

THE SPIRITUALITY AND MISSION OF
WILLIAM WILBERFORCE AND THE
CLAPHAM SECT

by
Paul Jensen

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
The Evangelical Awakening that Transformed England	2
The Leaders of the Awakening	4
The Motivation and Relevance of the Study	5
The Focus of this Paper	6
 Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect	 7
Their Context	7
The Slave Trade	8
Social Dislocation and Oppression of the Urban Poor	9
The Established Church	9
A Period of Gloom	10
Evangelical Response	10
Their Spirituality	11
Wilberforce's Conversion	12
The Disciplines of the Spiritual Life	14
Wilberforce's Year of Waiting	15
Wilberforce and the Regula	17
The spiritual Disciplines of Wilberforce's Colleagues	18
Their Mission and Legacy	20
Spreading the Word at Home	21
Spreading the Word Abroad	23
Creating Societies to Alleviate Suffering	24
Infiltrating the Upper and Middle Classes	25
Renewing the Church of England	26
The University and the Nursery	27
Fighting Slavery	28
 Conclusion	 33
 References Cited	 39

INTRODUCTION

“God almighty has set before me two great objects--the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners (English morals).” William Wilberforce (1759-1833), the great British abolitionist member of Parliament, wrote these words in his journal on October 28, 1787. Those living at the time could not have realized how prophetic his words were.

The Evangelical Awakening that Transformed England

At the end of the 18th century and first part of the nineteenth, England experienced one of the most profound religious, social and moral transformations of any western society since the Enlightenment. Building on the earlier work of Wesley and Whitfield which occurred largely outside of Anglicanism, Evangelicals led this massive revival which eventually reformed the state church as well as the nation's political life. Evangelical conversions in all socio-economic groups abounded. Crime rates dropped. Slavery was abolished and a multitude of other social, moral, spiritual and educational changes were brought about by Evangelicals. By 1850, the character and fabric of the whole country had been transformed. Ian Bradley states,

The evidence of this transition is clear throughout every level of society. Among the higher classes it is indicated by the marked decline in race-going, in attendance at theaters and other entertainments, and the closing down of several gaming clubs and pleasure gardens through lack of custom. . . Among the poorer classes, the signs of moral reformation are even more marked. The figures for crime and rioting showed a dramatic drop in the early part of the nineteenth century and the comments of contemporary social observers testify unanimously to the decline of the wild 'Irish temperament' generally attributed to the English poor in the eighteenth century and its replacement by a greater self-discipline and control. As public sports and diversions ceased, people forsook the streets and commons for the quieter pleasures of home (Bradley jacket cover).

Harold Perkins, no fan of the Evangelical movement, commented on its impact on England during this period,

Between 1780 and 1850, the English ceased to be one of the most aggressive, brutal, rowdy, outspoken, riotous, cruel and bloodthirsty nations in the world and became one of the most inhibited, polite, orderly, tender-minded, prudish and hypocritical. (*Ibid.*)

The Edinburgh Review which was usually a critic of Evangelicals stated in 1853 "they have not hesitated to preach in filthy courts and alleys, the haunts of vice and infamy to audiences which could not be tempted to listen under any roof but the sky." (Bradley 50-51) The Review concluded that primarily due to the efforts of Evangelicals "the profound darkness in which the English peasantry were enveloped at the beginning of the century has been gradually dissipated." By 1853, there were 3-4 million Evangelicals in Britain. Noel Annan describes them as "the single most widespread influence in Victorian England." Eric Stokes characterized Evangelicalism as "the rock upon which the character of the Nineteenth Century Englishman was founded." (*Ibid.* 15).

A prominent feature of the movement was the creation of "undenominational" as well as denominational societies, councils and commissions devoted to the alleviation of most every kind of social ill. To spread the word at home and to evangelize unreached peoples abroad, Evangelicals developed Bible societies and foreign mission societies. "Missionary zeal was perhaps the strongest single characteristic of the Evangelicals in the early nineteenth century, and it was certainly one of their most powerful legacies . . ." (*Ibid.* 74) Many of these societies, called sodalities in some contemporary mission circles, survive in England to this day.

The Leaders of the Awakening

The undisputed leader of the Evangelical movement during this era was William Wilberforce who lived in a society of associates known as the Clapham Sect. Wilberforce had been elected to the House of Commons (the lower house of the British Parliament), in 1780 at the age of 21. In 40 plus years, he created 67 societies, councils and commissions. (Eberly 54).

At the peak of Wilberforce's influence, many of his closest associates and their families lived as neighbors in Clapham, a small community several miles outside of London proper just south of the Thames River. They included:

Henry Thornton--a prominent banker and Member of Parliament (MP);

Granville Sharp--an influential barrister (attorney) who had abolished slavery within England itself and had become the chairman of the Abolition Committee;

Charles Grant--entrepreneur and a director of the East India Company and an MP;

Lord John Shore Teignmouth--Governor-General of India;

Zachary Macaulay--an attorney and a dissenting MP;

William Smith--dissenting MP; a Unitarian only non-evangelical in the inner circle;

James Stephen a leading attorney, orator and MP;

Thomas Babington--a Whig MP

John Venn--Rector at Clapham.

The larger circle not residing in Clapham but still considered part of the Clapham Sect included:

Thomas Clarkson, a tireless researcher in Wilberforce's abolition efforts who published his Cambridge prize winning essay against slavery;

Hannah More a leading writer in the London literary scene, playwright, educator

and later an influential religious writer and wealthy philanthropist;

Isaac Milner, Wilberforce's spiritual father and a tutor at Cambridge where he became President of Queen's College and Vice Chancellor of the University;

Charles Simeon, Vicar at Holy Trinity Church and fellow at St. John's College, Cambridge who instigated Evangelical renewal of Anglican clergy and structures.

The members of this impressive and diverse caste were influential upper and middle class laity who accumulated vast networks of relationships, wealth, gifts, skills and education which they devoted completely to reshaping British life for the glory of God. Though abolition and Evangelical piety brought the Sect together initially, their efforts extended to a broad spectrum of social and moral issues. To establish their remarkable legacy, they created alliances across theological, political, class and denominational divisions albeit most were Evangelical Anglicans loyally committed to reforming their church.

The Motivation and Relevance of this Study

As we move towards the beginning of a new millennium, the church in western society faces challenges of immense proportions. While Christianity in most of the rest of the world is growing rapidly (with the exception of Islamic societies), the church in the West and her leaders especially in North America need a new power and a new spirituality necessary for new tasks in a new context. Paul Pierson thinks that we are living in the greatest time of re-shaping the Church since the 16th century (Pierson 62)

Western urban centers represent the next major mission frontier in a postmodern, postchristian era according to some missiologists (*Ibid.* 182-4) In this era, the information revolution in North America is being led by Generation X (b. 1964-82) and the Millennial Generation (b. 1982-)--the first postmodern generations which have been abandoned by the

disintegrating social and moral structures in which they were raised. While technologically sophisticated, these generations are starved for mentors and hungry for spirituality, relationships, and community. They are suspicious of political and religious institutions, but are open to those who exhibit spirituality and social compassion as the Clapham Sect did. Generations that reject the notion of truth itself will respond to truth that is lived--more than truth that is proclaimed.

