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'Credulity, Superstition and Fanaticism'?: An Examination of the Relationship between Evangelical Revivalism, Madness and the Age of Reform

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One of the key features of the revivals that spanned the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a heightened sense of spiritual enthusiasm reminiscent of English Puritanism and Continental Pietism, both in the British Isles and across the Atlantic.[1] Yet the more visible expressions of feeling within the realm of religion were not without their critics, who often compared revivals to the antics of the mad. Evangelicals such as John Wesley and William Gibson defended the outpourings of heartfelt religion, separating the workings of "the Spirit" from contemporary understandings of lunacy. By comparing their different approaches to the question of religious insanity from the 1730s to the latter part of the nineteenth century, an increasing emphasis on the social aspect of religious transformation emerges, highlighting the relationship between Evangelical revivalism and the 'Age of Reform'.[2]

Enthusiasm and Madness

In Britain, the notion of religious insanity has a long and turbulent history, particularly in light of the enthusiastic excesses, both real and imagined, of seventeenth-century Puritanism.[3] Although fears of religious zeal had somewhat subsided with the onset of a new wave of anti-Catholicism, the spectre of Oliver Cromwell and his regime still haunted the imagination of the

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[1] M. A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, 2003), pp. 13-21.

[2] J. Innes and A. Burns, 'Introduction', in J. Innes and A. Burns (Eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 1-70.

[3] Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, pp. 13-21, 55-56, 142-145; N. Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain: Religion and Politics 1714-1815* (London, 2014), pp. 106, 122; R. L. Numbers and J. S. Numbers, 'Millerism and Madness: A Study of 'Religious Insanity', in Nineteenth-Century America', in R. L. Numbers and J. M. Butler (Eds.), *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Knoxville, 1993), pp. 94-96; M. Heyd, *Be Sober and Reasonable: The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Leiden, 1995); A. Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions: Madness and Society in Britain: 1700-1900* (New Haven, 1993), pp. 177-179; P. Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', *History of Psychiatry*, 12 (2001), pp. 467-468.

English-speaking world.[4] By the eighteenth century, accusations of religious enthusiasm and insanity were commonplace.[5] William Hogarth's mid-eighteenth century sketch *Credulity, Superstition and Fanaticism,* for instance, portrays George Whitefield, a key evangelical leader during the early trans-Atlantic revivals, as a mad 'fool' with dubious connections to Catholicism and witchcraft.[6] As he speaks, his audience experiences various states of fanaticism, from melancholy to suicide, measured by a large thermometer placed on top of the evangelist John Wesley's sermons and the seventeenth-century philosopher Joseph Glanvill's book on witchcraft.[7] For critics like Hogarth, the relationship between the new Evangelical teachings on 'heart religion', the revivals, lunacy and a juvenile belief in the supernatural were intimately connected; at best they were a satire to be derided, and at worst a threat to the very fabric of an enlightened social order.[8]

Yet, unlike Hogarth's caricature, early modern Evangelicalism and revivalism were interrelated, but in many ways distinct, movements. Revivals were 'intense periods of unusual response to the gospel preaching linked with unusual efforts at godly living', generally characterized by an intimate experience of conviction and a focus on the work of the Holy Spirit.[9] These periods of 'unusual' spirituality, known as revivalism, played a significant role in the growth of the evangelical movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, notwithstanding the fact that church membership in different localities often decreased once the emotional fervour of a revival had quieted down.[10] Enthusiastic responses to Evangelical teaching, however, were not necessarily confined to the cyclic periods of revival.[11] Sermons and small meetings, for instance, could also kindle an 'unusual response to the gospel'.[12]

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[4] Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', pp. 467-468.
[5] Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', pp. 467-468.
[6] Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', pp. 467-468.
[7] Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', pp. 467-468.
[8] Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', pp. 467-468.
[9] Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, pp. 18-21; J. Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Wilberforce, More, Chalmers and Finney* (Downers Grove, 2007), pp. 46-49, 70, 90-91; R. Carwardine, *Trans-Atlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America 1790-1865* (Westport, 1978).
[10] Carwardine, *Trans-Atlantic Revivalism*; S.J. Brown, *Providence and Empire: Religion, Politics and Society in the United Kingdom 1815-1914* (London, 2014), p. 332.
[11] Carwardine, *Trans-Atlantic Revivalism*, pp. 45-49.
[12] Carwardine, *Trans-Atlantic Revivalism*, pp. 45-49; Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', pp. 467-479.

