seems a contradiction to Haweis’ portrayal of Constantine’s rise as God-sent protector of the church, but Haweis did not acknowledge any difficulty. Perhaps he believed that Constantine’s divine mission was to bring peace and extend religious toleration to Christians, but the Emperor took matters too far. Throughout the *History* Haweis consistently had harsh words for coercion in religious matters, and it may have been his strong advocacy of religious toleration which led him to colour Constantine’s reign in dark tones despite an acknowledgment of the emperor’s real protection of the church.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1:276.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 1:279; also 280.

⁷¹ Ibid., 1:281.

⁷² Ibid., 1:277–78, quotation at 278.

⁷³ Ibid., 1:280.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 1:203; see also 365–66.

Such principles were much in evidence soon afterward in Haweis' discussion of Theodosius, whose actions and character Milner had praised. Haweis contended that Theodosius' "temper was violent, and his government tyrannical."⁷⁵ Perhaps demonstrating an affinity with ministers expelled from the Church of England under Charles II, Haweis wrote of Theodosius: "Resolved to establish *uniformity* of religion and worship throughout the empire, he enacted the cruelest [sic] pains and penalties against those who refused to conform to *his establishment*."⁷⁶ He then gave a clear record of his view on religious compulsion: "I openly desire to testify my abhorrence of all such conduct: fully persuaded that nothing can be more opposite to the spirit and temper of the Gospel: and so far from being subservient to its real interest, must tend in the highest manner to debase Christianity, and to promote hypocrisy and false religion. The truth needs no such auxiliaries." Explicitly countering Milner, Haweis expressed his doubt that Theodosius possessed any "real Christianity."⁷⁷ Then at the end of his first volume, Haweis appended his dissertation responding to Milner's essay on Theodosius and religious establishment. Here Haweis denounced as compulsion what Milner portrayed as Theodosius' justifiable use of penal laws to restrain paganism.⁷⁸ Against Milner's view that such a religious establishment held back the tide of irreligion, Haweis retorted, "Did not the true Church from the beginning subsist without it? Was it to obtain this, the primitive Christians were content to be confessors and martyrs?"⁷⁹

In stark contrast to Milner, Haweis treated Augustine summarily and for the most part critically. He identified the Bishop of Hippo as one of the best among the ancient

⁷⁵ Ibid., 1:319.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 1:320.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 1:320–21.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 1:358.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 1:370. Comparison of Milner's expressed view and Haweis' paraphrase—"...without a state establishment, there would be no religion among us"—reveals the kind of misrepresentation to which Isaac Milner took such exception in his various animadversions of Haweis' *History*.

fathers whose writings were “stuffed with a farrago of superstition, errors, monkery, origenism, platonism, bitterness and bigotry, that will little repay the pains of perusal.”⁸⁰ Haweis subscribed, apparently, to the negative impression of Augustine’s temperament which Milner sought to counteract. He viewed Augustine’s writings as “jejune, declamatory, and sometimes highly objectionable.” Even in terms of theological argumentation on grace, which Haweis agreed was Augustine’s *forte*, he declared “one page of Edwards on Free Will” to have richer content than all of Augustine’s works.⁸¹ Elsewhere he decried Augustine’s treatment of African Donatists: Augustine’s advocacy of secular “pains and penalties” against them, declared Haweis, “would have made me a Donatist, rather than an Augustinian.”⁸² Yet in a curious reversal after pages of unremitting criticism, Haweis ultimately judged Augustine to be “an eminent character” possessing “evangelical” beliefs and on the whole demonstrating an “exemplary” life. Haweis even gave an echo of Milner’s language of revival: “His little diocese of Hippo eminently profited by his labours; and in a day of great decay, exhibited specimens of primitive Christianity.”⁸³

On monasticism, Haweis was willing like Milner to see original monastic separation from society as stemming from a justifiable and pious desire to retain purity. He recorded his conviction that “many of the solitaries of the desert, who had fled from persecution, carried with them at first, a real sweet savour of Christ, and felt happy to have escaped from a disordered world, to be more occupied in the work of prayer and praise; and when driven there as a refuge, instead of drawn by fanatical superstition many walked

⁸⁰ Ibid., 1:333–34.

⁸¹ Ibid., 1:337; see also 2:17.

⁸² Ibid., 2:9.

⁸³ Ibid., 1:338.

with God, and went to glory.”⁸⁴ Yet he also portrayed the hermit Anthony as a “fanatic” and scorned monks in general as “enthusiastic ascetics.”⁸⁵

Haweis carried a mostly negative impression of monasticism forward into his discussion of the medieval Church. Benedict and his followers Haweis compared with Pharisees: their many rules “made men only sevenfold more the children of Satan and pride than before.”⁸⁶ On European missionary-monks, whom Milner had frequently praised, Haweis again raised the spectre of religious compulsion: “Wonderous and wretched conversions of whole nations, Germans, Gauls, Britons, encreased the fame of the monkish apostles, who ministred [arch.] baptism to them by thousands; where a queen was gained, and a complaisant monarch yielded to her solicitations, and ordered the conversion of his subjects.”⁸⁷ He expressed his surprise at Milner’s favourable presentation of the missionary labours of Augustine of Canterbury, sent to Britain by Pope Gregory I, and clearly sided with Celtic Christians who resisted Roman encroachment.⁸⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux, the subject of an extended defence in Milner’s history, Haweis treated harshly. Specifically he highlighted the abbot’s instigation of a crusade and his failed predictions.⁸⁹ He once more inserted a jab at Milner (not named in this instance, but referred to as “a late ecclesiastical historian”), calling his approval of Bernard so disgraceful that they called into question his own understanding of “evangelical” principles. “He might have found nobler champions,” exclaimed Haweis, “than the superstitious, fraudulent, bitter, and

⁸⁴ Ibid., 1:344–45. But compare p. 184, where Haweis contended that a practical error resulting from an overly philosophized Christianity in the second century was a dualism favouring spiritual contemplation, separation from the world and asceticism which gave birth to “the whole brood of mystics, monks, hermits, and recluses.”

⁸⁵ Ibid., 1:324, 326.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 2:48.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 2:29–30. Haweis repeated this theme of conversion by coercion in his presentation of centuries such as the eleventh and twelfth; see 2:164–65, 202–204.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 2:50; see also p. 78 on Celtic Christianity and pp. 84–85 for another opposite stance to Milner on missionary monks, this time on Boniface.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 2:197, 198.

bloody Abbot of Clairval.”⁹⁰

However, Haweis like Milner gravitated to the outermost parts of Christendom in his search for true Christianity. For example, within his discussion of the sixth century Haweis rearticulated his belief that the truly godly were few in number and that their natural habitat was obscurity. “The more remote from the scenes of contention, dissipation, and worldly pursuits, were most probably best preserved from the corruption which is in the world...” On the same page, Haweis surmised that Augustine of Canterbury would be more laudable “if he had been less eager after archbishoprics, and less chargeable with lying miracles,” but nonetheless credit was due him for at least some genuine conversions among the Anglo-Saxons.⁹¹ Later, in summarizing the seventh century, Haweis asserted: “Within the catholic pale itself, though the candle burnt but dimly, clouded with superstition and ignorance, yet was not the light utterly extinguished. Amidst the efforts to promote Christianity in the lands of pagan ignorance, some real religion stimulated the zealous missionaries; and in the different fields where they laboured, true converts, it must be hoped, were made to the faith of Christ.”⁹² At a later point he described men such as Bede and Alcuin of York as signs that “traces of the truth as it is in Jesus remained” amidst “much superstition.”⁹³ Thus despite a more dubious judgment of monasticism, Haweis’ portrayal followed similar contours and differed only in degree from Milner’s.

Haweis again departed from Milner over the character of Gregory I, seeing this pope as strongly superstitious, ambitious after the supremacy of the Roman See, and

⁹⁰ Ibid., 2:230–31, quotations at 231. This appears to have been Haweis’ final explicit reaction against Milner’s work.

⁹¹ Ibid., 2:49; see also 52–53 for similar mixed assessments of missionary monks.

⁹² Ibid., 2:78.

