



# Christian Leadership in the Public Square

Learning from  
Nineteenth Century Evangelicals



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Introduction:

An Extraordinary Period with Extraordinary Christian Leaders

Here, the tincture of vital religion has spread through the society, giving it the coloration of a revived Christianity. This new society, a product of the silent revolution within its own resources, its own history and traditions, was far from perfect, but it freed the slaves, taught the ignorant, brought spiritual life where there was darkness, turned the drunk and indigent into useful citizens and effective parents, and ameliorated the harsh conditions brought about by industrialization, internal migration, and rapid population growth. It was a revolution that succeeded in making almost all things better.

[Herbert Schlossberg, *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England*, p. 314]

## Some Key Characteristics of Early Nineteenth-Century Evangelical Leaders

### 1. A Deep Spiritual Earnestness ('seriousness')

...while the servants of Christ continue in this life, glorious as is the issue of their labours, they receive but too many humiliating memorials of their remaining imperfections, and they daily find reason to confess, that they cannot do the things that they would. *Their determination, however, is still unshaken, and it is the fixed desire of their hearts to improve in all holiness*--and this, let it be observed, on many accounts. Various passions concur to push them forward; they are urged on by the dread of failure, in this arduous but necessary work; they trust not, where their all is at stake, to lively emotions, or to internal impressions however warm; the example of Christ is their pattern, the word of God is their rule; there they read, that 'without holiness no man shall see the Lord'.

[William Wilberforce, *A Practical View*, 108-9]

The 'One Thing Needful' was a favourite evangelical text, the subject of many sermons, of letters from parents to children, and of meditations by individuals. [William] Gladstone's Confirmation prayer included the petition that he might live 'not seeking after vain things, but making the One Thing Needful the great, the supreme, the paramount object of my pursuit and my desire'.

[Doreen Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture*, 55]

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## 2. Trans-Denominationalism (and an Aversion to 'Party Spirit')

## When Charles Simeon Met John Wesley (30 October, 1787)

Sir, I understand that you are called an Arminian; and I have been sometimes called a Calvinist; and therefore I suppose we are to draw daggers. But before I consent to begin the combat, with your permission I will ask you a few questions. Pray, Sir, do you feel yourself a depraved creature, so depraved that you would never have thought of turning to God, if God had not first put it into your heart?

*Yes, I do indeed.*

And do you utterly despair of recommending yourself to God by anything you can do; and look for salvation solely through the blood and righteousness of Christ?

*Yes, solely through Christ.*

But, Sir, supposing you were at first saved by Christ, are you not somehow or other to save yourself afterwards by your own works?

*No, I must be saved by Christ from first to last.*



Allowing, then, that you were first turned by the grace of God, are you not in some way or other to keep yourself by your own power?

*No.*

What then, are you to be upheld every hour and every moment by God, as much as an infant in its mother's arms?

*Yes, altogether.*

And is all your hope in the grace and mercy of God to preserve you unto His heavenly kingdom?

*Yes, I have no hope but in Him.*

Then, Sir, with your leave I will put up my dagger again; for this is all my Calvinism; this is my election my justification by faith, my final perseverance: it is in substance all that I hold, and as I hold it; and therefore, if you please, instead of searching out terms and phrases to be a ground of contention between us, we will cordially unite in those things where in we agree.

(H. G. Moule, *Charles Simeon*, 79ff.)

## *British Evangelical Voluntary Societies, founded 1785-1831*

Society for the Support and Encouragement of Sunday Schools (1785)

Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (1787)

Baptist Missionary Society (1792)

Cheap Repository Tracts (1795)

Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor (1796)

London Missionary Society (1797)

Church Missionary Society (1799)

Society for the Suppression of Vice (1802)

Sunday School Union (1803)

British and Foreign Bible Society (1804)

Society for Promoting the Observance of the Christian Sabbath (1809)

Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (1824)

Lord's Day Observance Society (1831)

British and Foreign Temperance Society (1831)

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### 3. An Embrace of Both the Other-Worldliness of Christianity and Societal Transformation

...the sense in which Christian parents would wish to impress on their children, to know the world, is to know its emptiness, its vanity, its futility, and its wickedness. To know it is to despise it; and in this view, an obscure Christian in a village may be said to know it better than a hoary courtier, or wily politician; for how can they be said to *know* it, who go on to love it, to value it, to be led captive by its allurements, to give their soul in exchange for its lying promises?

[Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799)]



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#### 4. An Embrace of Both an Affective and Intellectual Approach to the Christian Faith

God affects the conscience and the heart, and through them the reason. He proposes nothing but what reason, as grace grows, will yield to.

[Josiah Pratt, in *Notes of the Eclectic Society* (1801)]

Comfort is not only connected with sanctification, but is a means of sanctification. *The joy of the Lord is your strength.* You invigorate your child by speaking lovingly to him. I cannot do so much for God when my habit of mind is in an uncomfortable frame, as when cheerful.