The Clapham Sect has much to say to us in our context. England at the end of the eighteenth century faced massive changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution. The country had experienced moral and social breakdown at home and the upheaval of the American and French Revolutions abroad. In the face of these challenges, God raised up a group comprised primarily of laymen and laywomen to lead an immense spiritual awakening. In the history of the Christianity, church renewal and expansion have been accompanied by lay renewal in which non-clergy have been spiritually transformed and released in ministry and mission (Ibid. 1998). Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect illustrate this pattern perhaps better than any other group in post-enlightenment western society.

The Focus of this Paper

I will explore the following questions: What was the context in which Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect functioned? How did they practice the disciplines of the spiritual life and how did their spirituality affect their mission? What was their mission and legacy? In the concluding section, I will summarize what I have learned from Wilberforce and his associates, the extent to which the Clapham Sect illustrates the basic theses of this

course, and the implications for my own context. Finally, I will identify questions for further investigation which arise from this study.

WILBERFORCE AND THE CLAPHAM SECT

Eighteen centuries after the birth of Christianity, slavery was finally abolished from England and the rest of the Western world as a result of the Evangelical revival from 1780-1833. This was the greatest social legacy of Wilberforce, his colleagues and the movement they led. What were the context, spirituality and nature of this community and its mission and methods and how can they account for such a legacy?

The Context

The horrors of the British slave trade galvanized Wilberforce and his associates in the long campaign against slavery which they fought from 1787 until his death in 1833. Wilberforce, Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson met weekly with their researchers whom Prime Minister Pitt called “Wilberforce’s Negroes” to study and disseminate their findings to a British public that was largely ignorant of the facts. “I want facts, not opinions,” Wilberforce instructed his researchers (Lean 45).

The plight of the urban poor growing out of the Industrial Revolution and the national sense of gloom and despair at the end of the eighteenth century helped prepare the way for the message of the Evangelical Revival and the plethora of social and moral campaigns launched by various members of the Clapham Sect and other Evangelical leaders. The sad state of the Anglican Church made it ripe for the reforming work led by Charles Simeon.

The Slave Trade

During the last twenty years of the eighteenth century, international slave trade supporting the imperial interests of the colonial powers was at its height with Britain leading the way. Ships from England and other European powers traveled to the west coast of Africa to purchase slaves from Arab slave traders or from local chiefs.

Often chiefs would sell the entire population of one of their own, or of a neighbor's villages . . . Once captured, the slaves were herded into barracoons to await the arrival of the ships. The fit were branded with their new owner's mark, while the old and deformed were often killed as useless. Many had to be flogged to force them into canoes which took them through the surf to the slave ship. There, they were chained in pairs between decks on shelves with only two and a half feet head-room. A ship of 150 tons often carried as many as 500 slaves. The crew, who had often been press-ganged into service, generally took their pick of the women. . . .

In bad weather . . . They would lie for weeks in their own filth and the stench could be smelled across a mile of ocean. By the time a ship reached America or the west Indies, ten per cent of the cargo would normally have died, while many others would be desperately ill.

On arrival a few days would be spent smartening them up for market. Their bodies were fattened and oiled, their sores disguised. Finally, they would be paraded naked through the streets and auctioned. . . Families were ruthlessly split up. Those who were too sick to be marketable were left on the quay to die. . . a third of those who survived thus far died from the vicious discipline imposed by their new owners. The process was politely known as "seasoning." (Lean 1,2)

The slave trade was financed by investments made not only by the aristocracy but also by the middle class. A single voyage could net investors a hundred percent return on investment. It was widely thought that the British Empire's economic well-being depended on the slave trade. In an era of political corruption, Parliament's opposition to the Abolition cause was largely bought by slave trade interests. Early voices against slavery included Baxter, the Quakers, Wesley, Newton--a converted slave trader who wrote *Amazing Grace*, and Granville Sharp.

Social Dislocation and Oppression of the Urban Poor

England was the first country to experience the Industrial Revolution which began about 1740, almost 20 years prior to the birth of Wilberforce. Industrialization and the urbanization which resulted unleashed powerful new forces that dislocated people. The rapidly changing English society threatened and then swept away traditional attitudes and habits.

Children were employed long hours with little pay. Under British law, poor children were hung for stealing six pence and debtors were thrown into prison in expectation that their families would do whatever they could to find the money needed to buy their freedom. The urban poor were denied justice and education which were the privilege of the aristocracy.

The poor, alienated from the Church of England--the church of class and privilege, had lower rates of church attendance than the upper and middle classes. Dissenting groups, especially Methodists, worked among the urban poor with unconventional methods such as open air preaching and Sunday school literacy programs for children of the urban poor.

The Clapham Sect carried on Wesley's strong commitment to many of the social dimensions of the Gospel.

The Established Church

The state of the Anglican church at the end of the eighteenth century was appalling. Wilberforce found no Sunday services in many parishes in East Yorkshire. Drunkenness, non residence, and inactivity were typical of many Anglican clergy. Others were steeped in the study of philosophy, of the arts and the pursuits of the upper classes. Evangelicals chided them for not being watchmen and shepherds of the flocks. Charles Simeon, Henry Thornton and others worked to fill the church with "serious clergy", i.e. Evangelicals.

A Period of Gloom

Rationalism, apathy and moral and social decay made eighteenth-century England ripe for the opposite. The bloody upheaval which accompanied the French Revolution was viewed as God's judgment upon the nation for its rejection of Christianity characterized by the coronation of a prostitute in the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris at the height of the Revolution (Orr 1986). Englishmen saw their own country headed in the same direction. A national sense of anxiety and crises prevailed. The beginning of the nineteenth century was a period of gloom and despondency in England.

Evangelical Response

In this milieu, Evangelicals preached and shared their message which made sense in the English context of 1800. Their message emphasized the total depravity of humanity which was so evident both across the Channel and at home. It emphasized God's judgment and the salvation from God's punishment through the atoning work of Christ.