⁹³ Ibid., 2:106.

complicit in accelerating the corruption of the Church.⁹⁴ After highlighting his attachment to relics Haweis wrote: “We read and stand amazed ... to hear such a man blazoned by Mr. Milner for his ‘eminent piety, integrity and humility.’”⁹⁵ Haweis first applied the language of Revelation to the papacy not far beyond Gregory chronologically, in regard to papal use of monks as emissaries to bring territories into submission to Rome: “A vast army was thus inlisted [arch.] throughout the world to magnify the beast, and exalt his supremacy.” Haweis cast a quick glance at subsequent centuries when the papacy “launched its thunders against monarchs, and brought the proudest to the feet of the triple crown, which those Roman pontiffs assumed.”⁹⁶ Shortly thereafter he highlighted the claim to the title ‘universal bishop’ by Pope Boniface III in AD 607, just three years after Gregory’s death.⁹⁷ In commencing his discussion of the eighth century, Haweis asserted that the hierarchical Church “stood confessed the whore sitting on the seven mountains, and filling the earth with the wine of her fornication” (Rev. 17).⁹⁸

As we have seen, Haweis took exception to several of Milner’s selections of godly example within medieval Christendom and propounded a view of the true church as hidden and obscure. Occasionally he made a statement which effectively drew his interpretation closer to Milner’s. For example, in closing out his discussion of the ninth century, Haweis claimed without going into specifics: “...some real Christians were found in the retirement of private life, or inferior stations of the Church; nor will I utterly exclude a solitary here and there, even in monastic seclusion, who loved and served a pardoning God, perhaps with much darkness of view, or conformity to established superstitions, but

⁹⁴ Ibid., 2:36, 50.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 2:40.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 2:67.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 2:69.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 2:81.

yet with sincerity and truth.”⁹⁹ But Haws sought to reclaim an interpretation of the godly as few and far between and even attempted to impose this perspective back on Milner’s work: “A *few* individuals indeed, of some respectability in the Church, have been produced by the exemplary patience of the learned Milner. He hath from the heap of chaff sifted out some grains of evangelical excellence sufficient to prove, that the light of divine truth, however dim, was not utterly extinct.”¹⁰⁰ Haws agreed that Milner’s original extracts stood as supporting evidence of godly characteristics. But he added that these came from largely superstitious writings like “flowers culled from gardens overspread and smothered with weeds”; their “evangelical sentiment” appeared “as a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout.”¹⁰¹

In regard to medieval protest, Haws like Milner intertwined Waldenses, Albigenses, and Cathars as one movement. He also, however, connected these with the Paulicians whom he had followed from Eastern, seventh-century roots.¹⁰² He acknowledged the view of some that Paulicians had revived the Manichean heresy. His own opinion was that they were innocent Christians who incurred the wrath of the institutional church for (he said with sarcasm) their “intolerable blasphemies” of refusing to venerate Mary and the cross and of rejecting a hierarchical leadership.¹⁰³ He followed their sufferings and used these as an example by which to assert a more generic ‘mark’ of true Christianity: “The persecuted and the suffering professors of Christianity, to every man who knows its real nature, have many presumptive evidences in their favour.”¹⁰⁴

Moving forward, Haws admitted that Albigenses reacted too strongly against

⁹⁹ Ibid., 2:138–39.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 2:108.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 2:108–109.

¹⁰² Ibid., 2:189–90, 232.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 2:71–72; also 135.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 2:138.

Catholic abuses by rejecting the sacraments and specially designated ministers. But errors and excesses aside, Haweis concluded from their reputation for piety and their “patient and resolute sufferings” that they grasped the essence of Christianity and thus were persecuted by “a corrupt priesthood.”¹⁰⁵ Later of the Cathars, whose name he (like Milner) translated to ‘Puritans’, Haweis wrote that they might have been excessively strict but “...from their own shewing, even by the testimony of their persecutors, in doctrine they were as sound, as in conduct exemplary.”¹⁰⁶

Haweis considered Waldenses as a branch of Paulicians who possibly in the seventh century removed themselves from the Catholic Church and “sought a hiding place” in Alpine valleys in order to be free from persecution and to preserve a “purer worship.” “Their beginnings,” he wrote, “were indeed small, but they had in time great increase, and the vital spark of heavenly fire seems to have been in an especial manner preserved in this wilderness.”¹⁰⁷ Like Milner, Haweis emphasized the godly character of Claudius of Turin: in his view Claudius’ writings displayed “more evangelical truth than perhaps any other of that day,” and opposition against him from Rome confirmed that he faithfully practiced what he taught. But Haweis also promoted the theory that Waldensianism pre-existed Claudius and only ‘flourished’ noticeably under his leadership.¹⁰⁸ He took a similar line with Peter Waldo, praising him as “the most zealous and successful reformer of the age” and insisting that Waldo took his name from the group whose principles he adopted rather than vice versa. His description of the success of Waldo’s leadership seemed to mimic accounts of the eighteenth-century Revival: Waldo’s biblical teaching as well as his personal “zeal” and holiness “awakened deep concern in

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 2:189–91, quotation at 190–91.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 2:223.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 2:79–80. On the subject of Waldenses’ ancient roots, see also 2:232–33.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 2:136–37.

many, and procured him a number of faithful associates and fellow labourers” who then “formed numerous societies” in France, Italy, and elsewhere.¹⁰⁹

Haweis attributed theological importance to the Waldensian movement. In his discussion of the eleventh century Haweis included Waldenses in a list of those through whom, he believed, “God was providing for a revival of his own work.”¹¹⁰ He highlighted the growing numbers of Waldenses from the twelfth century onward which attracted the attention of Catholic authorities who began opposing them. Like Gillies before him, Haweis drew from Samuel Clarke the reference to at least twenty English “witnesses”—Waldensian *diaspora*—prior to Wycliffe who testified against corruptions and proved that God had maintained a true church, however small. And he added an oblique reference to Waldenses “prophesying in sack-cloth,” which his readership undoubtedly would have associated with the apocalyptic vision of two witnesses in Rev. 11:3.¹¹¹ Catholic persecution against them only propelled their growth: “...the cause had taken too deep root to be extirpated; and though suppressed in one part broke out in another, till the happy day of reformation came....”¹¹² Later, in discussing fifteenth-century Christianity, Haweis described them as “witnesses for the truth” whose doctrines “were such as could not but produce the same divine effects, wherever they are embraced in the light, and in the love of them.”¹¹³ This assertion hinted of a perceived continuity of belief between Waldenses and evangelicals. Elsewhere he similarly linked Waldensianism with Protestantism in general, Calvinism, and Methodism.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 2:226.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 2:193.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 2:233–34.

¹¹² Ibid., 2:245.

¹¹³ Ibid., 2:337.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 2:227, 233, 275–76. In the latter place Haweis reacted against Archibald Maclaine who had correlated German Waldenses (called Beghards) and Methodists as mutual ‘fanatics’. Haweis retorted: “...I am at a loss to know whence a life of diligent prayer and deep seriousness in religion, should characterise a fanatic sect.”

Haweis condemned new monastic orders of the high Middle Ages, especially the Franciscans and Dominicans. Of the supposed stigmata of Francis, Haweis did not question the wounds themselves but claimed that they were “inflicted no doubt by fanaticism, or craft, to render him a higher object of veneration to his disciples.”¹¹⁵ He described both Francis and his following as “ignorant,” “fanatic,” overly ascetic, and “devoted to Rome.” On the last point he added with irony that these “*little brethren*, or *minors*, united to bring down the mightiest monarchs and their kingdoms to the feet of the Roman pontiffs.”¹¹⁶ Interestingly, Haweis, an itinerant preacher for half the year, criticized Franciscan usurpation of the roles of bishops and clergy, just as Milner did.¹¹⁷ Dominic he portrayed as an energetic, “bloody” tyrant who when he could not convince a supposed heretic of error readily made use of secular punishment. True to his aversion to religious compulsion, Haweis castigated Dominicans’ primary role in the Inquisition. He referred to them as “this black and bloody regiment” and added with sarcasm that through their actions “for the benefit of their souls, men’s bodies were committed to the flames.” More innocent people, he believed, were killed by them than by “the cruellest of the pagan emperors.”¹¹⁸ He speculated that had Dominicans and Franciscans cooperated instead of quarrelled, they might have overrun Christendom and permanently established “superstition and tyranny.”¹¹⁹ Soon after Haweis applied the apocalyptic language of Rev. 9 to monastic orders: these were “clouds of locusts that rose from the bottomless pit, [and] blackened the face of the sun.”¹²⁰

Haweis treated the subject of Boniface VIII after several pages of detailing what he

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 2:296–97.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 2:256.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 2:257. Had Haweis read Milner’s inferred parallels between mendicant and Methodist itinerancy he assuredly would have defended at least the Methodist practice.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 2:255, 256.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 2:257–58.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 2:267.

saw as an idolatrous papal ascendancy through the course of the thirteenth century. Boniface, however, in Haweis' view outdid all his forerunners with his nearly fanatical ambition for the Roman See. To Haweis this indicated a Church steeped in corruption: "Where such was the head, what must the members be?"¹²¹ He observed Boniface's opposition to the spiritual Franciscans and concluded that however overzealous groups such as these might have been, they fostered a critical attitude towards "papal wealth and tyranny."¹²² A few pages later Haweis described the day as "the meridian splendor of papal domination" and indicted the whole age of which Boniface was part: "I confess myself so partial to the present times, that I must avow my conviction, on comparing the principles generally admitted, and the practices approved, that I see none superior to our own. I am sure in ignorance and immorality the past have [sic] far exceeded us."¹²³ At a later point Haweis pinpointed Boniface's claim to possession of spiritual and temporal power over all humanity as one factor which garnered a strong reaction and effectively eroded papal authority.¹²⁴

Haweis described Wycliffe in heroic terms. He was the "intrepid Englishman" who fought against papal abuses and mendicant "encroachments" and translated and dispersed the Scriptures. He also spoke favourably of John of Gaunt's protection of Wycliffe.¹²⁵ "The University of Oxford," said Haweis of his *alma mater*, "had the honour of producing the first eminent English reformer, and the crime of persecuting and expelling him."¹²⁶ This statement seems to be stamped by Haweis' own biography, as he departed in 1762 from his first curacy at Oxford's St Mary Magdalen after university officials opposed his

¹²¹ Ibid., 2:251.

¹²² Ibid., 2:260–62, quotation at 262.

¹²³ Ibid., 2:266, 267.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 2:289, 291–92.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 2:300–301.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 2:310.