Evangelical revivalism could, therefore, precede and follow actual revivals as a distinct form of spirituality.[13] Likewise, revivalism did not necessarily take the same format in each area. Camp meetings were more popular in America than in Britain, while many English Evangelicals tended to disapprove of 'unusual responses to the gospel'.[14] In the British Isles, revivals generally originated in regions such as Wales and Scotland, as opposed to the larger city centres of England.[15] Yet, due to the dynamic channel of communication between the "old" and "new" world at the time, there was a significant degree of similarity between revivalism in these areas vis-à-vis America, allowing scholars to speak of revivals on both a local and a trans-Atlantic level.[16]

Not all Evangelicals, indubitably, supported these 'outpourings of the Holy Spirit'. For individuals like the Methodist leader Jabez Bunting, 'unusual responses to the gospel' like groaning and shivering endangered the respectability of the various strains of Evangelicalism— which emphasized personal conversion, a godly lifestyle, the centrality of the Bible and Christ's sacrifice—that were emerging at the time.[17] Amongst revival leaders, there was also a significant degree of conflict. During the early nineteenth century, a series of revivals known as the Second Great Awakening, led by the minister Charles G. Finney, introduced a great degree of 'excitement' into the New York region, which came to be known as the 'Burned-over district' due to the emotional intensity of the meetings in that area.[18] Finney's institutional 'new measures', such as his emphasis on the need for religious leaders and members of the congregation to work to bring about a revival in their area, clashed with more supposedly traditional forms of revivalism held by many of his contemporaries.[19]

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[13] Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, pp. 18-21; Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism*, pp. 46-49, 70, 90-91.

[14] Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism*, pp. 64-67; Brown, *Providence and Empire,* pp. 208.

[15] Brown, *Providence and Empire,* p. 208.

[16] Brown, *Providence and Empire,* pp. 214-217; S. O'Brien, 'A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735-1755', *The American Historical Review*, 91 (1986), pp. 811-832; Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, pp. 77-88; Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism*, pp. 11-44; Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, pp. 27-49, 92, 101, 110, 136-154; Carwardine, *Trans-Atlantic Revivalism.*

[17] D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), pp. 2-3; Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, pp. 18-21; Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism*, pp. 19-20, 65.

[18] Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism*, pp. 71-94.

[19] Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism*, pp. 71-94.

John Wesley and Religious Insanity

Similar to Finney, the abovementioned minister and founder of Methodism, John Wesley, recognized that not every physical manifestation during periods of revivalism was due to an 'outpouring of the Holy Spirit'.[20] Some individuals were truly insane; their lack of reason made them unable to respond to the gospel message.[21] For Wesley, the concept of religious insanity was a misnomer, since, like many of his contemporaries, he believed the mad were like beasts: they did not have a 'sound mind'.[22] Religion was merely a type of phantasm that their 'animal spirits' latched onto, which occasioned disturbing physical reactions in their bodies.[23] Their conditions necessitated the use of medicinal 'physicks' and, in many cases, a spiritual remedy as well.[24]

At the time, a number of people still advocated the use of 'spiritual physicks' as a treatment for both what was perceived to be moral-induced insanity, stemming from an ill-advised lifestyle, and 'real' madness.[25] Over the last several decades, historians such as Jonathan Andrews and Paul Laffey, while recognising the shift towards 'diseases of the mind', have in fact challenged previous interpretations of the secularisation of mental health in early modern Britain.[26] Madness, which stemmed from a variety of causes in early modern thought, could be treated and cured by not only a variety of methods, but also by a variety of individuals.[27] Thus Georgian clergy like Wesley could be critical of the medicalization of mental

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[20] J. Wesley, 'The Nature of Enthusiasm', <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-37-the-nature-of-enthusiasm/>, accessed 06.02.2016; Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', pp. 467-479.

[21] Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', pp. 467-479.

[22] Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', pp. 467-479; Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions*, pp. 56-64.

[23] Wesley, 'The Nature of Enthusiasm', pp. 1-6; Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', pp. 467-479.

[24] Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', pp. 467-479; Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions*, pp. 22-23.

[25] P. Laffey, 'Two Registers of Madness in Enlightenment Britain. Part 1', *History of Psychiatry*, 13 (2002), pp. 367-380; P. Laffey, 'Two Registers of Madness in Enlightenment Britain. Part 2', *History of Psychiatry*, 14 (2003), pp. 63-81; P. Laffey, 'Psychiatric Therapy in Georgian Britain', *Psychological Medicine*, 33 (2003), pp. 1285-1297; Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', pp. 467-479.