Newton, now a member of the Anglican clergy, captured the essence of its message, "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me." It promised eternal life in heaven--a cherished hope in the midst of chaotic change. It promised certainty and security--much welcomed in an uncertain and changing world where fear, doom and anxiety prevailed. It stressed the new birth or conversion. It addressed its message in large part to nominal professed Christians who exhibited little or no signs of a "vital religion"--an all-consuming faith. "In such times," one Evangelical clergyman told his congregation, "the Scripture characters fasted and prayed. The old puritans did so. I think we ought to."(Bradley 56)

The Spirituality of the Clapham Sect

The spirituality of the Clapham Sect was shaped by John Wesley, George Whitfield and Puritan works such as William Law's Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life (1728) and Baxter writings on the spiritual life. The early Puritan's had in turn been influenced by spiritual writers like Thomas a Kempis (The Imitation of Christ)—one of Wilberforce's favorite authors. Newton had been converted at sea while reading The Imitation of Christ. Phillip Dodridge's The Rise and Progress of Religion of the Soul, the last great Puritan spiritual autobiography played a key role in Wilberforce's conversion (Douglas 306). How, then, did Wilberforce and his associates practice the disciplines of the spiritual life and how did their spirituality affect their mission?

Wilberforce's Conversion

Born into a wealthy family in Hull, England, Wilberforce had been impressed by the Evangelical message as a boy when he lived for a time with his aunt and uncle who knew George Whitfield personally. They took him to hear John Newton preach at the parish in Clapham where lived another uncle, John Thornton who was converted by Whitfield in 1754. John's son, Henry Thornton, would become Wilberforce's closest friend and Clapham associate. Alarmed that her son was becoming a despised "Methodist," Wilberforce's mother brought him back home to Hull. He soon developed an appetite for the gambling, parties and other amusements of upper class social life and became hostile to the "Methodism" of his aunts and uncles. Wilberforce, short (5' 4") and slender, was fun-loving, kind, gregarious, witty, charming and had a magnificent speaking and singing voice. As a student at Cambridge University, he did little to distinguish himself academically but devoted himself to college social life instead.

At the age of 21, Wilberforce was elected to Parliament from Hull. Many doors opened for him. “He was amusing, his mimicry of the Prime Minister Lord North soon became famous, and his voice was so sweet that he became known as the nightingale of the House of Commons.” (Leath 17) He was noted for his oration and devastating sarcasm, the latter almost completely vanished after his conversion. His Cambridge contemporary, William Pitt, who had become an MP and close friend, said Wilberforce had “the greatest natural eloquence of all the men I ever knew.”(Lean 32) After Pitt became Prime Minister in 1783, Wilberforce stood for election to the most prestigious seat in Parliament representing Yorkshire. In 1784, he won against all odds.

All was in place for Wilberforce to become “God’s Politician”—the title of Garth Lean’s biography. In 1784, he “stood at the pinnacle of achievement” (*Ibid.* 32). God had been preparing Wilberforce through the trends and circumstances of his context, his family influences, his temperament, his talents and by bringing divine contacts and mentors into his life (Clinton 1988: 235-58). One of those was Isaac Milner, a Cambridge tutor and a brilliant Evangelical. He was a large jovial man who did not fit the stereotypical image of a “serious” Evangelical.

Milner accompanied Wilberforce on two trips to the Continent. On the first, they read together and discussed Phillip Dodridge’s The Rise and Progress of Religion of the Soul. Wilberforce had adopted some Unitarian views and ridiculed the Christianity of his aunt and uncle, but Milner “had a firm grasp of the intellectual case for Christianity and was famed for his skill in making complicated matters clear to his students. . . .” Their discussion “punctuated by frequent reference to passages from the Bible and much discussion, brought Wilberforce to an intellectual assent to Biblical Christianity.” (Lean

34) On the second trip in 1785, they discussed and read the New Testament in Greek. While staying at a Belgian resort of Spa, Wilberforce fell under conviction writing in his journal, “In the true sense of the word I am no Christian.”

. It was here at Spa that he began his life-long practice of rising early and spending the first hours of the day in meditation. “Began three or four days ago to get up very early,” he writes on October 25th.

In the solitude and self-conversation of the morning some thoughts which I trust will come to something. . . As soon as I recollected seriously, the deep guilt and black ingratitude of my past life forced itself on me in the strongest colors, and I condemned myself for having wasted precious time, and opportunities and talents. . . . It was not so much the fear of punishment by which I was affected, as a sense of my great sinfulness in having so long neglected the unspeakable mercies of my God and Savior. ” (*Ibid.* 35)

Later in his life he wrote about the pattern of solitude he began in Belgium:

“In the calmness of the morning before the mind is heated and weary by the turmoil of the day, you have a season of unusual importance for communing with God and with yourself.” (*Ibid.* 97)

As Wilberforce continued to seek God in solitude, meditation, quiet and journaling, he sensed God leading him to share his conversion odyssey and his subsequent wish to retire from public life with his close friend, Prime Minister Pitt and “Methodist” John Newton. He struggled mightily with the thought of meeting Newton because any association with “Methodist” Evangelicalism would tarnish his reputation among the upper and middle classes. Amidst a raging inner battle that ensued, however, Wilberforce sensed that to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ, he must obey this prompting no matter the cost. He obeyed.

Both Pitt and Newton counseled against retiring. Newton told him, “The Lord has raised you up for the good of His church and for the good of the nation.”(*Ibid.* 39) Newton’s affirmation of God’s sovereign preparation and his counsel provided spiritual direction for Wilberforce. This

was a prime critical incident (Clinton 1995:68) which saved him for public life. God used this encounter with Newton to form Wilberforce's life long commitment to both an inner life of solitude and an outer life of service.

The Disciplines of the Spiritual Life

In his book The Spirit of the Disciplines, Dallas Willard classifies the historic disciplines of the spiritual life in two groups—disciplines of engagement and the disciplines of abstinence. The disciplines of abstinence include solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, simplicity, sacrifice and watching (waiting upon God). The disciplines of engagements include study, worship, celebration, prayer, service, fellowship, confession and submission (Willard 1998:418).

In his classification of the disciplines, Eugene Peterson includes some omitted by Willard: spiritual reading, spiritual direction, meditation, bodily exercise, Sabbath-keeping, dream interpretation, retreats, pilgrimage, almsgiving (tithing), journaling, sabbaticals and small groups.(Peterson 108) Richard Foster classifies guidance as a corporate spiritual discipline. Other classifications include intercession, poverty, celibacy, scripture memory and evangelism.

Both Peterson and Willard hold that their lists of disciplines are not exhaustive. Sleep and rest can be considered disciplines according to Willard. Nor should the disciplines be viewed as rules or laws but as exercises to be tailored to a believer's need, life situation, experience, temperament, training, and so forth.(Willard 1988:190-1) "Each of us must develop expertise so that we can call up any one of the disciplines as it is needed and set it aside when it is no longer needed."(Peterson 108) However, Peterson

argues that three disciplines constitute the basic *Regula* or Rule for the Christian: 1) corporate worship on the Lord's day; 2) daily praying the Psalms; and 3) recollected prayer throughout the day--Paul's "praying without ceasing" or Brother Lawrence's "practicing the presence of God."(Ibid. 105-10)

In the above description of Wilberforce's conversion, 13 of the 32 disciplines classified by Willard, Peterson and Foster were already being practiced during the first year of his spiritual journey: a retreat, pilgrimage, service (the purpose of the two continental trips was to transport a sick cousin to and from recuperation in the Riviera's warmer climate), solitude, meditation, confession, journaling, submission (to the counsel of Newton), spiritual direction, guidance, sacrifice (his reputation), small group and fellowship.