‘Methodistical’ style and his bishop, due to complaints, refused to grant his formal license.¹²⁷ According to Haws, Wycliffe’s critique of papal corruption and his doctrine of grace were equal causes of opposition against him.¹²⁸ Haws established Wycliffe as a harbinger of the Reformation. His life planted “the seeds which were to bring forth fruits of eternal life to millions yet unborn.”¹²⁹ He constituted the foremost “beam of light darting across the dismal gloom; and promising a rising sun to dispel the clouds of ignorance and error.”¹³⁰ As with other evangelical expositors, Haws emphasized a link between Wycliffe and Bohemia which received his fugitive followers.¹³¹

It followed naturally that Haws would represent Hus and Jerome of Prague in similarly positive tones. He described the Council of Constance as “cordially united” in an intent to halt “the dreaded progress of the word of God” and to silence individuals who stood against the clergy in word and deed. Hus and Jerome, on the other hand, were “men of the most exemplary piety.”¹³² Haws connected the two men back to Wycliffe as his “disciples” and adopted Hus’ alleged prophecy of a coming swan as a clear reference to Luther.¹³³ These men and their followers anticipated a seemingly inevitable Reformation. The fragile plant of the true church persevered, spread its roots, and “waited only the moment of opportunity to burst forth and blossom as the rose.” Haws also employed the metaphor of a “vital spark” kept alive under a providential hand which was about to “burst out into a flame”; he added his expectation that it would “continue to shine brighter and stronger unto the perfect day.”¹³⁴ But the vantage point of modern Protestantism also

¹²⁷ Welch, "Haws, Thomas". In his final volume Haws referred directly to this incident, and his language of suffering, persecution, and injustice revealed that wounds were still fresh three and a half decades later. Haws, *ISH*, 3:247.

¹²⁸ Haws, *ISH*, 2:337–38.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:301–302.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:309.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 2:303; also see 337.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 2:321.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 2:323.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2:338, 340, quotation at 340; see also 352.

gave Haweis a more critical, ‘enlightened’ perspective: Hus had “been succeeded by men so much advanced in spiritual wisdom and knowledge” that his writings did not receive, or perhaps did not deserve to receive, much notice.¹³⁵ Haweis construed the pacifist branch of Bohemian Hussites (the Taborites) as the root of the Moravian Brethren. He added: “...if the ancients at all resembled the moderns, they were the excellent of the earth.”¹³⁶

Haweis titled his third major division “The Happy Revival of Evangelical Religion, from the Reformation to the Present Day.” He began by depicting an imposing and seemingly invincible papacy in the early years of the sixteenth century buttressed by “ages of superstition” and “legions of monks and clergy, whose terrors overawed the consciences of mankind.”¹³⁷ “But,” he held, echoing other evangelical history-writers, “as the darkest moment of the night precedes the dawn of day, when the Church appeared in the most desperate situation, her deliverance was approaching...” God had been quietly at work, he believed, and “the utter rottenness of the foundation awaited only a bold and resolute hand to make the mighty fabric totter.”¹³⁸

On Luther, Haweis’ narrative jumped quickly from one picture of the “inconsiderable monk at Wittenberg” witnessing Tetzel’s sale of indulgences to another of the heroic “brave Saxon” dealing the decisive “blow” with his ninety-five theses, beginning an epic battle which continued to Haweis’ day.¹³⁹ Yet Haweis’ depiction of Luther was not monolithic. He observed Luther’s initial submissiveness to the pope and acceptance of the granting of indulgences so long as these were unconnected with the process of salvation.¹⁴⁰ He also acknowledged Luther’s flaws, such as argumentativeness, belligerence and

¹³⁵ Ibid., 2:329.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 2:328–29; see also 339–40, 492.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 2:345.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 2:351–52.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 2:354–55.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 2:357–58, 361.

jealousy. In debate over the Eucharist with other reformers, Luther “claimed the authority to dictate, which he was himself so averse to allow the Pope.”¹⁴¹ Haeberlin intermingled reference to God’s providential intervention. Early on, he claimed, Luther did not realize his own abilities or the results which would come from his actions. God could use anything for his purposes, but with Luther one could admire God’s provision of a well-qualified servant.¹⁴² Later he viewed the distraction of Charles V with other political matters within the Empire as an instance of ‘providential’ favour protecting the cause of the reformers.¹⁴³

Haeberlin highlighted violence and fanaticism instigated by Anabaptists in the Peasants’ War—albeit a popular response to real injustices—and at Münster (1535).¹⁴⁴ Subsequent to these events, however, “many ... persons of real piety” seemed to be intermixed with the disorderly and deluded. True to his principle of religious freedom, Haeberlin spoke bitingly of how both Protestants and Catholics made Anabaptists “an object for the sword and coercion of the established government.” Menno Simons he described as “a person of singular abilities,” a gentle and pious leader and powerful preacher who tempered Anabaptist tenets. Predictably, he admired their peacefulness and pacifism as well as their “strictest purity of morals.” Menno and his followers, Haeberlin concluded, could be called “as true and real members of Christ’s body, as the excellent in the reformed and Lutheran churches.”¹⁴⁵

Although he had labelled this period as one of ‘revival’, Haeberlin nonetheless held that the end of persecution and formation of various Protestant religious establishments

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 2:370, 378, 459, 460, quotation at 378.

¹⁴² Ibid., 2:356.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 2:369; see also 381–82.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 2:379, 408.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 2:500–503.

brought religious decline.¹⁴⁶ Venturing into the seventeenth century and his third volume, *Haweis* continued under the canopy of a “sun of righteousness” risen after “ages” of darkness; but the historical landscape before him featured devastating wars.¹⁴⁷ Not far into his respective presentations of Lutheran and Reformed territories in Europe he found reason to bemoan general declension.¹⁴⁸ As with other instances noted earlier, this added a layer of complexity to his tripartite thematic division; it also maintained his vision of a relatively small number of true Christians.

Haweis gave guarded praise towards Puritanism. An exclusivist attitude in regard to communion *Haweis* argued was the beginning of controversies within the English Church which culminated in violence. Despite their intolerance, Puritan lives and writings demonstrated faith and godliness to the extent that one could speak of “a general spread of *vital religion* among us, in that day.”¹⁴⁹ In his view Puritans during the Interregnum were equally as culpable of abusiveness as the royalists against whom they had fought. Cromwell was a tyrant who, like Henry VIII, was used by God to defend the Protestant faith.¹⁵⁰ *Haweis* looked more fondly on those who immigrated to America, whose missionary efforts among American natives earned them a place “among the first harbingers of gospel day.”¹⁵¹

His portrayal of Christianity in seventeenth-century Scotland also was comparatively positive. “During all this century,” he wrote, “the Scots may be considered as a remarkably religious people.” He noted without specifics a high number of “evangelical and zealous ministers” and “faithful followers” in the Scottish Kirk as well as

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2:469–70, 477–78, quotation at 470.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 3:1–2.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3:116, 179.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:485–86, 488, 491.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:486, 3:30, 84.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3:11–13, quotation at 12–13.

“remarkable instances of great revivals of religion in various places,” likely in reference to the same series of events in the 1620s and 1630s to which Gillies’ *Collections* and Wesley’s sermons had drawn attention.¹⁵²

Haweis found several other examples of renewal throughout Europe. Most striking was his admiration for the French Catholic Jansenists who included in their number Pascal and Archbishop Fenelon. These, he claimed, “walked with God” amidst “false religion” and in spite of opposition from authorities, proving that “God had ... still within the Roman pale, a people to the eternal praise of the glory of his grace....”¹⁵³ Based on his reading of Jansenist authors he adjudged that their beliefs and practices were soundly biblical and evangelical and their activism “blessed with eminent success” such that he could call them his “brethren,” even his “fathers.”¹⁵⁴ Haweis also lauded German Pietists who sought to bring revival to the Lutheran Church.¹⁵⁵ Spener was “a man eminent for real truth and godliness.”¹⁵⁶ Haweis took Mosheim to task for concentrating on Pietist practices and failing to recognize their promotion of essential doctrine and practical godliness.¹⁵⁷ Moravian Brethren, meanwhile, emerged from the depths of despair under papal persecution to demonstrate godly examples and especially a remarkable missionary “zeal” which resulted in “the happiest effects, not only in Europe, but throughout the world.” Haweis claimed for them an important place within “the happy revival of evangelical religion” in his own time.¹⁵⁸

As with other evangelical authors, Haweis depicted increased corruption in England beginning with Charles II. It was during this time that “infidel” writers—deists

¹⁵² Ibid., 3:101.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 3:41–43, quotations at 43.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 3:46–47.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 3:67, 76.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 3:64.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 3:69–70.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 3:183, 184; also 190–93, 195.

and atheists—emerged. In his view both Charles and then James II attempted to restore Catholicism, but their plans were thwarted. He said of the ‘Glorious Revolution’ under William and Mary: “Thus once more the prey was taken from the mighty; and, in the critical moment, when the waster was ready to destroy, a gracious interposition of Providence preserved the purity of religion, and the liberties of the land.”¹⁵⁹ But later he recorded the supposedly popular view that widespread declension took place toward the end of the century through the influences of indulgent living, poor theological and biblical education, latitudinarian moralist preaching, deism, and Arminianism.¹⁶⁰

Following this bleak portrayal, Haweis predictably had high praise for the evangelical Revival. Within a 110-page section on Reformed churches in the eighteenth century he devoted over sixty pages to the subject of Methodism in Great Britain. This narrative revolved around the careers of the Wesleys and Whitefield and the beneficence of the Countess of Huntingdon.¹⁶¹ He graciously gave the Wesley brothers pride of place as “the first, and most distinguished leaders in this revival of evangelical truth.”¹⁶² Whitefield was superior in his activism (“he fell a martyr to his work”) and his ability to communicate; moreover his success in conversions possibly was unrivalled “since the days of St. Paul.”¹⁶³ For both John Wesley and Whitefield, Haweis pointed to their very public lives and lack of serious complaint against them as proof of their being profoundly godly characters.¹⁶⁴ He acknowledged their disagreement and parting of ways but concluded that as with Paul and Barnabas this only enlarged their spheres of influence. Their success also hinged on their willingness to move into itinerancy, and “dissenters of all denominations”