[26] Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', pp. 467-479; J. Andrews, 'Cause or Symptom?: Contentions Surrounding Religious Melancholy and Mental Medicine in Late-Georgian Britain', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 44 (2011), pp. 63-91; J. Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul: Religion, Moral Philosophy and Madness* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 1-18, 27-128.

[27] Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Care of the Soul*, pp. 1-18, 27-128; Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions*, pp. xv-45.

disorders, while at times advocating a medicinal or spiritual 'physick' in the case of morally neutral psychosis.[28]

For Wesley in particular, it was the role of the minister of God to determine whether the enthusiastic responses of a particular individual were authentic conversion experiences or manifestations of an indisposed body.[29] For example, in his journal he notes that Mrs K. of Shattery was not mad, despite her erratic behaviour and visions of the devil.[30] Her 'very odd kind of madness' was a real symptom of her depressed spiritual state.[31] In contrast, Wesley recognized that another unfortunate woman in Weardale was not like Mrs K.[32] 'Raving mad', he was compelled to leave her in her distressed state; his spiritual ministrations could not heal her disturbed faculties.[33] Her mind may have been innocent, but her body was ill and could, therefore, not comprehend the gospel message.[34]

Yet how did someone distinguish the work of the Spirit from enthusiasm and insanity? Wesley's emphasis on 'Christian perfection', or the sanctification of the individual and the pursuit of the godly life, was governed by an active understanding of grace.[35] God's 'spirit concurs with' the individual in question, inspiring them to live a holy and good life.[36] The minister did not, however, deny that at times the Spirit acted in an intense manner during periods of revivalism, yet these were 'rare instances'.[37] Following the Reformed and the Evangelical emphasis on living a holy life, he emphasized the fact that it was the 'plain, scriptural, rational' transformation of the Christian life, 'inwardly and outwardly', which enabled someone to 'do good and be good'.[38] An individual could not truly be a helpful member of

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[28] Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions*, p. xv-45; D. Madden, 'Medicine and Moral Reform: The Place of Practical Piety in John Wesley's Art of Physic', *Church History*, 73 (2004), pp. 741-758.

[29] Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', pp. 467-479.

[30] Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', pp. 467-479; J. Wesley, 'Journal', in J. Emory (ed.), *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley* (New York, 1856), pp. 278-279.

[31] Wesley, 'Journal', pp. 278-279.

[32] Wesley, 'Journal', pp. 278-279.

[33] Wesley, 'Journal', pp. 278-279.

[34] Wesley, 'Journal', pp. 278-279.

[35] Brown, *Providence and Empire,* p. 276; Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, pp. 120-121, 126, 156-157, 216, 270-271, 275, 282; Madden, 'Medicine and Moral Reform', pp. 741-758.

[36] Madden, 'Medicine and Moral Reform', pp. 741-758; Wesley, 'The Nature of Enthusiasm', pp. 1-6.

[37] Wesley, 'The Nature of Enthusiasm', pp. 1-6.

[38] Wesley, 'The Nature of Enthusiasm', pp. 1-6.

society without the aid of God's transformative power, thus their 'social holiness' was a sign that their conversion experience was authentic.[39]

Enthusiasm in the Writings of Jonathan Edwards

Wesley's contemporary, Jonathan Edwards, also examined the nature of religious enthusiasm and the work of the Spirit. The Congregationalist theologian was one of the leading figures in Evangelical revivalism.[40] His 'faithful narrative' of the early eighteenth-century revivals inspired Evangelicals across the Atlantic, and became a blueprint for understanding 'the outpourings of the Spirit'.[41] Yet these early American revivals were not without their dark side: Edwards' uncle, Joseph Hawley II, was apparently tormented by his own sense of damnation and committed suicide.[42] Unfortunately, Hawley was not the only individual to take his life, and a series of suicides marred the first Great Awakening.[43] Edwards, defending the revivals, argued that these fatal cases of insanity were atypical since most of the individuals who manifested an 'unusual response to the gospel' did not fall into such an abject state and commit suicide.[44] Religious insanity and religious enthusiasm were not identical.[45] Indeed, given the glorious nature of God and the frailty of man, the revivals' physical manifestations were unsurprising.[46] In the specific case of his uncle, however, Edwards, employing more traditional conceptions of mania, noted that although 'sovereign providence' saw fit to depress Hawley's spirits, the

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[39] Wesley, 'The Nature of Enthusiasm' pp. 1-6.