Wilberforce's Year of Waiting

Conversion brought great changes in Wilberforce's public and private life. Until he was married at age 38, he practiced sexual abstinence--the discipline of chastity which probably predated his conversion. Regretting past waste of time and talent, he terminated membership in five different clubs in one day and absented himself from occasions expected of politicians that were wasteful or immoral (the discipline of simplicity). He wondered if colleagues and those he represented would support him given the changes occurring in his life. His political future was unclear. He was convinced that his career in Parliament had accomplished little and he wanted more noble motives and a worthwhile mission. If 1785 was the year of conversion, 1786 was a year of ambiguity, restlessness, introspection and waiting.

"One further fruit of Wilberforce's own change was a new intellectual rigor. He set himself to redeem the idle years at Cambridge [by] reading . . . From this time until his marriage . . . he spent two months every summer in such study. Usually he settled down

in the country house of one of his friends . . . In this year of waiting it was, above all, the Bible which became his favorite book. As he traveled, too, he carried a notebook in which he entered information from his innumerable conversations.”(Ibid. 45)

Wilberforce, not a detail administrative type, struggled with the practice of personal virtues and discipline. These he shared with Milner, whom he asked to keep him accountable for keeping new resolves. “He made a pact with Milner to pay a forfeit, presumably to charity, for lapses pointed out by the other. It had to be abandoned because the guineas flowed too copiously from Wilberforce to Milner.” (Lean 43) He was concerned that though his time with God was regular it often lacked the passion he had for other pursuits. “Is it that my devotions are too hurried, that I do not read the Scripture enough, or how is it, that I leave with reluctance the mere chit-chat of Boswell’s Johnson, for what ought to be the grateful offices of prayer and praise?” (Hennell 461) Awareness of his sin and weakness, ambiguity about his mission, struggles in his soul and grief over his past consumed him. He was in a desolate desert of the soul.

During the course of 1786, however, the infectious gaiety for which Wilberforce was loved and known returned. He described it to his sister, “Let me call it serenity, tranquility, composure which cannot be destroyed.” His mother who had shuddered at reports of a return to “Methodism” was astonished by his cheerfulness and control of a quick temper. “If this is madness,” she told a friend, “I hope he will bite us all.” (Lean 43) In the first winter of his soul, Wilberforce had concentrated a great deal on disciplines of abstinence—the giving up of the old life making way for then new. As new life emerged, disciplines of engagement became more central especially the discipline of celebration described by Willard as “holy delight and joy” (Willard 179). Springtime had come.

Wilberforce and the Regula

Wilberforce practiced the three-fold *Regula* comprised of weekly corporate worship, praying the Psalms and recollected prayer--Peterson's classifications of disciplines which are normative. Even in his pre-conversion days, Wilberforce attended church (pastored by a Unitarian). After his conversion, he eagerly involved himself in corporate worship. His Sabbath observance included extended times of solitude with the Lord and spiritual reading.

“A Sunday in solitude never failed to restore me to myself.” Coupland, *op. Cit.*, 187 . . . Wilberforce practiced fasting during a day of secret prayer that he arranged for himself. Sundays always included a time for church and a time for retirement when Wilberforce left his guests for an hour and a half during the afternoon to study Baxter's *Works* or some other spiritual classic. (Hennell 461)

In the long campaign against slavery, Sundays would be crucial to regain focus from the week. In 1801, when he was left out of a newly formed government, he admitted to being “a little intoxicated” with “risings of ambition.” He journaled what the next Sunday did for him: “Blessed be to God for the day of rest and religious occupation wherein earthly things assume their true size. Ambition is stunted.” (Lean 99) He could not have continued to lead the fight against slavery had he become a cabinet member or Pitt's successor as Prime Minister.

Wilberforce combined praying the Psalms with bodily exercise and Scripture memory. After moving back into London from Clapham later in his career, he planned his daily walk to be long enough to repeat from memory all 176 verses of the 119th Psalm.

These regular practices spilled into an active week. He sensed God as the focus of his work. His spirituality became integrated with his vocation, his private with his public life. His inner journey became the wellspring for his outer journey. In the words of Brother Lawrence, he “practiced the presence of God.” Solitude and contemplation spilled into his daily activities. Thus he could say, “My shame is not occasioned by my thinking that I am too studiously diligent

in the business of life; on the contrary, I then feel that I am serving God best when from proper motives I am most actively engaged in it.”(Bradley 30) Throughout the day, prayer and praise were common practice for Wilberforce. “Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous ordinances. Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.”(Psalm 119:164-5) After his marriage in 1796, he brought his family members together twice a day for ten minutes of family prayer.

The Spiritual Disciplines of Wilberforce’s Colleagues

Other members of the Clapham Sect practiced the disciplines in a similar fashion. Henry Thornton, who became Wilberforce’s closest friend and colleague, lived in Clapham and arranged for Wilberforce and others to move to the Clapham community. Like Wilberforce and most of the other members, Thornton kept a “diary” in which he wrote about the importance of contemplation: “I think I have discovered that my religion consists too much in active duties and in efforts to edify and convert others and too little in serious self-examination, attentive reading of the Scriptures, prayer and secret self-denial.” (Meacham 19-20)

Charles Simeon (1739-1836), one of the principal members of the Sect, was the Vicar of Trinity Church at Cambridge who led the Evangelical renewal of Anglicanism. He led retreats of clergy, practiced solitude, Bible study, prayer, meditation, silence, celibacy (he was single all his life), spiritual direction, among other disciplines.

Simeon . . . rose at four a.m. and gave four hours to prayer and Bible study. If he overslept he fined himself a guinea which he threw in the Cam [the river that runs through the town of Cambridge]; this he had to do only once. . . In his teaching Simeon distinguished between prayer and meditation. He always encouraged his pupils to wait on God in quietness, and not always to frame their prayers in words.