[D. Wilson, in *Notes of the Eclectic Society* (1804)]



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## 5. A Conscious Effort to Study the Culture

THE  
ECLECTIC REVIEW,  
For JANUARY, 1805.

*Quid verum aliquis decessu, curis et regis, et omnia in hoc sum;  
Credo et complas, quæ nos deprensere possim,  
De ne fructu reges, quæ me daret, quæ Latet talis,  
Nullius addictus jurare in verba magisteri,  
Quæ me cunque tepus tempestas, deferret Læpæ.* HORATIUS, Epist. L. 1.

IMITATED.

What's 'er is decent, honourable, true,  
With industry we trace, with zeal pursue,  
With care combine, and for immediate use,  
Intent on public benefit, produce.  
Ask you—What Chief, what Party we obey?  
No Party guides, no Chief contrains our way;  
We catch the gale of Sorrow's west, as it blows;  
And join with VIRTUE's friends, nor dread her foes.

ART. I. *An Abstract of the whole Doctrine of the Christian Religion, with Observations.* By John Anastasius Freylinghausen. From a Manuscript in her Majesty's possession. The first Book stereotyped by the new process. pp. 227, very large octavo. Price 12s. Cadell and Davies, London; Constable, Edinburgh; Archer, Dublin. 1804.

AMONG the avowed opponents of Christianity, many have borne a reluctant testimony to the excellence of its moral precepts. That a practical system, which, if universally prevalent, would secure the peace and harmony of the human race, could originate only in delusion, or imposture, appears to us more incredible than any thing contained in the scriptures: and, though the doctrines and the precepts of Christianity require to be distinguished, they are so essentially connected, that both are invalidated by the rejection of either. The inspired writers usually introduce the most sublime truths of revelation, as motives to the practice of moral duties; and rare indeed are the instances of a conduct worthy of our holy religion, among persons who cavil at its doctrines. It may, therefore, justly be asserted, that the most effectual method to promote the welfare of nations, is to diffuse the knowledge of all that our Lord performed and taught; and that those rulers are peculiarly entitled to the filial attachment of their subjects, who, while to a due respect for religious liberty, their example of a practical attention to Christianity, and their exertions for the enlargement of its salutary influence.

At the commencement of a Work, undertaken for the moral, as well as the literary advantage of our countrymen, it affords us particular pleasure to recommend a summary of Christian Doctrine, published under the immediate sanction of HER MAJESTY.

THE  
**CHRISTIAN OBSERVER,**

CONTAINS

**MEMBERS**

OF THE

*ESTABLISHED CHURCH.*

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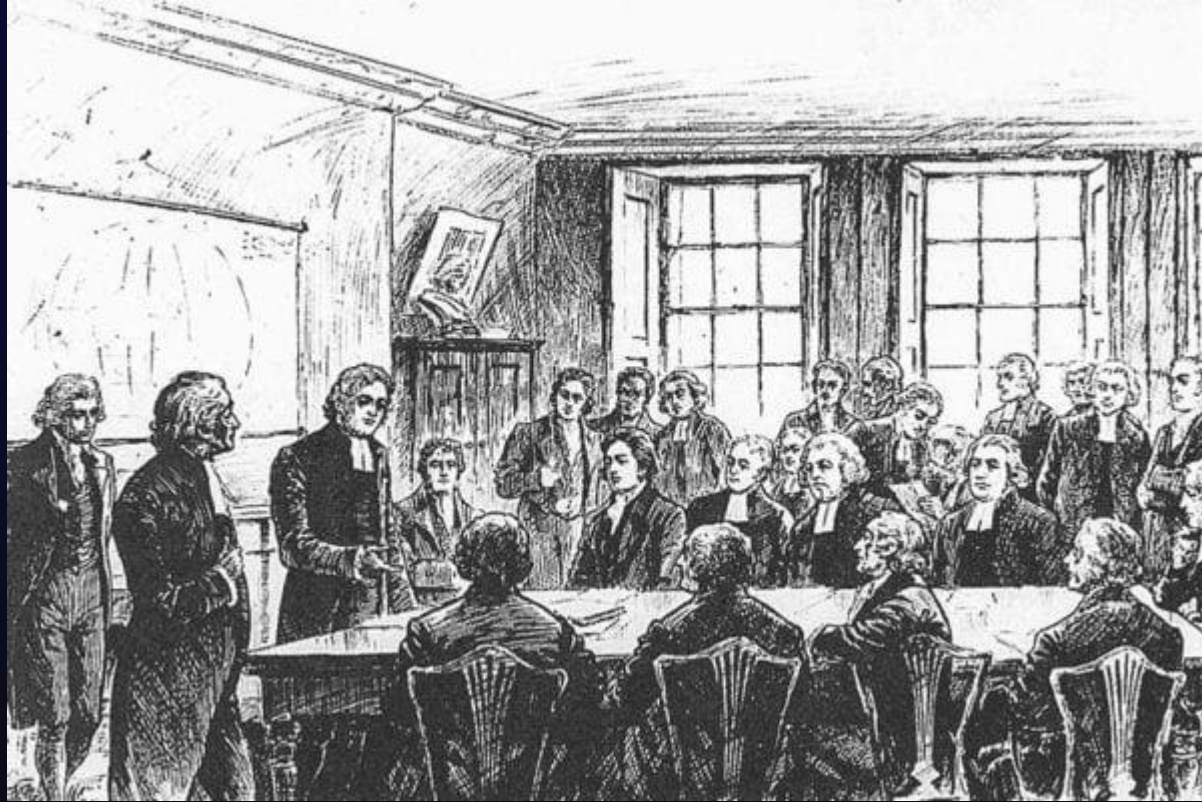
AND ALSO IN AUSTRIA, BY HELDT, ATZ MARG LANE; AND REMOTE, FORTY-NINE ROW; AT BRISTOL,  
BY BARTON AND PARRIS, AND COOKE; AT CAMBRIDGE, BY DUNTON, AND BUCHANAN; AT BATH, BY  
HARRIS; AT BIRMINGHAM, BY HALL; AT EDINBURGH, BY GILL; AT GLASGOW, BY GILL; AT DUBLIN, BY  
COLLIER; AND BY ALL OTHER BOOKSELLERS, AND BY THE DEPOSIT, THROUGHOUT THE UNITED  
KINGDOM.

