

Why Christians Should Get...

Involved

In Politics & Society

Dr. Andrew Corbett

**WHY
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INVOLVED
IN POLITICS & SOCIETY**

Short Essays In Christian Engagement Philosophy

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WHY WE ARE LOSING.

While I was either listening to or giving a sermon, with the aim of persuading people to accept Christ, the great majority of people that I was hoping to eventually reach were effectively being evangelised with a different gospel! This alternate gospel has now been embraced by millions in Australia. It has convinced its followers that all religions are the same, and that any religion is essentially a private matter. But it has managed to effectively persuade its followers not through sermons, but through media, education, legislation, and lifestyles. And its most deadly advances have been ingenuously based on the very principles Christ gave the Church- which it has been duped into ignoring for the past two centuries! The result is, no matter how hard we try, by ignoring these principles, we will never fulfil the Great Commission of Christ!

John Wesley and George Whitefield were arguably the two greatest preachers of all time. They preached at times to tens of thousands of people in single gatherings. Hundreds of thousands of people credited their salvation to the preaching of these great men. Their preaching revival lasted between



1740 and 1780. Yet, curiously, two almost inexplicable things remained unaltered in England during this time. Firstly, the total numbers in churches after this period was unaffected by the revival. There were just as many people in churches after their revival as there was before the revival. Secondly, England's social climate was quite possibly worse, not improved.

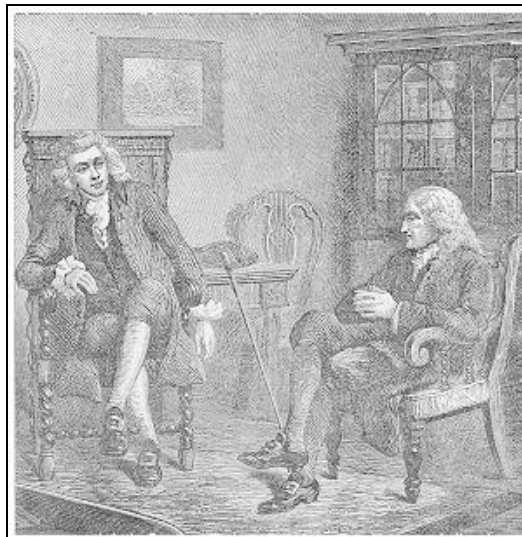
For example, historian J. Wesley Bready, writes in his book, "*England Before and After Wesley*", describes this era as being characterised by-

"the wanton torture of animals for sport, the bestial drunkenness of the populace, the inhuman traffic in African Negroes, the kidnapping of fellow-countrymen for exportation and sale as slaves, the mortality of parish children, the universal gambling obsession, the savagery of the prison system and penal code, the welter of immorality, the prostitution of theatre, the growing prevalence of lawlessness, superstition and lewdness; the political bribery and corruption, the ecclesiastical arrogance and truculence, the shallow pretensions of Deism, the insincerity and debasement rampant in Church and State – such manifestations suggest that the British people were then perhaps as deeply degraded and debauched as any people in Christendom."

J. Wesley Bready, "*England: Before and After Wesley*", Hodder and Stoughton, 1939:11, 14

Many Christians decry our social climate and long for another revival like that of Wesley and Whitefield to fix all our social ills. Yet history tends to indicate that evangelistic revivals, in themselves, don't necessarily fix anything. But by around 1820 nearly all of the social vices mentioned by Bready were remedied! Added to this, church attendance was at record highs! For example, around 1780 there were an estimated 50,000 Methodists in England but by around 1820 there were an estimated 1,000,000 English Methodists! As well as this, the British Parliament were passing laws that righted wrongs, brought justice to the underprivileged, and implemented social reforms that are still in place today!

So what happened during the subsequent forty years after Wesley and Whitefield that achieved so much social reform and evangelistic gains? The etching below is a depiction of the very elderly John Wesley counselling a young man to undertake what he had failed to achieve. I believe this young man and his mission became the reason so much was achieved during this time.