Simeon was a spiritual director of rare insight. (Hennell 461) A glance at Simeon's written meditations shows the relational way he approached the Bible and how he studied scripture "for formation not just for information" (Gorman 1997):

When reading 1 Corinthians 13 this morning, I asked myself, How should I act towards Mr. And Mrs. Edwards and Mr. And Mrs. Thomason, and regretted that the same spirit did not animate me towards every other person. I began to pray for our Provost, and Mr. Flower, and Mr. Twiss, the grocer. I apprehend that the best mode of understanding Christian love, is to consider what dispositions we show towards the dearest objects of our affections, and put every human being in their place. (Hennell 462)

Simeon profoundly impacted the spirituality and mission of Henry Martyn, one of his key proteges and curates (an intern or assistant in the American context). Martyn was a brilliant Cambridge student and linguist who later became a missionary to India and Persia. "His diary is one of the most precious treasures of Anglican devotion." (Neil 227)

Hannah More, another key member of the Clapham group, was a prolific influential literary figure of the day as well as an Evangelical author on spirituality. She wrote on prayer and the intimate personal nature of her relationship with God:

It has been justly observed, that the Scripture saints make this union the chief ground of their grateful exultation--'My strength,' 'my rock,' 'my fortress,' "my deliverer!" Again--'Let the God of my salvation be exalted!' Now take away the pronoun and substitute the article *the* [and see] how comparatively cold is the impression! The consummation of the joy arises from the peculiarity, the intimacy, the endearment of the relation. (More 1:434)

Prayer is the application of want to Him who alone can relieve it, the voice of sin to Him who alone can pardon it. It is the urgency of poverty, the prostration of humility, the fervency of penitence, the confidence of trust. . . . Adoration is the noblest employment of created beings; confession, the natural language of guilty creatures; praise, the spontaneous expression of pardoned sinners.--Prayer is desire; the abasement of contrition; the energy of gratitude. It is not a mere conception of the mind nor an effort of the intellect, nor an act of the memory; but an elevation of the soul towards its Maker. (More 2:515)

All but five of the 38 spiritual disciplines classified above appear in this brief discussion of the spirituality of the Clapham Sect. Spirituality, then, was the spring and root of its life. Intimacy with God empowered its remarkable mission and made possible its legacy.

The Mission and Legacy of Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect

It was May 12, 1787. God had been bringing important Evangelical abolitionists across Wilberforce's path at key times in providential ways to shape his thinking about slavery. They included John Newton, Grenville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson and Sir Charles Middleton, the Controller of the Navy, who wrote Wilberforce requesting that he sponsor anti-slavery legislation in Parliament. But it was not until this fateful day the decision was made:

William Pitt, his cousin Grenville and Wilberforce all three now men of twenty-seven were lolling beneath an oak overlooking the Vale of Keston "Wilberforce," said Pitt, "why don't you give notice of a motion on the subject of the Slave Trade?." In later years, Wilberforce always recalled that scene when asked how he entered the battle for Abolition. (Lean 47)

Wilberforce finally had a clear sense of destiny (Clinton 1988:238). "God Almighty had set before" him a two-fold mission: first, to suppress England's Slave Trade; and second to reform the spiritual, social and moral life of the country's citizens. He knew that the former could not occur without the latter and so both prongs of the mission were set in motion simultaneously. To accomplish this mission, the Clapham Sect led the Evangelical movement in spreading the message of the Gospel both at home and abroad, developing voluntary societies to alleviate human suffering, infiltrating the upper and middle classes, and legislating an end to the slave trade as well as other reforms.

Spreading the Word at Home

Wilberforce's underlying goal in bringing about his reforms in society was that people should find new life in Jesus Christ. The gospel of the Kingdom was the central reality to which his work pointed. His love for people and their need for Jesus Christ was not lost in the hectic pace of his legislative campaigns and the organizational demands of the many voluntary societies in which he and his associates were involved. For him, people were more important than organization and programmatic concerns. During his times of solitude on Sundays he would meditate on the spiritual needs of his friends.

Among his papers was found a 'Friends' paper, marked 'to be looked at each Sunday,' listing thirty of his friends. Against each name stood thoughts of how best to help each take the next step towards a fully satisfying experience of Christ. His aim was the same, whether the friend was a neighbor's footman, a prisoner under sentence or the Czar of All the Russias. (Lean 121)

Before dinner parties he often wrote down "launchers," lists of topics which might lead to deeper conversations about life in Christ.

An important method for spreading the Gospel were tracts and books written to introduce the nation to "vital religion." In the place of a vague and undemanding concept of Christianity, Wilberforce and other Evangelicals preached a message which made Christianity "the vital principle that animates the whole being of a Christian."(More 1:419)

In 1797 after ten years of writing, Wilberforce finally published his book for the upper and middle classes to protest their nominal religion and moral decay. Its title was A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country Contrasted with Real Christianity. True Christians, he wrote, were distinguished from nominal ones, in that "relying on the promises to repenting sinners of acceptance through the Redeemer, they have renounced and adjured all other masters and have cordially and unreservedly

devoted themselves to God." In 1797, the publisher would only agree to an initial printing of 500 copies because religious literature written by a politician was unheard of at the time. The response was overwhelming. The initial printing sold out immediately. The Practical View sold millions of copies among the upper and middle classes and remained popular for the next fifty years. The publication was accompanied by a movement back to church among the wealthy in the 1790s. By 1798, the Annual Register reported that the avenues of churches were filled with carriages (Bradley 37).

Tracts were written for the lower classes as well. Hannah More started this method of communication to counteract the spread of atheism, a result of the French Revolution. In 1795 more than two million tracts were sold. To distribute them, Evangelicals paid more to hawkers of obscene ballads than they had previously received for distributing the equivalent of today's pornographic material. More's literary influence upon the nation was noted by the publishers of her collected writings:

Her works have . . . given a new and most important feature to the moral character of the nation she adorned. They have diffused vital religion, in faith and practice . . . [and she succeeded] in rendering piety fashionable and popular, where even the name of religion was and that at no very distant period, treated with indifference, if not with absolute contempt." (More 1:v)

Tracts and evangelistic novels contained dramatic stories of changed lives.

Dairyman's Daughter, a touching account of a girl's death from tuberculosis, sold four million copies. In 1833, a tourist visiting the Isle of Wight found the fourteen year old future Queen Victoria reading this tract to her mother at the grave of the girl on whose life the story was based (Bradley 36). Wherever Evangelicals went they left books and tracts and shared the Gospel with others.

Spreading the Word Abroad

Spreading the word at home was not enough. The Evangelical Awakening provided the impetus for sending missionaries abroad to other cultures. The great protestant missionary explosion of the nineteenth century found enthusiastic support among Clapham members Simeon, Charles Grant, Henry Thornton, Thomas Macaulay and Wilberforce.