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3:15, 31–33, quotation at 33.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:91–96, 225, 228.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 3:221–82.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 3:229.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 3:232, 279–80.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 3:275, 280.

benefitted from “the flame originally kindled by the ministers bred in the established Church.”¹⁶⁵ Haweis gave effusive praise to his patroness, highlighting the Countess’ friendly relations with “all whom she esteemed real Christians, whatever their denomination or opinions might be” and her support for devout ministers and especially those such as himself who had experienced “persecution.”¹⁶⁶ She was a saint to be revered: “...thousands and tens of thousands will have reason, living and dying, to bless her memory, as having been the happy instrument of bringing them out of darkness into marvellous light...”¹⁶⁷

In a final summary, Haweis drew out themes which he had carried throughout. He spoke of conflict between Satan and Christ and of the presence “in all ages” of human depravity leading to religious corruption as well as “divine grace” producing renewed faith. Continuing this dualism, he asserted that humanity could be divided between two lopsided groups: “the children of God, and the children of the wicked one: the latter always the many, the mighty and the wise, the former the few, the poor, and the despised of this world.” The survival of God’s people in these circumstances answered Christ’s promises to “never leave thee nor forsake thee” and to be “with you always, even to the end of the world.”¹⁶⁸ Haweis then offered a panoramic canvas of church history, painting with broad and bold strokes. Early Christianity, characterized as “the blaze of gospel light in all its purity and vigour, and the triumphs of the cross over the power, craft, and malice of men,” was soon followed by declining vitality and nominal profession. This slide accelerated with the state establishment of Christianity. From this point forward for a period of one thousand years “superstition and tyranny” grew and true Christians were

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 3:233–34, 237, quotation at 237; also 265.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 3:246, 247.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 3:252.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 3:305–306.

“reduced very low.” But finally “a day of revival broke” and spread its light around the world. “However sad our declensions have since been,” concluded Haweis, “God hath never forsaken his Church and people. Times of refreshing have come from the presence of the Lord. In our own land remarkable interpositions of his arm made bare have appeared....¹⁶⁹

IV. Features

Since Haweis partly wrote his *History* in reaction to Milner’s it is helpful to consider his interpretation through a comparative perspective. Haweis disagreed specifically with Milner on the character of a number of individuals and groups: this study has highlighted Cyprian and the Novatians, Theodosius, Augustine, Pope Gregory I, medieval missionary-monks, and Bernard of Clairvaux. Haweis either rejected Milner’s choices outright, as in the case of Bernard, or demonstrated a decided preference for the marginalized over those in positions of power, as with the Novatians over against Cyprian. On each of these historical points Haweis’ contention pertained for the most part to the issue of church government and/or religious establishment. Cyprian, Augustine and Bernard were guilty, in his view, of pretensions and mistreatment of opponents. Cyprian, Theodosius, Gregory and monastic emissaries were seen as overzealous for church establishment and hierarchical government. Haweis became incensed when his sources suggested to him that legal punishment or physical force played a role in the church’s expansion. Overall, Haweis gave a more vivid impression of ‘true’ Christians as situated in obscurity, persecuted, and relatively few in number.

Yet in other ways Haweis’ interpretation aligned with Milner’s. Milner had expressed a willingness to find godly examples within the sectarian groups which Haweis

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 3:306–307.

defended, such as the Montanists and Novatians. Both writers were critical of Constantine's character. Their respective estimations of the time by which the Catholic Church's hierarchy had become 'antichristian' in nature differed only by about a century. They were similar also on large-scale aspects, such as the remarkable early spread of Christianity, the spreading tide of corruption through influences such as worldliness and philosophy, and the generally bleak complexion of the medieval Church. Milner certainly included a much larger coterie of Christian exemplars through his presentation of the Middle Ages, and yet as we have observed he gave much greater significance to medieval protest movements such as the Waldenses. This emphasis effectively narrows the distance between the two histories. Moreover, their mutual interest in a spiritual church defined by evangelical principles supports Haweis' statement that he and Milner shared the major assumptions even if they departed on minors.

Ironically, although Haweis and Milner made this spiritual definition of the church central to their interpretations, differences between them are best explained in relation to ecclesiastical commitments and experiences. Their respective biographies revealed their loyalties: Joseph Milner was a settled parish minister and schoolmaster, his brother Isaac a Dean and Cambridge college president; Haweis, in addition to his parish work, participated in the Countess of Huntingdon's Methodist connexion and the interdenominational London Missionary Society. It may also be that personal encounters with opposition played a role. Although Joseph experienced some early resistance to his evangelical preaching from his Hull parishioners, he persevered and became a well-respected civic and ecclesiastical figure in the region. Haweis, in addition to being expelled from his Oxford parish, became embroiled in another public controversy over his appointment to Aldwincle and exposed himself to scorn from Churchmen because of his association with

the Countess' chapels.¹⁷⁰ Perhaps these varied experiences led Haweis to be more pessimistic on the number of the godly and keener to identify with persecuted forebears than Milner. But however much these factors might explain their divergence, it seems ironic that Haweis, interested as he was in promoting Christian unity, sharply criticized Milner and denounced his attempts to be charitable towards historical characters. Haweis admitted the same principle of the possibility of godliness under the Roman Catholic name, and yet most of the characters whom Haweis denigrated in reaction against Milner were medieval monks or ecclesiastical dignitaries.

The rivalry between Haweis' and Milner's histories brings into relief the ecclesiastical tensions among Anglican evangelicals at the turn of the century. Their points of disagreement communicate much about competing desires for renewal within the establishment and for mutual cooperation with serious Christians from dissenting churches. Clearly there existed a feeling of suspension between an establishment hierarchy looking unfavourably on 'Methodistic' religion on one side and the swelling ranks of evangelicals operating outside of parochial structures—Methodists proper and revitalized adherents especially among Baptists and Congregationalists—on the other. A. S. Wood speaks of the issue of church order as the chief cause of division between Anglican evangelicals and Methodists and goes on to say of Haweis that he “embodied in his own person” this tension.¹⁷¹ In fact Haweis and the Milner brothers each attempted to appear

¹⁷⁰ Isaac Milner seems to have been familiar with the controversies which followed Haweis: in a letter to a friend dated 10 September 1800, in which he criticized Haweis' *History*, he expressed his opinion that Haweis' “character, of old, is very problematical.” Milner, *Life of Isaac Milner*, 222. Martin, *Evangelicals United*, 51, comments that Haweis' “irregular” ministry and influential role in the Countess' Connexion “brought down on his head the censure of many Anglican evangelicals.” Grayson Carter includes Haweis in a list of “half-regulars” to be distinguished from truly “irregular” ministers such as Wesley and Whitefield. He asserts that instances of half-regular ministry declined over the course of the Revival, and that settled parish work became the norm from at least the 1770s. Haweis and several others persevered but were “isolated figures.” Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals*, 35, 41, quotation at 41.

¹⁷¹ Wood, *Haweis*, 14, 16, 18, quotation at 18. For an apt description and analysis of this tension in general terms, see Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals*, 39–41.

loyal to the Church of England and gracious towards Methodists and Dissenters.¹⁷²

Our understanding of the relatively small distance between Haweis and the Milners is assisted through the work of Roger Martin, who convincingly describes two strands within British evangelicalism both committed to Christian unity but working this out in different ways. Haweis would number among the ‘idealists’ who worked for real cooperation across denominational lines and hoped for union into one body. Milner’s view corresponded with those of ‘realists’ who thought that visible reunion would be impossible prior to the millennium and thus were content to maintain denominational distinctives while encouraging a friendly posture towards evangelicals of other stripes.¹⁷³

Thus situated on somewhat opposite sides in ecclesiastical matters, but from our vantage point not separated by a wide gulf, their competing gravitational forces produced harsh words centred on the representation of church history. To Isaac Milner in 1800, it was clear that the two histories had little in common. But hindsight allows comparison without the colourings, however legitimate, of ecclesiastical loyalties and brotherly fidelity. Haweis’ reaction to Milner seems to parallel Gottfried Arnold’s to those who wrote history along confessional lines. Like Arnold, Haweis believed he was writing ‘impartial’ history, *contra* Milner; but from our vantage point we can say as F.C. Baur did of Arnold (see Introduction, above), that Haweis offered instead an alternative partiality.

Juxtaposition of Haweis’ church history alongside Milner’s also highlights another feature in which Haweis differed from Milner, but not in explicit reaction. Milner, as shown in the previous chapter, frequently used church history to prophetically challenge

¹⁷² Wood maintains that Haweis did not see himself as in any way disloyal to the Church of England. He cites Haweis’ own reflection in his diary around 1810 or 1811 that although he abhorred the unchristian character of Church administrators he revered the Church and its doctrinal basis; his “uniform efforts” were to hold “every gracious man I have influence with in [sic] it” (p. 254). See Wood, *Haweis*, 152, 169, 173–75 for further discussion of Haweis’ relationship to the Church.

