

Innocent of Evil: Learning about Godliness from Nineteenth-century Evangelicals

One of the great challenges for discipleship today is navigating a media world which so often floods Christians with content which is undermining or antagonistic to spiritual growth. In the early nineteenth-century, British evangelicals sought to respond to similar challenges--and ended up reforming not only the church, but all of society. This presentation will bring out some of the underlying convictions about discipleship which guided evangelical leaders of the Wilberforce generation, and apply these to Christians living in the internet age.

David Sandifer was born and raised in France, of American parents. He holds a Ph.D. in history, from the University of Cambridge (2014). He spent 20 years in pastoral ministry in the U.S. and Australia, and also worked for a Christian public advocacy organisation in Australia, where he co-launched an on-going campaign to protect children from online pornography. He currently lectures in the area of practical theology and ethics at Tyndale Theological Seminary in the Netherlands. He has a heart to see the church in Europe renewed in love for God and holiness, and to see Christian families equipped to raise counter-cultural disciples who will 'shine like stars in the universe' (Phil. 2:15).

1. Historical Background: An Extraordinary Cultural Shift

2. Evangelical Attitudes: The Ethic of Innocence

1) Seriousness

2) Malleabilism

3) Aesthetic Moralism

4) Modesty (Innocence)

5) Chastity

3. Questions for Contemporary Evangelicalism

Have we underemphasized the importance of applying ourselves to godliness, for fear of a 'works theology'?

Have we absorbed an aestheticist view of the arts which separates quality from edification?

Do we take seriously enough the degree to which our ideas and character are shaped by the media which we consume?

From a desire not to be thought 'prudish' or 'old-fashioned', do we value properly the importance of being 'innocent of evil'?

In an effort to not be overly judgemental, do we properly estimate and warn against the destructiveness of sexual sin?

In wanting to affirm single persons, do we properly elevate marriage and family as God's intended context for human flourishing?

Are we intentional enough in our discipleship (e.g. with children and new believers) in emphasizing the importance of an 'eco-system' of habits and associations?

Are we too shy of giving Christians practical guidance in everyday matters for fear of seeming legalistic?

> *For Further Reading:*

Historical Studies

Bradley, Ian, *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians* (Adam & Charles Black, 1966).

Brown, Ford K., *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge, 1961).

Gurstein, Rochelle, *The Repeal of Reticence: A History of America's Cultural and Legal Struggles Over Free Speech, Obscenity, Sexual Liberation, and Modern Art* (Hill and Wang, 1996).

Himmelfarb, Gertrude, *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values* (Vintage, 1996).

Pratt, Josiah, ed., *The Thought of the Evangelical Leaders: Notes of the Discussions of the Eclectic Society London During the Years 1798 to 1814* (Banner of Trust, 1978).

Prior, Karen Swallow, *Fierce Convictions: The Extraordinary Life of Hannah More--Poet, Reformer, Abolitionist* (Thomas Nelson, 2014).

Schlossberg, Herbert, *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England* (Ohio State University Press, 2000).

Christian Discipleship

Arnold, Johann Christoff, *A Plea for Purity: Sex, Marriage and God* (Plough, 1996).

Bilbro, Jeffrey, *Reading the Times: A Literary and Theological Inquiry into the News* (IVP, 2021).

Doddridge, Philip, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul: Illustrated in a Course of Serious and Practical Addresses, Suited to Persons of Every Character and Circumstance* (available in reprints and online).

Ryle, J. C., *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (available in various editions, both complete and abridged).

von Hildebrand, Dietrich, *In Defense of Purity* (Hildebrand Project, 2017).

Wilberforce, William, *A Practical View of Christianity* (Hendrickson, 2021). [Also available at very low cost on Kindle.]