A major impediment to mission work in India was the East India Company's fear that missionary activity would bring unrest and economic loss. Thanks to the Clapham Sect, this resistance eventually gave way to the admission of more and better chaplains to India. "The change was due directly to the Evangelical Revival in England, particularly to the influence of Charles Simeon. . . (Neil 226). Also in need of change was the prevailing British mind set of viewing British territories solely in terms of economic exploitation. "Charles Grant...and leaders such as William Wilberforce in London [labored] for a change of attitude towards the new British dominion in India and the spiritual welfare of its peoples." (*Ibid.* 226)

In the absence of effective foreign mission structures in the Anglican church at the time, Clapham members supported both the Baptist Missionary Society which had sent William Carey to India in 1793 and the interdenominational London Missionary Society. In 1799, they established the Society for Missions to Africa and the East later to be renamed the Church Missionary Society (CMS) to send missionaries to Africa and India. Though CMS was an Anglican venture, they wanted to cooperate not compete with other mission endeavors. The Society's 1801 report expresses this ecumenical attitude:

"The world is an extensive field, and in the Church of Christ there is no competition of interests. . . . Let there be cordial union amongst all Christians in promoting the common salvation of their Lord and Savior." (Meacham 123)

In 1804, Clapham members also helped begin the British and Foreign Bible Society which marked the beginning of the modern bible society movement. “Its stated aim was ‘to encourage the wider circulation of the Holy Scriptures, without note or comment.’” (Douglas 130) Soon the movement enveloped Europe, America, the British colonies and Russia. By 1819, the Russian Bible Society had published a new translation of the New Testament.

Creating Societies to Alleviate Suffering

The Clapham Sect took seriously Christ's commands to help the poor and disadvantaged. They were genuinely moved with compassion at the plight of the poor, the addicted, the prostitute, the homeless, the orphan, etc.

Evangelicals of the period have been criticized for their view that class and economic status were part of the divinely appointed order and thus should be accepted. This view was held in part because of the upheaval of the French Revolution. Nonetheless, the Clapham Sect not only gave sacrificially of their time, organizational skills and money to create voluntary societies to alleviate suffering, but also to extend educational opportunities to the poor which previously had been the exclusive privilege of the aristocracy.

In 1785 a Sunday School Society was established with Henry Thornton as treasurer. With encouragement from Wilberforce, Hannah More set up six Sunday Schools in the Mendips area offering literacy and educational opportunities to the poor. These became models for schools throughout the country. By 1820, an estimated 500,000 poor children participated in English Sunday Schools—the single most effective tool for increased literacy and conversion among lower classes (Bradley 44).

Clapham members with their enormous talent for creating and running voluntary societies left a remarkable legacy which later Evangelicals built upon. The legacy lasts to this day in England.

Ever since the Clapham Sect had founded the Society for bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor (the Bettering Society) in 1798, new charitable organizations had been started at an average rate of six a year, until by the middle of the nineteenth century there were nearly 500 of them. . . The Evangelicals established the voluntary charitable society as the characteristic vehicle for philanthropic activity in Victorian England. It is principally to them that the country owes its tradition, still strong today, of voluntary social service undertaken by unpaid workers and supported by the subscriptions and donations of private individuals . . . It has been calculated that three-quarters of all voluntary charitable organizations in existence in England in 1850 were Evangelical in character and control. (*Ibid.* 122-3)

James Edwin Orr has never studied a spiritual awakening without finding accompanying ministries of social compassion (Orr 1986). The existence and persistence of these societies provide evidence of the depth and genuine nature of this Evangelical awakening.

Infiltrating the Upper and Middle Classes

Evangelicals wanted to effect change in England's public life for the glory of God. To pervade every part of British life with their message and morals, they consciously set about to infiltrate England's aristocracy and the middle classes.

The Evangelicals believed that they had a special mission towards the upper classes in the same way that John Wesley had felt a particular call to awaken the hearts of the people. Since Methodist preachers had concentrated largely on ministering to the lower classes, the aristocracy remained virtually untouched by the Evangelical revival at the end of the eighteenth century. This state of affairs led the Evangelicals to direct their efforts especially to evangelizing the upper classes. (Bradley 37)

Clapham members, who themselves belonged to the upper and middle classes, naturally led much of the effort to infiltrate their own. Their strategy focused on the renewing the Established Church, and reaching aristocracy's children through the university and the nursery.

Renewing the Church of England

In 1782, when Charles Simeon became Vicar of Holy Trinity Church of Cambridge, just a handful of Anglican clergy were Evangelical. In face of the widespread drunkenness, absenteeism and powerlessness among Anglican clergy at the time, Simeon, Thornton and others determined to fill the Anglican pulpits of the land with Evangelical clergy. How did they do this?

First, various funds were established to help Evangelical university students who wanted to be ordained but lacked the finances to finish their schooling. But training young men for ministry would be of little use if there were no places for them to serve. Therefore, Simeon and Thornton bought the rights to present clergyman to a particular parish or living. These were called advowsons. A living held money in trust from which the interest provided the salary of the clergy who occupied the living. John Venn owed his position as rector of Clapham (1792-1813) to the patronage of Thornton (*Ibid.* 60).

Simeon set up a trust to buy livings for evangelicals and by the time he died in 1836, the Simeon trustees held the advowson of twenty-one livings. Where Evangelicals could not buy livings, they tried to place Evangelical curates in parishes of non-resident clergy or in parishes where the living was held by a plurality of patrons. This was largely the work of the Church Pastoral Aid Society which was set up in 1836 by Lord Shaftesbury, Wilberforce's successor as the leader of the Evangelical movement. If all else failed, Evangelicals would build a chapel and fill it with Evangelical clergy (*Ibid.* 61).

So effective were these and other attempts that the number of evangelical clergy grew from an estimated one in twenty in 1800 to about one in every three by the

mid-nineteenth century. The Edinburgh review computed that of the 17,000 Anglican clergymen, 6,500 were evangelicals (*Ibid.* 63). The first and only Evangelical Archbishop of Canterbury was Rev. John Bird. Evangelical clergy transformed their parishes. They opened the church to the people by abolishing the system of pew rents. It took Simeon, for example, more than twelve years to abolish pew rents at Trinity (Clinton 1995:27-73). They introduced hymn-singing under the influence of Methodism. Their efforts resulted in massive numbers of people filling their parishes. The 1851 census showed that church-going had drastically increased in the upper and middle classes—a high percentage of these gains attributable to the Evangelical Renewal in the State Church.

Their activity, however, often created opposition and warring factions among their parishioners, between those who embraced the Evangelical message and those who did not. A party spirit was common. Evangelical clergy and non-Evangelical clergy alienated each other as well. Evangelicals, then, both revitalized and divided the Church (Bradley 64-73).

The university and the nursery

The primary environments where Evangelicals reached the children of the wealthy were the university and the nursery. Cambridge became the intellectual center of Evangelical influence through the work of the Charles Simeon and Isaac Milner. Cambridge University was comprised of thirty or so colleges including King's College, where Simeon was a Fellow (tutor), and Queen's College where Milner was President and also Vice-Chancellor of the University.

Simeon employed mentoring as a primary methodology. His mentorees, called "Sims," invited Freshmen to their rooms for tea and cakes eager to share the Evangelical message.

They were followed up in discussion and training groups led by Simeon and his inner core of emerging leaders. The influence of other Evangelical tutors and their wives was a significant factor also. InterVarsity Christian Fellowship traces its origins to Simeon and the Evangelical movement at Cambridge. A smaller Evangelical influence at Oxford was limited to St. Edmund's Hall.