¹⁷³ Martin, *Evangelicals United*, 30–33.

modern infidelity and nominal religion. In Haweis' work there were general hints of this as well as occasional critical comments directed towards Enlightenment historians such as Mosheim and Gibbon. But one also notices a perception of modern sophistication contrasting ancient and medieval superstition, barbarism or dullness. We noted above Haweis' striking dismissal of Augustine's writings in favour of "one page" of Edwards and his view that medieval reformers anticipated Protestant reformers but also were eclipsed by them. Haweis' periodization of church history which emphasized 'revival' beginning in the sixteenth century and progressing to his own time strengthens the impression of movement from darkness into light. In this sense Haweis seems to have imbibed a greater degree of Enlightenment sentiment than his Anglican counterpart.¹⁷⁴ His was a Christianized version, however, as indicated by his occasional expressions of hope in an imminent millennial kingdom. He believed that the Reformation had brought irreparable damage to the power of the papacy and initiated a process of Christian renewal continuing in his own day. His eschatological anticipation was evident as well in his interest in Protestant missions, to which effort he dedicated the *History*.¹⁷⁵

Mention of Haweis' periodization of church history raises the question of how his interpretation corresponded with the pattern of revival and declension which we have identified as a major component of other evangelical interpretations. His tripartite division entailed a nod to traditional Protestant accounts. In this manner his *History* appeared more

¹⁷⁴ Ian Shaw in a recent article has demonstrated convincingly Haweis' sharp critique in his *History* of Enlightenment scepticism and anti-religious sentiment, but also overlooks the extent to which Haweis (whether cognizant or not) shared the language, attitudes and presumptions of his philosophical opponents. As such, Haweis' work does not stand as a straightforward rebuttal of the notion that the Enlightenment spirit influenced evangelicalism. See Ian J. Shaw, "The Evangelical Revival Through the Eyes of the 'Evangelical Century': Nineteenth-Century Perceptions of the Origins of Evangelicalism," in *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (Norton Street, UK: Apollos, 2008), 302–323, at 304–305.

¹⁷⁵ In relation to eschatology Haweis evidently was part of a larger phenomenon: Martin perceives an increased millennial expectation especially in the early years of the French Revolution in which French Roman Catholicism was decimated and, it appeared, a new day of religious (as well as civil) freedom was dawning. Martin, *Evangelicals United*, 28–29.

conservative than those which maintained aspects of the older view but also nuanced it by integrating a series of smaller-scale revivals and declensions. As we have suggested, it is possible that Haweis derived this storyline directly from Newton. Comparison of Haweis' account with Newton's plans shows close correlation: a more pristine early church, the rapid rise of iniquity followed by a long season of decay, negative treatments of the pivotal figures Constantine and Gregory I (although Haweis, reacting against Milner, made Theodosius his pivot between periods one and two), gravitation to medieval reformers from the Waldenses and Wycliffe to Hus and Jerome, and the rise of Luther instigating reform which continued through subsequent centuries in the western world. Such a plot and character cast for the most part reflected that which developed among sixteenth-century Protestants.

But although Haweis held his commitment to this construal throughout, with synopses of it bookending the historical content, we have seen signs of variation. At least once (within his discussion of the third-century church, cited above), he articulated in general terms that church history had witnessed numerous revivals and declensions. For specific instances prior to the Reformation he employed revivalistic language, such as in describing the pastoral labours of Augustine and Peter Waldo. And he spoke of religious decline within Protestant denominations subsequent to the Reformation, however much spiritually-minded groups such as Puritans, Presbyterians, Pietists, Moravians and Methodists produced a stronger overall impression of revival. Haweis also clearly subscribed to the common revivalistic view that God, in fulfilment of his promise to protect his church, typically intervened to bring renewal when the survival of true godliness seemed most vulnerable. Examples of these divine rescues were in the birth of the Christian church, among those suffering under Roman persecution, amidst medieval protest movements, with the Reformation, in later groups such as the Moravian Brethren,

and in England with the ‘Glorious Revolution’.

Theological aspects of Haweis’ interpretation corresponded with other evangelical renditions. An evangelical doctrinal ‘essence’ centred on justification through Christ, evident in the historical works of Newton and Milner, helped Haweis to determine his godly examples. Where sources on belief were lacking, evidence of suffering provided an adequate signpost marking genuine Christianity. Haweis’ strong emphasis on persecution, his favouring of sectarian groups such as Novatians and Anabaptists, and his scorn for the corrupting influences of politics, wealth or worldly wisdom aligned him most closely with Wesley’s interpretation.¹⁷⁶ His use of the language of providence was comparatively sparse, but its occurrence increased significantly once his narrative reached the Reformation. Haweis’ general notion of a spiritually-defined church existing as a relatively small, persecuted remnant, shielded by grace against the railings of both infidels and nominal Christians, was a commonly-held one among evangelical history-writers. Evangelical ecclesiology also encompassed Haweis’ emphases on Christian unity across denominational barriers and on cooperation in missionary ventures. These emphases were latent already in the Revival of the 1740s but were heightened in Haweis’ day with its ecumenical spirit and excitement for missionary venture.

Important unique elements in Haweis’ *History*, then, are his imposition of a traditional periodization coupled with his obvious preference for modern, ‘enlightened’ times (informed in part by missionary involvements and eschatological excitement). These might seem to march in opposite directions. But we have consistently found that evangelical history-writers mediated between traditional Protestant and Enlightenment interpretations. Haweis in his own way adopted this posture. With hints of a more

¹⁷⁶ Supporting this correlation, A. S. Wood aligns Haweis with Wesley on the issue of church order, as both willing to transcend order and parish boundaries for the purpose of greater “usefulness.” Wood, *Haweis*, 268.

complex pattern intertwined, Havis described as “rise, declension, and revival” the familiar storyline of a suffering church moving through phases of pristine purity, a long season of burgeoning corruption, and successive renewals under divine influence. Situated at the end of the eighteenth century he effectively recast the longstanding view in the language and outlook of his enlightened, evangelical day.

Chapter Seven – Conclusion

Is it possible, based on these evangelical sources, to speak of a unified evangelical perspective on church history? In addressing this question it will be helpful first to offer a summary comparison of the details and themes of the various sources. After weighing similarities and differences, we can then situate evangelical perspectives more broadly, in relation to traditional Protestant and Enlightenment historiography. Better understanding this wider context in turn sheds light on the significance of church history for eighteenth-century evangelicalism.

Evangelicals consistently gave keen attention to Pentecost and apostolic Christianity. From the very beginnings of the Revival, writers viewed the founding and early spread of the church as dramatic. Some, such as Prince, Gillies and Haweis, especially noticed what they called the ‘remarkable’ spread or progress of the gospel at this early stage. Cooper, Edwards, Wesley, Milner and Haweis all characterized Pentecost as a powerful spiritual effusion and burst of light after a period of darkness. Edwards, Wesley, and Milner more definitely articulated their view that this season outshone all others in the history of the church; Haweis reflected this view specifically in regard to Paul’s missionary effort. Evangelical sources were unanimous that the successful establishment and expansion of Christianity in early centuries demonstrated divine governance in the face of great obstacles such as the weakness and obscurity of the apostles, Jewish opposition, well-established pagan worship and philosophy, and attempts to eradicate the church by Roman emperors.

Evangelical writers held somewhat varied opinions on the state of Christianity in subsequent centuries under the experience of persecution. Prince, interested primarily in sketching the geographical spread of the church, depicted steady progress from the

apostolic age forward through persecutions and eventual peace. Edwards and Gillies straightforwardly praised Christians' faithfulness and holy lives in the midst of suffering and considered Roman persecutions as seasons in which the church flourished. These two also gave theological significance to the persecutions: for Edwards, Christ's kingdom marvellously persevered against Satanic attempts to overthrow it; for Gillies, martyrs brought glory to Christ. Wesley asserted the rapid appearance of corruption, and persecutions for him constituted divine instruments to rouse or revive a declining church. Milner and Haweis similarly perceived an early rise of both corruption and opposition. They presented persecutions in various ways: as human attempts to wipe out Christianity, providentially reversed to become opportunities for expansion; as divine rescues of the church; and as divine scourges in a time of declension and doctrinal weakness. Comparison suggests that an author's context affected his perception of persecution and early Christian martyrs: we find stronger hagiographical and theological tones in Scottish and New England examples and more variegated presentations among English evangelicals. The cause of this difference, however, cannot be deduced simply as the product of different geographical or ecclesial contexts; Edwards and Gillies recorded their views in 1739 and 1754, respectively, whereas the English authors wrote in the 1780s and 1790s. The greater complexity evident in later examples could be seen plausibly as the development of a tradition.

Early evangelical writers did not include discussions of groups such as Montanists, Novatians and Pelagians. Edwards gave a brief negative comment on factions which grew up in the church during seasons of respite in early centuries. Wesley ambitiously countered traditional assessments on Montanus, Novatian and Pelagius and offered these, in speculative terms, as examples of holiness. Both Milner and Haweis described Tertullian's character as a mixture of positive and negative. As we have seen, these two writers took

different stances on several historical controversies, especially that between the Novatians and Cyprian. But although Haweis generally was more sympathetic to ancient 'sectarian' groups, whom he saw as not guilty of schism, Milner also allowed for the presence of genuine Christians among them. Haweis' view correlated closely with Wesley's.

Interestingly, both leaders were situated between a commitment to the Church of England and an itinerant preaching ministry, and both experienced scorn, if not persecution, as a result. This circumstance seems a likely explanation for their gravitation to characters in history standing at odds with the dominant church. History served both prophetic and self-justifying functions: past examples of mistreatment would either rouse nominal Christians' spiritual vitality or raise their ire and thus perpetuate the lineage of suffering.