[40] Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, pp. 24, 75-80.

[41] Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, pp. 92, 101, 137.

[42] Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, p. 79; N. Dain, 'Madness and the Stigma of Sin in America Christianity', in P. J. Fink and A. Tasman (Eds.), *Stigma and Mental Illness* (Washington, 1992), pp. 75-77.

[43] Dain, 'Madness and the Stigma of Sin in America Christianity', pp. 75-77.

[44] J. Edwards, *The Great Awakening: A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton (1736),* C. C. Goen (Ed.) (New Haven, 1972), pp. 109, 224-265; Dain, 'Madness and the Stigma of Sin', p. 76.

[45] Dain, 'Madness and the Stigma of Sin', p. 76; R. J. Martin, '"Violent Motions of Carnal Affections": Jonathan Edwards, John Owen, and Distinguishing the Work of the Spirit from Enthusiasm', *Detroit Baptist Theological Journal*, 15 (2010), pp. 99-116.

[46] Martin, '"Violent Motions of Carnal Affections"', pp. 99-116.

devil had 'taken advantage' of the state of his soul and convinced him to slit his throat.[47] Hawley, listening to the devil, had decided to take his own life.

Yet Edwards also recognised that not all forms of insanity were moral in character. In his account of the missionary David Brainerd, he discusses Brainerd's 'melancholy' (an early modern term for a variety of mental disorders), arguing that it was the result of a natural infirmity, not a sinful life or erroneous choices.[48] Indubitably, in both his 'faithful narrative' and his work on Brainerd, Edwards was defending his own beliefs, from accusations of religious insanity in the former account, to allegations against the moral character of a minister in the latter.[49] Nevertheless, Edwards, like Wesley, distinguished between moral and natural accounts of madness: Brainerd, as opposed to the merchant, did truly suffer from some mental weakness. The early Evangelicals did not merely see melancholy as the outworking of human wickedness or demonic activity.[50]

Like Wesley, Edwards envisioned the authentic revivalist experience within an introspective framework. Although Wesley's emphasis on 'Christian perfection' was not identical to Edwards' view of sanctification, the American minister saw the transformation of the way an individual acted in society as one of the chief signs of genuine 'religious affection'.[51] It enabled a minister to 'separate between the wheat and the chaff', thereby distinguishing between the 'outpourings of the Spirit' and fanatic enthusiasm.[52] Indeed, throughout his 'faithful narrative', Edwards describes how the change of heart wrought by the Holy Spirit impacted local communities in positive ways, such as the establishment of 'societies for

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[47] Dain, 'Madness and the Stigma of Sin', p. 76; Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions*, pp. xv-45; S. Kemp and K. Williams, 'Demonic Possession and Mental Disorder in Medieval and Early Modern Europe', *Psychological Medicine*, 17 (1987), pp. 21-29.

[48] J. Edwards, *The Life of David Brainerd* (New York, 2007), pp. 3-264; Dain, 'Madness and the Stigma of Sin', pp. 75-76.

[49] Dain, 'Madness and the Stigma of Sin', p. 76.

[50] Dain, 'Madness and the Stigma of Sin', pp. 75-77.

[51] J. Edwards, 'A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections in Three Parts', <http://www.jonathan-edwards.org/ReligiousAffections.pdf>, accessed 08.02.2016; J. Edwards, 'The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God', <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/works2.vii.html>, accessed 10.02.2016; Martin, '"Violent Motions of Carnal Affections', p. 104-115; Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, pp. 119-122, 156-158.

[52] Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, pp. 119-122, 156-158.

prayer' before, during and after specific revivals.[53] However, it was precisely the failure of good works alone to achieve salvation that kindled the 'outpourings of the Spirit', which led to genuine reform, both of an individual's heart and the community.[54]

For both ministers, the essential feature of true 'religious affection' was the state of an individual's faith.[55] In his sermon on enthusiasm Wesley primarily focuses on the personal quest for 'true religion', not good works.[56] Similarly, Edwards chiefly measured the 'unusual responses to the gospel' present during periods of revivalism against an individual's relationship with God.[57] Did *he* confess to Christ?[58] Did *he* have an appropriate sense of his own sin?[59] Did *he* genuinely love God and his neighbour?[60] Even in Edwards' 'faithful narrative', many of the social effects of revivalism were primarily focused on the state of the human soul vis-à-vis its maker, not necessarily the social state of the world.[61] Essentially, 'the relationship of the self to God eclipsed all other concerns' during the early revivals.[62]