Unfortunately, the movement produced few intellectual giants of Milner's stature who would seriously engage the intellectual challenges posed by higher criticism, Darwin's work and continuing fallout from the Enlightenment. Though Evangelicals were fully engaged with England's social, political and moral life, their intellectual isolation was costly as the century progressed. The lack of theological integration, one of Richard Lovelace's five secondary elements of spiritual renewal (Lovelace 75), contributed to a loss of Evangelical influence by the end of the nineteenth century.

A key factor in the high incidence of Evangelical conversions among children of the upper classes was an intentional strategy encouraging women to seek employment in nurseries of affluent homes. Wilberforce's successor, Lord Shaftesbury, was first exposed to the Evangelical faith through his nursemaid. Nursemaids largely raised these children introducing them to Christ and the principles of "vital religion."

Fighting Slavery

The crowning social achievement of the Clapham's Sect was its long and finally successful fight against the Slave Trade. But the fight would have floundered without a profound spiritual awakening that would transform the upper classes and bring a reformation to the nation's social and moral life. Wilberforce understood that no nation

can legislate a deep moral change and so he carried on the fight against slavery in Parliament concurrently with his other reforming efforts. The fight began in 1787, when he introduced legislation against the Slave Trade. In his opening speech he told the House and the nation:

When I consider the magnitude of the subject which I am to bring before the house—a subject, in which the interest, not of this country, nor of Europe alone, but of the whole world, and of posterity, are involved . . . it is impossible for me not to feel both terrified and concerned at my own inadequacy to such a task. (Colson 102)

Indeed, Wilberforce was inadequate in the face of the insurmountable forces arrayed against him: the interests of the Slave Trade upon which so much of the economic well being of the Empire rested; rampant political corruption which enabled majorities against abolition legislation to be bought; a serious illness in 1788 which almost took his life; the threat of a Napoleonic invasion in 1803, and threats upon his life resulting in his reluctant retention of body guards at the urging of his colleagues. In spite of the opposition, year after year, he introduced legislation only to be defeated. At times he wondered if he should give up the fight. One night while flipping through his Bible a letter fell out. It was from John Wesley now dead—one of the last letters he ever wrote:

My dear Sir,

Unless the Divine power has raised you up . . . I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that execrable villainy, which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils, but if God be for you who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? Oh, be not weary of well-doing. Go on in the name of God, and in the power of His might, till even American slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun, shall vanish away before it. That He that has guided you from your youth up may continue to strengthen in this and all things, is the prayer of,

Your affectionate servant, John Wesley (Colson 105)

Wilberforce took courage and continued the long battle. In 1796 his bill lost by only four votes in the House. In 1804, the House passed it 124 to 49 only to have it overturned in the House

of Lords. Finally in 1807, after twenty years, Wilberforce prevailed. The new abolitionist government under Grenville (after Pitt's death) reversed the strategy of the previous government by introducing the bill first into the House of Lords. There it encountered bitter opposition in a month long debate. The bill passed at four a.m. on February 4 1807. On February 22, 1807 the House debated the issue with little doubt as to the outcome. At the conclusion of Sir Samuel Romilly's tribute to Wilberforce, the entire House stood cheering in thunderous ovation for "God's Politician." "Realizing that his long battle had come to an end, Wilberforce sat bent in his chair, his head in hands tears streaming down his face. The motion carried, 283 to 16." (Colson 108)

Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect were not content with the abolition of the Slave Trade alone. Their real goal was to abolish the very institution of slavery. He continued the campaign until his retirement from Parliament in 1825. In 1833 as he lay sick, Parliament freed the slaves. Two days before he died, Wilberforce heard the news of Parliament's decree that all slaves within the British Empire were to be emancipated and their owners compensated twenty million pounds.

"Thank God, that I should have lived to witness a day in which England was willing to give twenty millions sterling for the abolition of slavery." (Lean 176)

Criticism of the Clapham Sect, some deserved, has drawn much attention to its mistakes and weaknesses some of which has been alluded to in this study. Notwithstanding, recent scholarship for the most part has underscored its massive legacy and significance. Ernest Howse writes:

The slave trade was stopped before the economic expansion of European nations had well begun, and before slavery on a large scale was introduced into the home of the slaves. “It is terrible to reflect,” says Dean Inge, “what might have happened if slavery had not been abolished before the partition of Africa among the Great Powers. The whole of the Dark Continent might have become a gigantic slave farm, with consequences to the social and economic condition of Europe itself which cannot be calculated.” . . . (Howse 177-8)

In short, while occupied mainly with objects of a missionary character, and inspired almost wholly by motives of a pietistic origin, the Clapham Sect, by the principles they evoked and the methods they developed, indirectly rendered to English social movements an outstanding service—a service which they themselves did not foresee but which nevertheless justifies the conclusion that they were indeed among the “pioneers and fuglemen” of English social progress. (*Ibid.* 192-3)

The Clapham Sect left no ongoing Evangelical order or organization. It’s legacy lives on in other ways. The Sect died with its participants—Thornton in 1815, Grant in 1823, James Stephen and Charles Elliott in 1832, Wilberforce and Hannah More in 1833, Lord Teignmouth in 1834, William Smith in 1835, Simeon in 1836, Babington in 1837, Macaulay in 1838 and Thomas Clarkson in 1846. “In 1845 the younger James Stephen wrote sadly, “No more ‘Clapham sect’ nowadays.” (*Ibid.* 183) On the south wall of the Clapham parish church are these words:

LET US PRAISE GOD for the memory and example of all the faithful departed who have worshiped in this Church, and especially for the under named Servants of Christ sometime called ‘THE CLAPHAM SECT’ who in the latter part of the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth centuries labored so abundantly for the increase of National Righteousness and the Conversion of the Heathen, and rested not until the curse of slavery was swept away from all parts of the British Dominions. (*Ibid.* 167)

CONCLUSION

What can be learned from the leaders of the Evangelical Revival that swept England transforming its life and what are the implications for Christians in our day? I draw seven lessons and implications from Wilberforce and the Clapham sect.

1. Spirituality is the spring and root of mission. Wilberforce's and his colleague's inward journeys produced outward journeys. Our inner life must be nourished for our outer life to flourish. This relates to a primary thesis of this course: **The renewal of the church and its expansion are interlinked** (Pierson 1998). Another thesis of the course is powerfully illustrated by the experience of Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect: **Renewal and expansion are often triggered by a key person**. (Ibid.) Consequently, studying the spirituality of key leaders and how it relates to their mission should be given heightened attention in missiology and practical theology. The thesis suggests a corollary: The renewal of persons and their expanded influence are interlinked. Waiting upon God for intimacy, direction and power precedes going in mission.