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## 6. An Intentional Banding Together with Like-Minded Leaders

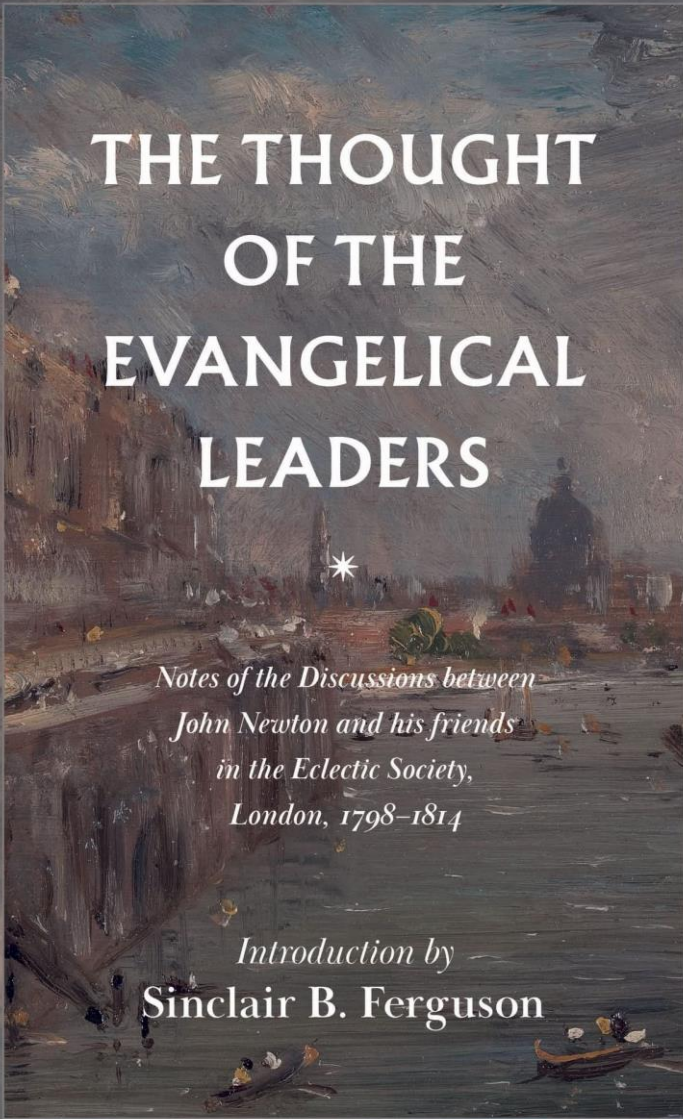


Battersea Rise, Henry Thornton's home in Clapham Village and home base for the 'Clapham Sect'



Founding meeting of the Church Missionary Society  
at Aldersgate St, London, 12 April 1799



The background of the text is a painting of a river scene. In the foreground, there are small boats with people on the water. The middle ground shows a city with buildings and a church spire. The sky is dark and cloudy, with a single white star visible. The overall style is impressionistic or painterly.

# THE THOUGHT OF THE EVANGELICAL LEADERS

*Notes of the Discussions between  
John Newton and his friends  
in the Eclectic Society,  
London, 1798–1814*

*Introduction by*  
**Sinclair B. Ferguson**