Later Evangelicalism and Social Reform

Yet in the latter part of the eighteenth century, reflecting the growing preoccupation with moral and institutional improvement amongst a variety of groups, Evangelicals increasingly sought not only to transform individual hearts but also the condition of their communities.[63] Finney and a number of his contemporaries, for instance, advocated a postmillennial vision of reform

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[53] J. Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*, pp. 31-82, 104-111; Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, pp. 92, 101, 110, 137.
[54] Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, pp. 92, 101, 110, 137.
[55] Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, pp. 233-290.
[56] Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, pp. 233-290; Wesley, 'The Nature of Enthusiasm', pp. 1-6.
[57] Edwards, 'A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections'; Edwards, 'The Distinguishing Marks'; Martin, '"Violent Motions of Carnal Affections"', pp. 8-10.
[58] Martin, '"Violent Motions of Carnal Affections"', pp. 8-10.
[59] Martin, '"Violent Motions of Carnal Affections"', pp. 8-10.
[60] Martin, '"Violent Motions of Carnal Affections"', pp. 8-10.
[61] Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative,* pp. 31-82.
[62] Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, p. 233.
[63] Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism*, pp. 159-227; Innes and Burns, 'Introduction', pp. 1-70; J. Innes, '"Reform" in English Public Life: the Fortunes of a Word', in J. Innes and A. Burns (Eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 71-97; J. Sperber, 'Reforms, Movements for Reform, and Possibilities of Reform: Comparing Britain and Continental Europe', in J. Innes and A. Burns (Eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 312-330.

in America.[64] They expanded the 'Christian perfection' doctrines of Wesley, placing greater emphasis on the power of sanctification through the Spirit and the reformation of society, in what came to be known as the 'Keswick' or 'Higher Life' movement.[65] The millennium, or the thousand years of righteousness spoken of in the Bible, would soon arrive if Christians acted as the true church, allowing the Spirit to transform not only their hearts but also their communities through reforms such as the abolition of slavery.[66] Within this postmillennial context, Finney's understanding of religious insanity is particularly relevant to the question of social reform.[67] By offering a 'physick' in the form of the gospel message, 'the outpourings of the Spirit' improved not only the lives of mentally disturbed individuals but also the entire community, transforming the 'deranged' into responsible members of society.[68] Indeed, Finney's emphasis on revival as reform reflects a growing trend amongst Evangelicals to advocate for more humane, or 'reformed', treatments to cure the mentally ill.[69]

The all-encompassing vision of the 'Age of Reform' included peoples from all walks of life.[70] Alongside the moral prosecutions of the ecclesiastical courts, voluntary associations focused on moral and social reform became more widespread in the eighteenth century, in the absence of an established bureaucracy for state-sponsored reform initiatives.[71] Revivalism had kindled a renewed interest in the 'reformation of manners', with associations such as the Society for Distributing Religious Tracts handing out material on proper moral behaviour.[72]

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[64] U. Pak, 'Social Reform and Theology in the Ministry of Charles G. Finney', *Theological Forum*, 58 (2009), pp. 101-139; Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism*, pp. 71-94, 159-192; C. E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, 1996), pp. 206-207.

[65] Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney*, pp. 206-207; A. Porter, 'Cambridge, Keswick, and Late-nineteenth-century Attitudes to Africa', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 5 (1976), pp. 5-34; Brown, *Providence and Empire*, pp. 277-278.

[66] Brown, *Providence and Empire*, pp. 277-278.

[67] Brown, *Providence and Empire*, pp. 277-278; Dain, 'Madness and the Stigma of Sin', pp. 76-77.

[68] Dain, 'Madness and the Stigma of Sin', pp. 76-77; C.G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* (Oberlin, 1888), p. 149.

[69] Scull, *The Most Solitary of Afflictions*, pp. 19, 84-87.

[70] Wolffe, *The Expansion of Evangelicalism*, pp. 159-192; Innes and Burns, 'Introduction', pp. 1-70; Brown, *Providence and Empire*, pp. 133-207.

[71] Brown, *Providence and Empire*, pp. 133-207; Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, p. 68; G. Gamm and R. D. Putnam, 'The Growth of Voluntary Associations in America, 1840–1940', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 29 (1999), pp. 511-557; Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, pp. 149-181; A. Porter, 'Religion and Empire: British Expansion in the Long Nineteenth Century, 1780–1914', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 20 (1992), pp. 370-390.