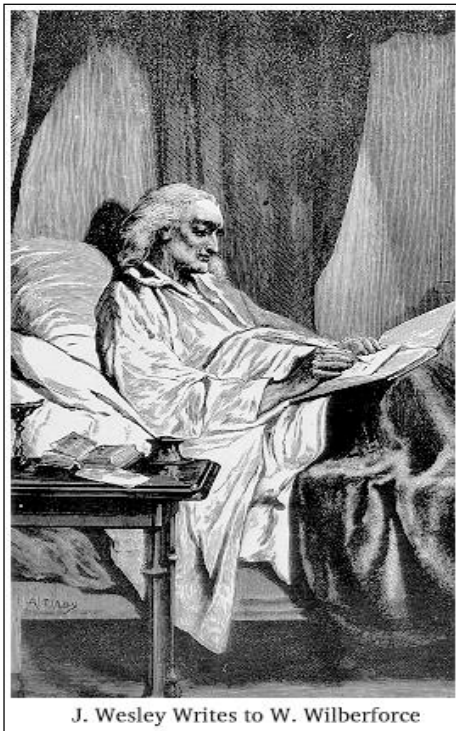
William Wilberforce was the son of a wealthy industrialist. He lived a carefree life with all the pretences of being religious. He stood for Parliament in his early twenties and won a seat in the House of Commons. Not long after this, with failing health, he took a recuperating vacation in France with a friend who was a Methodist. During their many hours in the coach they read a book which eventually led to Wilberforce being soundly converted to Christ. His conversion was so dramatic that he felt he could no longer be a Parliamentarian (since it was commonly known that Parliamentarians were among the most corrupt people in English society). Before deciding on his future he sought counsel from his childhood pastor- John Newton. Newton encouraged him to serve Christ in Parliament and be a minister of Christ in that capacity.

This counsel profoundly changed the course of British history. Wilberforce realised that the Word of God was not just for Christians, but for all mankind. This revelation would drastically grip Wilberforce for the rest of his political career and cause him to deserve some of the highest honours ever bestowed upon a person.



Wilberforce is honoured in Westminster Abbey, London, with this monument.

Wilberforce began to identify where in society England had deviated from God's standards. He didn't have to look far. The most prominent blight was slavery. The English people had been told that they were actually doing these black Africans a favour by removing them brutal, tribal, enslavement, in a godless nation and blessing them with the opportunity to walk on "God's green pastures" and enjoy the privileges of eating "real food" and contributing to the glory of the Empire. But Wilberforce exposed these myths with well-researched data and godly ideals.



J. Wesley Writes to W. Wilberforce

As he declared the standards of right and wrong in the eyes of God, and showed England their need to amend their ways, he was ridiculed, mocked, and derided. His speeches were reported in newspapers and read all over England. He felt the need to re-educate England. This resulted in him writing a book on 'Systematic Theology for the Common Man' which he was told would bankrupt him, but actually went into three reprints!

Wilberforce saw how the Gospel should affect the way people treat each other, their animals, their employees and society as a whole. This led him to found and fund over 70 different societies, including the Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals, and the Bible

Society. All of this engagement in society – its arts, media, politics, and education- caused the population to increasingly realise the truth of God's claims and therefore their own need to accept Him and His Gospel.

I realised that in studying Wilberforce and this era, that he had tapped into the very principles of Christ which the Evangelical Church seems to have largely ignored. These principles include being salt, light, leaven, seed, the pillar of truth, and a prophetic voice. These roles are coupled with determination, the empowering of the Holy Spirit, persistence in the midst of ridicule and persecution, and a trans-generational vision.

It's simply not enough to attempt to evangelise our society with sermons. We must also present Christ in the arena of the Academy, Arts, Media, Politics, and Marketplace. Our opponents have been subtly(?) evangelising our society for decades with their message of secularism (life without God) and inculcated their values into these very arenas where we should have always been engaging. This is why we are losing.

But we can win. The following articles will hopefully fuel that victory fire and give you a vision for why Christians should be involved in politics and society for the glory of Christ and promotion of His eternal light.

Andrew Corbett, June 30th 2005

WHY CHRISTIANS NEED TO ENGAGE

In Society...

A response to those who believe that Christians should have nothing to do with politics.

"It's a waste of time for Christians get involved in politics! Jesus wants us to preach the Gospel and feed the hungry and not get obsessed with political power!"

This is the belief of many Christians but I strongly suspect that its roots are actually secular not Biblical. That is, I would suspect that for most Christians who believe this type of thinking it has more to say about their own apathy than their Biblical convictions.