The widest divergence among evangelical history-writers was over the character of Constantine. The views of Edwards and Prince on the one hand and Wesley on the other were diametrically opposite. Constantine's actions marked for the New Englanders a pinnacle and for Wesley a pit in the church's history. Gillies, perhaps having personally discussed this point with Wesley, seriously qualified his source's high praise for the emperor. Milner avoided extremes and depicted an emperor truly avowing Christianity but lacking internal devotion and godliness. Haweis also attempted a mediating position, portraying an emperor devoid of Christian qualities who was used by God to quell persecution and re-establish the church. Those who exalted Constantine's reign pointed to the end of persecution and the geographic spread of Christianity at the expense of pagan religion. Critics identified the corrosive effect of power, honour and wealth on the church's spiritual character.

How might one explain such extreme divergence and variety? New England church leaders (as suggested of Edwards in Chapter Three) may have resonated with the effect of Constantine's reign on the establishment of Christian churches and erosion of

heathen worship, based on their experiences in colonial New England. Gillies and Wesley, conversely, may have been influenced by perceptions of nominal religious adherence in Great Britain which led them to be critical of established religion. If these explanations are accurate, then history on both sides was serving a prophetic function: Edwards and Prince longing like their Puritan forebears for an elusive ‘national’ reformation under godly leadership, Wesley and Gillies seeking to rouse nominal Christians within historic state churches. Milner’s and Haweis’ mixed portrayals of Constantine likely reflected ecclesial tensions (further discussed below) prevalent among Anglican evangelicals around the end of the eighteenth century.

Despite these marked differences of interpretation, evangelicals generally agreed that the spiritual state of the church sank quickly after Constantine’s day. This correlation lessens the effect of the above disagreement. For Gillies, Wesley and Haweis, Constantine himself was responsible for instigating corruption which escalated in subsequent centuries. Cooper, Gillies, and Wesley (in his sermons) essentially skipped over the history of the church from Constantine to the Reformation. Edwards perceived renewed threats after Constantine’s reign so that this constituted a brief respite before the church plunged into its darkest day, enduring for ten centuries. For Milner, Constantine at least slowed the advance of corruption, but the church was in dire need of revival again by the fifth century.

Representations again diverged on the character of Pope Gregory I. Edwards held that an antichristian papacy, usurping Christ’s place at the head of the church, was in evidence by the early seventh century, nearly coinciding with Gregory’s papacy. Wesley accepted Mosheim’s portrayal of Gregory’s character as a mixture of over-ambition, superstition, and praiseworthy aspects such as wisdom and missionary zeal. Milner admitted Gregory’s penchant to promote the Roman See but ascribed this to human

jealousy; otherwise Gregory was a humble, devout Christian whose pastoral activism was unparalleled. Haweis took exception to Milner's portrayal and denounced Gregory's superstitious practices and papal ambition. Like Edwards, Haweis dated the rise of the Antichrist very close to Gregory's time. It may be that Edwards' and Haweis' interests to find fulfilment of biblical prophecies of the Antichrist in the papacy led them to condemn any action which promoted the Roman See. For Milner, Gregory perhaps answered a personal desire to see devout, active Christian leadership within the hierarchy of the Church of England.

Evangelical leaders generally concurred in viewing monasticism negatively. New England writers and Gillies alike ignored monastic developments, the shared assumption most likely being what Gillies articulated, namely that very little was noteworthy in terms of gospel 'success' from roughly the fifth through the thirteenth centuries. Wesley also offered no personal judgments but adopted Mosheim's stance that monasticism in its separation from society and its superstitious practices did more harm than good, although particular monks could be worthy of esteem. Milner and Haweis held that monasticism had sprung from a venerable desire for purity and separation from worldliness which regrettably developed into a well-established way of life. Haweis allowed for the possibility of godly examples among medieval monks. Milner uniquely praised a significant list of monks for the vital Christianity they demonstrated through their missionary labours and their writings. But his clearly negative view of the monastic life suggests that the godliness he perceived among monks was in spite of, rather than native to, their habit. These collectively critical views of monasticism reflected an evangelical conviction that vital faith was to be expressed in action rather than in reclusive contemplation; true holiness had public consequences.

Pope Boniface VIII was included only in the histories of Wesley, Milner and

Haweis. Wesley adopted Mosheim's harsh characterization of Boniface as fanatical and arrogant, and Milner and Haweis offered very similar judgments. Wesley's and Haweis' presentations depicted Boniface's papacy as near the summit of corruption and correspondingly as an instigator of eventual decline in papal power. Although it is unclear whether Edwards was familiar with the history of Boniface when he prepared his *History* sermons, papal notions of political and ecclesiastical supremacy were clearly marks of antichristian idolatry in his mind.

Evangelical history-writers consistently elevated medieval individuals and groups scorned and persecuted by Catholic authorities, especially the Waldenses, Albigenses, Wycliffe, Hus, and Jerome of Prague. Of the Waldenses, they typically asserted ancient origins and correlated their belief and practice with those of Protestants. Wesley, Milner and Haweis admitted more flaws in Wycliffe and the Bohemian reformers. Milner and Haweis, however, also argued in favour of tangible links between (or even confluence of) the various groups. Considering the emphasis placed on this coterie and the interest in continuities, it is apparent that evangelicals essentially maintained the traditional Protestant view which searched for a succession of gospel witnesses to rival Rome's claim to apostolic succession. Gillies, Milner, and Haweis also made allowance for the presence of true Christians within the bounds of a corrupted Catholic Church, but their narratives and explanations gave most significant weight to the line of protest.

For the medieval period these writers also frequently gravitated to regions on the western and northern perimeters of Europe. Prince highlighted these regions as he traced the geographic progression of Christ's kingdom. Edwards contended for an enduring national resistance to papal dominion and the continual presence of genuine Christians in Germany, France and Britain. Haweis and especially Milner followed more exactly Christianity's expansion to the outer reaches of Europe as instances of more vital

Christianity. This geographical interest was the product of at least two factors: an evangelical suspicion towards Catholicism and especially its hierarchy, and an evangelical passion for mission and conversions.

Evangelical leaders typically described the Reformation in effervescent terms. This was, in their minds, a glorious new dawn of vital Christianity after centuries of religious darkness. Their praise was directed not only at the reformers' opposition to Rome and at the Catholic Church's dramatic loss of influence and territory, but also at the reformers' emphasis on Scripture and preaching and evidence which suggested a spiritual outpouring and widespread conversions. Milner and Haweis, both drawing on the groundwork laid by John Newton, highlighted the place of doctrinal renewal at the heart of the Reformation. Wesley provides one notable exception in our comparison. The view he adopted from Mosheim was positive, and Wesley's own tendency in sermons to jump from ancient Christianity to the sixteenth century communicates a degree of respect for the Reformation. Yet his representations in sermons leaned towards pessimism: the Reformation was a short-lived renewal and effected little lasting change.

Eighteenth-century evangelicals increasingly distinguished between revolutionary and peaceable Anabaptists. Edwards seemed to have militant peasants and/or Münsterites in mind as an expression of corruption following on the heels of the Reformation. Wesley's editing touch on Mosheim's work displayed some sympathy for nonrevolutionary Anabaptism. Milner's history similarly condemned revolutionary outbursts but made room for innocent, genuine Christians within Anabaptist ranks. Haweis took a similar, but more generous, tack. Writers from Wesley to Haweis described Menno Simons in appreciative terms.

These eighteenth-century writers generally agreed that the Reformation was followed by decline among Protestants into cold, formal religion. They found instances of

renewed Protestantism among seventeenth-century Puritans, Presbyterians, and Pietists. Edwards' account praised Pietism and especially its charitable work and implicitly elevated New England's Puritan past. Gillies clearly saw the middle decades of the seventeenth century, coinciding with the Scottish National Covenant and the Puritan Interregnum, as a more flourishing season. Wesley's history displayed his sensitivity in regard to Puritanism, as his interjections into Mosheim's work both defended Puritans' desire for freedom of worship and critiqued their notions of church government. In sermons, Wesley seemed to follow Gillies' account on instances of renewal in Scotland, Ireland and England but also associated the intermingling of religion and politics with declining vitality ending in scandal. Milner expressed sympathy for Puritans and Pietists but also implicitly denounced the Puritan Revolution by condemning any use of physical force towards religious ends. Haweis similarly praised Puritan religiosity as an expression of vital Christianity but denounced their promotion of closed communion and their actions under Cromwell. More pure in his mind were American Puritans, Scottish Presbyterians, German Pietists and Moravian Brethren. The above variations roughly correspond with Ian Shaw's recent observation for nineteenth-century evangelicals that those in Dissenting contexts more readily expressed continuity with Puritanism than their Anglican evangelical counterparts.¹

As one would expect, evangelicals gave a prominent place to the transatlantic Revival of the 1730s and 1740s. But the profound emphasis given to these events communicates more than a predictable appreciation. The histories of Gillies, Wesley and Haweis gave over-abundant space to their discussions of the Revival. Edwards included brief effusive comments in regard to Whitefield and the New England revival of the mid-1730s. If we include Milner's early writings, all of these authors singled out the Revival as a high point in church history to be compared with the Reformation and the first-century

¹ Shaw, "Evangelical Revival," 323.

church.