[72] Porter, 'Religion and Empire', pp. 370-390; Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, pp. 149-181.

Missionary activity, stemming from various Nonconformist denominations and the established Churches, also intensified, often through the efforts of particular societies, such as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK).[73] It was commonplace to regard the expansion of the British Empire, for instance, as a call to the new 'chosen people', commanding them to not merely Christianise, but also to cultivate the peoples of the world.[74] Ultimately, a 'Higher Life' was possible for everyone.[75]

While the various proponents of different reforms, missions and voluntary associations did not always agree, they were nonetheless willing to work alongside each other on occasion. Cooperation was an important factor amongst the various reformers, providing further evidence for the more 'outward-looking' nature of evangelicalism at the time.[76] For instance, Evangelicals such as William Wilberforce partnered with the supporters of Jeremy Bentham (the father of modern utilitarianism) on lunacy reforms, although their motivations for doing so were often at odds.[77] The central desire for reform could smooth differences of opinion between the various parties—the subscription to a particular type of theology, ideology or belief could not be insisted upon in such cases.

Yet not everyone embraced this postmillennial vision for social reformation. During the 1820s there was a growing degree of cynicism amongst evangelicals.[78] In Britain in particular, the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, which removed the legal restrictions that barred Catholics from political participation, challenged the Protestant identity of the nation, while the failed efforts to convert the Irish Catholics during the New Reformation movement obscured Britain's role as the new 'chosen people'.[79] The Scottish minister Edward Irving, for example, maintained a decidedly melancholic view of social reform.[80] His premillennial emphasis on the

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[73] Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, pp. 149-181; Brown, *Providence and Empire*, pp. 1-63, 133-207.

[74] Brown, *Providence and Empire*, pp. 1-63, 133-207.

[75] Brown, *Providence and Empire*, pp. 277-287.

[76] Innes and Burns, 'Introduction', pp. 1-70; Scull, *The Most Solitary of Affections*, pp. 84-85.

[77] Scull, *The Most Solitary of Affections*, pp. 84-85.

[78] Brown, *Providence and Empire*, pp. 64-68; A. N. Porter, 'Evangelicalism, Islam, and Millennial Expectation in the Nineteenth Century', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 24 (2000), pp. 111-118.

[79] Porter, 'Evangelicalism, Islam, and Millennial Expectation in the Nineteenth Century', pp. 111-118.

[80] Brown, *Providence and Empire*, pp. 2, 45, 57-58, 64-68, 92.

depraved state of the current world and the establishment of the thousand-year millennium of peace after the return of Christ stood in opposition to Finney's emphasis on the possibility of 'entire sanctification' within the present time.[81] While Finney declared that 'if the church will do her duty the millennium may come in this country in three years', Irving heralded 'a series of thick-coming judgments and fearful perplexities' before the Second Coming of Christ.[82]

The Ulster Revival of 1859

The relationship between social reform and revivalism persisted well into the nineteenth century. Defending the intense displays of religious emotions during the Ulster Revival of 1859, for example, the Presbyterian minister William Gibson noted that very few individuals were admitted to an asylum on account of the 'unusual responses to the gospel' witnessed at the time.[83] Similar to Wesley, Gibson argued that religion, like politics, could 'swell the number of the insane' since a deranged individual could latch onto any ideology.[84] These ill-fated men and women did truly suffer from a mental disorder, yet their intense response to the gospel message was a symptom or manifestation of their insanity, not the cause.[85] Rather than arguing that there were no genuine cases of madness during the Ulster Revival, the Presbyterian minister was in fact astonished that there were not *more* episodes of madness among those attending the meetings.[86] Since religion could potentially 'swell the numbers of the insane', the Revival was unusual insofar as 'it has led to fewer instances of [lunacy] than any similar movement on record'.[87] Like Finney, Gibson saw Evangelical revivalism as a social

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[81] Brown, *Providence and Empire*, pp. 2, 45, 57-58, 64-68, 92; Finney, *Lectures on Revivals,* p. 290.

[82] Finney, *Lectures on Revivals,* p. 290; E. Irving, *Babylon and Infidelity Foredoomed of God: A Discourse on the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse, which Relate to these Later Times* (Philadelphia, 1828); Brown, *Providence and Empire*, p. 57.

[83] W. Gibson, *The Year of Grace, a History of the Ulster Revival of 1859* (Edinburgh, 1860), pp. 1-383; J. G. Donat, 'Medicine and Religion: on the Physical and Mental Disorders that Accompanied the Ulster Revival of 1859', in W. F. Bynum, R. Porter and M. Shepherd (Eds.), *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry* (London, 1988), pp. 125-150; Brown, *Providence and Empire*, pp. 210-212, 219.

[84] Gibson, *The Year of Grace,* p. 395; Donat, 'Medicine and Religion', p. 143.

[85] Donat, 'Medicine and Religion', p. 143.

[86] Donat, 'Medicine and Religion', p. 143.

[87] Donat, 'Medicine and Religion', p. 143.

'physick' for ailing individuals. The Ulster Revival dispelled, rather than kindled, epidemics of mania.

As a supporter of and participant in the Ulster Revival, however, we cannot take Gibson's account at face value. Since he was defending the revival against its critics, he may have felt obliged to downplay the more negative aspects of the 'unusual responses to the gospel' at the time.[88] Yet the opponents of the Ulster Revival were not without their own biases.[89] For instance, although the revival attracted a number of medical critics, in the nineteenth century the psychiatric profession was still in its infancy.[90] 'Domesticating' the manners of the mentally ill, whilst increasingly underlining the incorrigible nature of insanity, they would have been far less likely to support alternative modes of healing and reform that challenged their tenuous status within society.[91]

Moreover, while the Ulster Revival attracted a notable degree of criticism, several doctors did, in fact, challenge the view of religious 'hysteria' prevalent at the time.[92] Since they were Presbyterians and inhabitants of the Ulster region, they, like Gibson, also may have been more inclined to believe that the 'unusual responses' were truly the work of the Spirit.[93] Nonetheless, their understanding of the nature of social reform and madness is notable vis-à-vis the conceptions of religious insanity discussed above. For example, John Motherwell argued that the individuals who manifested a particularly 'unusual response to the gospel' were not hysterical.[94] Their enthusiastic response to the gospel was not a sign of a deranged mind, since they had bettered the 'moral and religious tone of the community'.[95] Alexander Cuthbert, in a similar vein to Gibson, recognised that there were several cases of genuine

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[88] Donat, 'Medicine and Religion', p. 143.
[89] Donat, 'Medicine and Religion', pp. 125-150.
[90] Scull, *The Most Solitary of Affections*, p. 1-114, 334-374; A. Scull, 'From Madness to Mental Illness: Medical Men as Moral Entrepreneurs', *European Journal of Sociology*, 16 (1975), pp. 218-261.
[91] Scull, 'From Madness to Mental Illness', pp. 218-261; A. Scull, 'The Domestication of Madness', *Medical History*, 27 (1983), pp. 233-248.
[92] Donat, 'Medicine and Religion', pp. 125-150; Brown, *Providence and Empire*, pp. 210-212.
[93] Brown, *Providence and Empire*, pp. 210-212.
[94] J. Motherwell, 'Letter', *Banner of Ulster*, 24 September 1859, p. 4, quoted in Donat, 'Medicine and Religion', pp. 133, 136.
[95] Donat, 'Medicine and Religion', pp. 133, 136.

hysteria among the individuals attending the revivals, while arguing that these were far fewer in number than the accounts of the Revival's critics.[96] For Cuthbert, like Gibson and Motherwell, a key factor in determining the difference between mental disturbance and the Spirit was the 'moral improvement' of the community after the Ulster Revival. [97] The revival was a 'blessed agent' of social change in the region.[98]

Gibson, Cuthbert and Motherwell's emphasis on the nature of genuine conversion and its relationship to the betterment of society was not unfounded. Following the Ulster Revival, for example, the Female Mission was established in Belfast.[99] In the context of the evangelising efforts discussed above, the Mission's purpose was twofold: to reform both human hearts and social conditions, which had in many ways deteriorated with rapid industrialisation and urbanization.[100] As Norman Sykes has argued, many Christians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries envisioned their efforts as challenging the 'moral evils' of the modern world, which had not only led to increased levels of depravity (such as alcoholism), but also, in the specific case of the Female Mission, put Ulster's 'economic development' at risk.[101] These efforts were not merely the result of 'social control'.[102] The Mission sought to improve both the spiritual and physical wellbeing of the lower classes, teaching them skills, such as reading, which would make them more productive members of both the Church and society.[103] Their notion of reform was fundamentally inclusive: it benefited the individual on a personal and spiritual level, as well as the community on an economic level.[104]

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[96] A. Cuthbert, 'On the Prominent Features of the Ulster Revival', *Medical Times & Gazette*, 5th November 1859, pp. 293-294, quoted in Donat, 'Medicine and Religion', pp. 135-136.