It is difficult to explain concretely the divergences on historical details. Yet the variety of opinion serves to strengthen the impression that evangelicals were not simply parroting a familiar, traditional account of church history, but rather possessed lively appreciations for the past and used it creatively for various ends. Thus aspects of evangelical interpretations reflected different geographical, cultural and ecclesial settings as well as different personalities. Prince and Cooper saw signs that New England was under God's blessing. Edwards expressed admiration for an established, state-supported church and for actions which hampered heathen religious practices. Gillies highlighted moments in Scottish church history. Wesley and Haweis as ordained Anglicans practicing itinerancy and associating beyond the establishment looked more favourably on sectarian and marginalized Christians in history. Their praise for ancient heretical groups and Wesley's more pessimistic portrayal of the Reformation were driven less by historical analysis than by a penchant to go against the grain of established views for the purpose of reviving Protestantism in their own day. The Milners as prominent and well-connected Church of England ministers defended established religion and frowned upon separatism. The public rivalry between Isaac Milner and Haweis was fuelled by circumstances in 1790s England and competing loyalties among Anglican evangelicals.

Comparison of overall impressions of history—its highs and lows—reveals a similar construal. Evangelicals saw in early Christianity a dramatic spiritual outpouring producing rapid and numerous conversions and the widespread establishment of churches against all odds. Spiritual decline began soon afterward, but the church was divinely protected, purified and renewed through the experience of persecution. There was disagreement as to whether Constantine's actions represented a blessing or a curse, but all were agreed that spiritual decline followed and deepened through subsequent centuries. Some writers left

more room than others for godly examples within medieval Christendom, but again all retained a picture of a hierarchical Church generally degraded by superstition and worldly pursuits such as power and wealth, such that it answered biblical prophecies of Antichrist. The bright spots in the age of darkness were the fringe movements such as the Waldenses, Albigenses, Cathars, Wycliffe and the Lollards, Hus and Jerome and their Bohemian followers. The Reformation was most often presented as another dramatic, divinely-led renewal of vital Christianity. Decline again followed quickly in Protestant churches. Signs of renewal appeared in the seventeenth century among Pietists, Presbyterians, and Puritans. Another downturn was identified in a creeping tide of materialism, moralistic preaching, and deism in the late-seventeenth-century English-speaking world. But a new, glorious sign of God's preservation and perennial renewal of the church arose with the transatlantic Revival of the 1730s and 1740s.

Common themes emerge from these evangelical church histories. Perhaps out of a shared desire to prompt renewal within their own churches, writers from Edwards to Haweis identified a tendency for the institutional church to lapse into nominal religion and superfluous ceremony. Genuine faith, they believed, was more often preserved among a remnant existing on or beyond the fringe of the institution. The experience of persecution was seen as native to Christianity in its most vital form. And while particular individuals were highlighted as favoured examples of practical godliness, these authors were interested especially in seasons in which larger groups or sectors of the church revived or the gospel was taken into heathen territories.

Moreover, evangelical authors believed that the study of church history could foster godliness in the reader. This was the positive face of a two-sided coin: they also used history to counter certain contemporary currents such as moralistic preaching, deism, and atheism. Church history, then, could serve a prophetic function both in church and

society. According to Ted Campbell, Wesley turned to former ages—the New Testament church and moments of renewal at in subsequent centuries—for “a precedent or example for the renewal of Scriptural Christianity in his own generation.”² For Wesley as well as Haweis, marginalized historical figures became effective instruments to make the point that Christianity involved not only orthodox belief, but a transformed life. Milner also repeatedly used history to confront the spirit of his own age. Evangelical writers together believed that accounts of individuals or, better yet, entire movements of people in history who responded to God’s grace with faith and godliness could stir others towards the same result.

These history-writers also typically claimed a Scriptural basis for their understandings. One important means was the employment of Scriptural referents, including biblical parallels and types, key passages such as Matt. 16:18, and prophecies. Authors began their histories of Christianity with New Testament accounts and either explicitly marked the transition in authorities from sacred to human or more subtly incorporated biblical and especially prophetic language to guide their post-biblical interpretations.

Church history also was a vehicle to communicate theological convictions. Edwards’ *History* was certainly the most theologically-infused of the various histories; but all evangelical writers’ interpretations were textured in this way. There were several common emphases. First, they strongly asserted a belief in God as creator *and* ruler, governor of the universe *and* personal Lord who intervened directly in human affairs. The

²Ted A. Campbell, "Christian Tradition, John Wesley, and Evangelicalism", *Anglican Theological Review* 74, no. 1 (1992): 55, 65–66; see also 57–58 on Anglican precedents for turning to history as a ‘pattern for renewal’. Campbell claims (p. 56) that Wesley and other evangelical leaders turned to history in a desire for continuity “but did not regard unbroken tradition as a positive criterion in the way that Caroline Anglicans and Catholics had done.” This assertion overlooks the emphasis placed by evangelical history-writers on the continual ‘witness’ of fringe groups from ancient Christianity to the Reformation and on biblical references to Christ’s promises to be present with his followers (Matt. 28:20) and to prevent the overwhelming of the church by the powers of hell (Matt. 16:18).

person of Christ they presented as the fulcrum of history and the one who planted the church, preserved it continually amidst opposition, and promised to be present with it always. They interspersed their narratives with references to the Holy Spirit who, they believed, at key points brought special blessing to the church through far-reaching renewal. Additionally, they shared an optimistic eschatology which viewed God's design progressing throughout sacred history towards widespread godliness culminating in the millennial kingdom of Christ.

These authors generally articulated a spiritual conception of the church which led them, in varying degrees, to find historical examples of godliness under a range of visible banners. For several this extended even to Roman Catholicism, although descriptions of these exemplars tended to retain a sense of being at odds with the Catholic religious system. An invisible church could be identified historically by markers such as doctrinal affirmations, practical holiness, opposition to worldliness and corruptions, and the experience of suffering. This shared view that the 'true' church transcended national, institutional and confessional borders was articulated most forcefully by Milner and Haweis at the end of the eighteenth century, fuelled in part by tensions created by loyalty to the establishment on one hand and a growing spirit of cooperation between Anglican and Dissenting evangelicals on the other.

These various theological aspects can be incorporated into a prevailing concept of revival. Perceived instances of revival in history demonstrated both God's general sovereignty over, and direct involvement in, human affairs. Likewise they proved most emphatically for evangelicals the fulfilment of Christ's promises to be present with his church and to preserve it against all opposition. Frequently revivals were presented as interventions at the critical moment, when the church appeared about to be overwhelmed. Revivals also stood as remarkable occurrences of the Spirit's work; records suggesting

widespread conversion were appealing to evangelicals wanting to assert the Spirit's involvement in the renovation of the heart. Revivals could also make tangible the concept of a spiritual church, especially when groundswells of godliness could be located on different sides of ecclesial or national divides. And the trajectory of the overarching pattern of revival and declension most often communicated the view that God's work leading up to eighteenth-century events was escalating in intensity and scope, so that evangelicals could articulate hope or expectation that the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth was imminent.

The concept of 'revival' emerges as a dominant, central interpretive key in evangelical interpretations of church history. But the role of these historical works in defining and confirming evangelicalism itself has been undervalued in extant scholarship. The prevalence of this revival-centred understanding of history has significant implications for our understanding of eighteenth-century evangelicalism.

Scholars such as Crawford, Lambert and Hindmarsh have given attention to the morphology of conversion as depicted by eighteenth-century narratives, and the expansion of these into local and international revival narratives cultivating the exciting notion of an international work of God. Within this scholarship there are hints of recognition that church history factored in this process. We have already referred to Lambert's observation of evangelicals' comparison of the Revival with the Reformation or even Pentecost. Crawford's important analysis of the eighteenth-century Revival suggests briefly, with Edwards' *History* in view, that British and American evangelicals shared a unique historical interpretation which focused on revivals.³

Eighteenth-century sources, however, bear the argument that church history

³ Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 127.

played a foundational, formative role from within the years of the Revival itself. Edwards' published corpus, as scholars have observed, depicts the expansion from a narrative of local revival, the *Faithful Narrative*, to a full-fledged morphology of revival, *Religious Affections*. But his *History*, composed only a few years after the *Narrative*, represents a narrative expansion to astounding proportions, wherein all of history is absorbed under the theme of God's redemptive design and is interpreted through the paradigm of revival. We have seen the sense of historical significance which Cooper (as well as Watts and Guise) provided to Edwards' *Narrative* itself. Both Cooper and Prince expressed a sense of awe at the cumulative magnitude of local revivals which permitted comparison with the Reformation and Pentecost. Then as revival occurrences multiplied on both sides of the Atlantic, evangelical publishers in England, Scotland and New England produced magazine 'histories' which noted some precedents and recorded 'remarkable' contemporary revival events for the benefit of posterity. A decade later, Gillies in Glasgow applied a revivalist perspective more systematically to church history, his first volume's material serving to buttress the importance of the accounts of the evangelical Revival in the second. Then Wesley, a decade before his death, provided Methodists with an extensive and erudite church history culminating in an account of the rise of Methodism itself. Moreover, he used history in sermons both to confirm Methodism and to challenge towards further renewal. Finally, Milner and Haweis, amidst years of upheaval and transition both in English society and in the Church, produced comprehensive church histories set within revival-centred frameworks. In Milner's history, a fluid progression of major and minor revivals and declensions told the full story of Christianity's history. For Haweis, hints of ebb and flow nuanced a tripartite division of the sweeping narrative into periods of rise, decline and revival.