[97] Donat, 'Medicine and Religion', pp. 135-136.

[98] Donat, 'Medicine and Religion', pp. 135-136.

[99] J. N. I. Dickson, 'Evangelical Religion and Victorian Women: the Belfast Female Mission, 1859-1903', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 55 (2004), pp. 700- 725.

[100] Dickson, 'Evangelical Religion and Victorian Women', pp. 700- 725.

[101] Dickson, 'Evangelical Religion and Victorian Women', pp. 700- 725; N. Sykes, *From Sheldon to Secker: Aspects of English Church History 1660-1768* (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 185–187; Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, pp. 149-156.

[102] Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, pp. 149-156.

[103] Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, pp. 149-156.

[104] Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, pp. 149-156.

The Age of Reform

The growing emphasis on the transformation of temporal communities among revivalists reflects the prevalence of the idea of reform in the public sphere from the 1780s.[105] In a similar vein to the abovementioned history of insanity, recent scholars such as Joanna Innes and Arthur Burns have challenged nineteenth and twentieth-century Whiggish narratives of progress, many of which saw the eighteenth century as the 'dark ages' in order to highlight their own quest for social improvement.[106] Although briefly stifled by the atrocities of the French Revolution and subsequent besmirching of 'radical' ideas that proposed change, the idea of 'reform' and a 'theology of good works', present throughout British voluntarism in the eighteenth century, actually increased in prominence in the latter part of the century, providing a stimulus to later reform movements.[107]

This shift in focus is reflected in the language of religious madness and social reform. Between the writings of Wesley and Gibson, attention was increasingly directed towards how revivals transformed the world around them, reflecting not only their connection to contemporary social movements, but also highlighting a key similarity between revivalism and the ecclesiastical reform of the established Church at the time.[108] Both the Church and the leaders of the revivals recognised the moral and social ills, such as increasing levels of poverty, which 'consumer society' had brought about.[109] Notwithstanding the differences of theology and institutions, which became more pronounced in the latter part of the eighteenth

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[105] Innes and Burns, 'Introduction', pp. 1-70; Innes, '"Reform" in English Public Life: the Fortunes of a Word', pp. 71-97; Sperber, 'Reforms, Movements for Reform, and Possibilities of Reform', pp. 312-330.

[106] Innes and Burns, 'Introduction', pp. 4-16; Scull, *The Most Solitary of Affections*, pp. xv-45.

[107] F. Knight, 'Internal Church Reform, 1850-1920: An Age of Innovation in Ecclesiastical Reform', in J. V Eijnatten and P. Yates (Eds.), *The Churches: The Dynamics of Religious Reform in Northern Europe* (Leuven, 2010), pp. 75-117; Madden, 'Medicine and Moral Reform', pp. 741-758; Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, pp. 149-244.

[108] Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, pp. 149-244.; Brown, *Providence and Empire*, pp. 133-207.

[109] S. Taylor, 'Whigs, Bishops and America: The Politics of Church Reform in mid-Eighteenth-Century England', *The Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), pp. 331-356; Yates, *Eighteenth Century Britain*, pp. 220-242, 271-278; A. Burns, 'English 'Church Reform' Revisited, 1780-1840', in J. Innes and A. Burns (Eds.), *Rethinking the Age of Reform: Britain 1780-1850* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 136-162.

century, in a number of respects revivalism and ecclesiastical reform held parallel purposes: to improve the lot of the disadvantaged.[110]

Thus, the way proponents of Evangelical revivalism understood enthusiasm and the workings of the Spirit highlights not only the several perceptions of insanity among early modern evangelicals, but also the relationship between the revivals and the widespread reform movements at the time. As part of a trans-Atlantic drive towards 'reform', revival leaders consciously saw the 'outpourings of the Spirit' as a means of 'reviving' not only the soul, but also society. Rather than increasing the numbers of the mentally disturbed, revivals could actually act as agents of reform, transforming individuals into valuable members of the community. Ultimately, for men like Wesley and Gibson, true madness lay more in the accusations of their detractors than the 'unusual responses to the gospels' witnessed at the time.

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[110] A. Stott, 'Hannah More and the Blagdon Controversy, 1799-1802', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 51 (2000), pp. 319-346.

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