History proved useful for evangelicals both for defending the Revival and

promoting further revival. Their efforts resulted in an array of church histories possessing some personal, ecclesial and regional colourings but also demonstrating the workings of a powerful interpretive matrix. Besides obvious emphasis on the eighteenth-century Revival itself, 'revival' provided these histories with a language, a means of selecting and shaping historical content, and a concept which encompassed the theological emphases which evangelicals wanted to promote and defend.

This leads us into an assessment of the relationship of evangelical historical interpretations with Protestant tradition and with the leading histories of the English-speaking Enlightenment. In relation to earlier Protestant historiography, evangelical church histories reflected several similar emphases. Convictions remained in the natural tendency for 'true' Christians to be relatively few in number and subject to opposition, in God's active intervention in favour of the church, in the interpretive relevance of biblical prophecy, and even in a sense that God's design was nearing completion. Like their Protestant forebears, evangelicals insisted on the continual historical presence of genuine Christianity in fulfilment of Christ's promise.

Other aspects involved both continuity and change. Evangelicals held a spiritually-defined ecclesiology much like their forebears but applied this to history more freely. Older tendencies such as an anti-Catholic polemic and a confessional bias were noticeably less pronounced. While evangelicals still at times exalted earlier Christian expressions in their homelands, their perspective was much less bound to their regional or national contexts than earlier examples. And while evangelicals held soundly Protestant beliefs in human sinfulness, justification and regeneration, they were relatively novel in making these doctrines signposts marking the path of genuine Christianity through the centuries. Like earlier Protestants, evangelicals clearly gravitated to the early church and the Reformation as high points in history. Although glimmerings of a revivalist perspective had already

appeared, it was the events of the 1730s and 1740s which seemed to answer longings for the further renewal of Protestant churches. As we have seen through detailed analysis of each evangelical source, one of the most significant revisions of Protestant historiography was a greater sense of dynamism, so that the traditional storyline of a golden apostolic age, a long, dark age of corruption, and a glorious Reformation had become an historical vision of successive declensions and revivals or of smaller-scale declensions and revivals adding further layers to an overarching pattern. At the same time other elements—theological and otherwise—were retained, so that evangelical historical interpretations can be seen as intent to revive rather than to rearticulate or rescind earlier Protestant views.

There was an affinity between evangelicals' historical vision and that of Enlightenment historians. As observed in Chapter One, leading writers of the Enlightenment also showed an interest in tracing patterns of decline and renewal. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* was a case in point, especially since, as scholars have noted, the work ended not with 'fall' but 'renaissance'. The language of revival was a shared one. The degree of affinity between evangelical and Enlightenment histories is worthy of further scrutiny. Both sides tended to disdain the Middle Ages and looked with favour to ancient times, to developments of the late medieval and early modern periods, and to signs of progress in their own times. Several scholars have observed a conjunction even between evangelical postmillennialism and the optimism and progressive view of the Enlightenment, two facets of a cultural turn in the late seventeenth century.⁴

As has been pointed out earlier, writers such as Edwards and Gillies produced their histories before the publication of what are now considered the classics of

⁴ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 234–35; David W. Bebbington, "Response," in *The Emergence of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (Norton Street, UK: Apollos, 2008), 417–32, at 427.

Enlightenment historiography. Wesley, Milner and Haweis demonstrated a ready willingness to make use of recently published histories. Wesley considered Mosheim's church history the most worthy one to edit, condense and disseminate. Milner and Haweis also drew substantially from Mosheim and interacted with the historical content of Gibbon, Hume, and Robertson, among other modern writers.

At the same time, evangelical history-writers from Edwards to Haweis reacted strongly against characteristic features of the Enlightenment. Most prominent was their forceful reassertion of belief in providence against the human-centred philosophy and historiography of contemporary writers. Ernst Breisach's notion that traditional views of 'sacred' history simply gave way to more humanized accounts beginning in the early 1700s is untenable. A full century later, the Milners and Haweis asserted interpretations with providential and prophetic colourings. Their histories, moreover, can be seen as the fullest flowering of an evangelical perspective which had been taking root and branching out for at least six decades.

Krieger, as we observed in Chapter One, holds that the Enlightenment involved not secularization but the pushing back of perceptions of divine influence "from tangible fact to intangible principle" and that Enlightenment historians' reaction against the church was "more of an internecine conflict than we have known."⁵ From our vantage point, it is clear that one purpose of evangelical authors was to contend with what they saw as prevailing views which diminished appreciation for God's place in human history. Evangelical emphasis on God's governance and direct action was not the fading echo of Protestant forebears but was a matter of direct engagement with eighteenth-century intellectual trends. This situation clarifies our understanding of eighteenth-century

⁵ Krieger, "Heavenly City": 296–97.

historiography in general: Enlightenment historians articulated their positions not to a disappearing Protestant tradition so much as to a living, popular current within English-speaking society. In light of Krieger's work on Enlightenment historians' at least vague notion of divine causation, evangelicals such as Milner may have been irresponsible in calling the philosophical historians 'heathen' or 'atheistical'; but such reactionary comments showed that evangelicals occupied one side of a contest or struggle.

In an effort to counter humanistic arguments, evangelicals found 'revival' to be a useful tool. In their minds, this was not solely a concept; they believed they could point to historically demonstrable occurrences of direct divine intervention, evidence of God's particular providence in order to renew the church and transform society. History might also show God's supreme governance over nature and human affairs; but much more interesting were instances of rapid and widespread conversions and altered lives for which earthly causes seemed inadequate as explanations. This provides another facet to understanding evangelicals' emphasis on providence and revival in church history. Against philosophical human-centred notions they believed they could produce tangible evidence of God's action. The Revival and its perceived precedents allowed evangelicals to reemphasize God's sovereignty and his direct intervention in human affairs through the Spirit's influence. Thus they could recalibrate history as a universal story of progress—not the triumph of the human spirit, but the advance of God's kingdom in accord with his design.

Enlightenment advocates were among those who viewed the Revival and evangelicalism as recurrences of religious fanaticism, or 'enthusiasm'. Another important aspect to evangelicals' history-writing was a defensive effort to vindicate themselves against the charge of radicalism or novelty. Interestingly, Methodist historian Gordon Rupp has argued that the sixteenth-century question to Protestants "where was your

church before Luther?” became one implicitly posed to evangelicals after the eighteenth-century Revival: “where was your church before Wesley?”⁶ As with the sixteenth-century reformers, an appeal to church history became a vital defence mechanism for evangelicals. Evangelical church histories sought to find historical precedents for the Revival and for evangelical emphases. The examples they identified gave evangelicals either legitimacy or, at worst, company in a long line of marginalized reformers.

Evangelical history-writers’ efforts also were positive definitions of evangelical self-identity. Gillies’ history, for example, should be seen as an important addition to early evangelical publications which according to Lambert effectively shaped an “imagined community” in the transatlantic world.⁷ Grayson Carter makes the point that Milner “with some success” gave Anglican evangelicals “a respectable pedigree to be traced back not only to the Reformation, but through the Augustinian tradition of the Middle Ages back to the early Fathers.”⁸ Bruce Hindmarsh similarly observes of both Milner and Haweis that they “saw the Evangelical Revival in continuity with the hidden operation of God’s grace in all generations.”⁹ Evangelicals discerned a connection with such exemplars in salvation history as New Testament Christians, faithful witnesses in the Roman Empire and in medieval Christendom, Protestant reformers, and devout Puritans, Presbyterians and Pietists. This sense of history conversely lent weight to the perceived importance of the eighteenth-century Revival as a defining moment, a ‘great work of God’ in sacred history.

The argument that evangelical church histories played an important role in evangelical self-definition is reinforced in part by the prominence within evangelical circles

⁶ According to Rupp, the answer in both centuries involved the concept of a spiritual church. Rupp, *John Wesley und Martin Luther: Ein Beitrag zum Lutherischen-Methodistischen Dialog* (Stuttgart: Christliches Verlagshaus, 1983), 5, cited in Oh, *Wesley's Ecclesiology*, 51–52.

⁷ Lambert, *Great Awakening*, 144.

⁸ Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals*, 107.

⁹ Hindmarsh, *John Newton*, 4.

of the authors themselves. Edwards and Wesley, of course, held renown alongside Whitefield as key ‘instruments’ of the Revival. Other writers also had stature within evangelicalism, confined more to a national or regional influence but nonetheless in important positions and locales: Prince and Cooper in Boston, Gillies in Glasgow, Joseph Milner in Hull and his brother Isaac as head of a Cambridge college and Dean of Carlisle Cathedral, and Haweis as a central figure in the Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion and the London Missionary Society.¹⁰

In a sense these authors wrote the history of evangelicalism from the first to the eighteenth centuries. Evangelical emphases such as practical godliness and beliefs in repentance, justification through Christ, and ongoing sanctification through the Spirit became criteria for identifying historical exemplars. More prominently, they took their experience and understanding of the Revival and, for both defensive and proactive purposes, traced a lineage of ‘evangelical’ Christianity through the ages culminating in the evangelical Revival itself. Through ‘revival’, evangelicals added new complexity to Protestant historiography and also used in a religious sense a vocabulary which they shared with Enlightenment thinkers in order to counter Enlightenment ideas. This unique historical interpretation served to distinguish and give shape to evangelicalism itself.

¹⁰ To this list could be added the prominent names of John Newton, whose *Review of Ecclesiastical History* established an approach which influenced Milner and Haweis, and John Erskine of Edinburgh, who spearheaded the publication of Edwards’ *History* and edited and published the supplement to Gillies’ *Historical Collections*.

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