2. There are seasons to the spiritual life. Ambiguity, loss, and the disciplines of abstinence, such as sacrifice and simplicity occur especially during the soul's winter. Winter is a time of waiting for God and His direction which is often accompanied by confusion, depression (lack of gaiety) and restlessness. But God is faithful to bring springtime. During the first winter of Wilberforce's spiritual journey in 1786, God established intimacy with him through his practice of the disciplines and began to reshape

his character and being before giving him direction regarding his mission. Winter allows us to experience something of the sufferings of Christ which makes us more like Him. Our mission flows out of who we are which has a higher priority than the mission itself. This perspective is easily lost in the busyness of an active life--often expressed in the journals of the Clapham Sect. They found their souls restored in times of solitude, meditation, reflection and prayer.

3. The classical spiritual disciplines were indispensable to the spiritual lives of the Clapham Sect. The three-fold *Regula* of Corporate worship on the Lord's Day and recollective prayer throughout the day were practiced by all the Clapham members of the Sect while praying the Psalms appears to have been part of Wilberforce's practice.

Most of the disciplines of abstinence and engagement show up in the journals and writings of Clapham members. Some variance existed between members in the practice of spirituality and their resultant view of God. Thornton, more disciplined and less spontaneous than Wilberforce approached his relationship with God more inflexibly than others. John Venn, the Clapham rector, for example, stressed God's father love for his erring children--a concept which Thornton had difficulty relating to. Regular extended times of solitude on Sundays were part of the Wilberforce's pattern as were annual two month sabbaticals from the time of his conversion until his marriage eleven years later.

Wilberforce's "Friends Paper" which were reviewed each Sunday appears to be an intercession journal in which he recorded ideas God gave him for his mission to the people in his life. Spiritual direction was a key part of Simeon's mentoring and the discipline of celibacy played a significant part in the community. Both Simeon and Hannah More were single all their

lives. We should expect that in any genuine movement of God, He will call some to a life of celibacy even in protestant settings. Scripture memory seems to have aided the discipline of meditation at least in Wilberforce's life.

4. Clapham members recorded their inward journeys as well their outward journeys. The journals of these very human men and women helped them examine their own lives. They could never be accused of living under the tyranny of an unexamined life. Some have argued that journals did for Evangelicals what the confessional did for the Medieval church. This relates to another theses of the course: **Renewal and expansion are often accompanied by new spiritual dynamics or recontextualized forms of spirituality.** (Ibid.) The value and role of the confessional was recontextualized in the form of the journal. They also established new spiritual dynamics--"everyday spirituality" to use Robert Bank's term. "This involved the creation of what was--almost--a new type of spirituality, a spirituality for everyday and for ordinary people." (McManners 294)

5. Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect provide us a model for evangelizing nominal Christians and bringing renewal to ecclesiastical structures. Wilberforce's Practical View defined genuine believers as those who "relying on the promises to repenting sinners of acceptance through the Redeemer, they have renounced and adjured all other masters and have cordially and unreservedly devoted themselves to God." What does this mean to nominal Christians at the end of the twentieth century? What other masters keep us from genuinely giving ourselves to God without reserve?

Much of my own ministry in the next few years will challenge/equip laity for renewal of their own intimacy with God and living out the mission to which He is calling

them in the world. Identifying and understanding the “all other masters” which need to be renounced and adjured will be critical for: my own life, my relationships with laity, my writing, training, teaching and preaching. The equivalent of a “Friends Paper” will be helpful in interceding for the laity God brings into my sphere of influence.

Members of the Clapham Sect were loyal members of the State Church. From the vantage of “dissenting” groups and the poor, the Sect was at the center of power and influence. Still when the Clapham group began their work, Evangelicals were very much on the fringes of Anglican structure and power. They were laity not clergy. They were few in number. They were not liked as they challenged the status quo. They both illustrate and to a lesser extent negate the following thesis: **Renewal and expansion are often seen to have begun on the periphery of the ecclesiastical structures of the day.** (Pierson 1998)

Two ministry insights from the way the Sect worked to renew the Anglicanism: First, it is not enough to train and renew clergy within an organization. Structures must be developed or modified, acceptable to the larger body, in which “graduates” can express the ministry/mission for which they were trained. My organization, The Leadership Institute is doing this presently with our Postmodern Mission Project (which plants churches for the next generations) as well as a CFD Proposal that would employ Fuller CFD graduates (I am an Adjunct in the CFD Department). Secondly, the development of voluntary lay societies devoted to both cross-cultural mission and local evangelistic and social mission suggest that wherever possible we should create lay sodalities (mission structures) with spirituality at the center of those structures. Though they may not be initially accepted within existing church structures (modalities) they will serve a crucial role in expanding and renewing the church.

In 1990 the Leadership Institute began training seminarians formally. In 1993, we started training pastors non-formally. In both contexts, we devote significant time to actually practicing the disciplines of the spiritual life in the training itself. God has graciously granted deep transformation to those taking our training and in some of their ministries. Currently, we are developing processes spanning one to two years that will do the same for laity. I will be leading a lay mission group (sodality) this next year with my twenty-one year old son who is passionate about Christ and His mission in the world. Through this pilot, I hope to learn volumes about how to create lay volunteer sodalities that will be both deeply transforming and expanding. I plan to draw heavily upon this study in shaping the group.

6. Renewal and Expansion happen when the historical/contextual conditions are right.(*Ibid.*) The contextual factors mentioned at the beginning of this study made England ripe for the Evangelical Awakening led by the Clapham Sect. One factor not mentioned in this study was the movement towards younger leaders in church and state. King George III ascended to the throne at a young age. Wilberforce was elected to Parliament when he was 21. Pitt became Prime Minister in his early twenties. Simeon also became Vicar at Holy Trinity Church in his early twenties. At a time of momentous change, old leadership was being replaced by a new generation of leadership which was anxious for change. It was a revolutionary period. The new patterns of leadership were crucial to the work of the Sect illustrating another course thesis: **Renewal and expansion are often seen to have been accompanied by new leadership patterns** (*Ibid.*).

In our current context, a whole new generation shaped by postmodernism is redefining the church. To those under thirty-five the church is relationships not

institution. They have redefined what legitimates leaders—transparency and spirituality not credential or position. In addition leadership is now seen as a team process not an individual lone-ranger affair. Leadership is being done in communities. These new patterns of leadership offer tremendous opportunity for the renewal and expansion of the church in our day (Van Engen 1997).

7. Isaac Milner's crucial role in the conversion and growth of Wilberforce underscores the enormous potential of Christian academics and scholars. What if there had been one hundred Milners during this era? Perhaps the lack of theological integration by the Evangelicals would have been reversed. Perhaps Evangelical scholars would have engaged the intellectual challenges of the time more adequately. Perhaps there would have been some major theological breakthrough as a result of this rigorous intellectual life. Instead the movement stands as an exception to the thesis: **Renewal and expansion are often accompanied by theological breakthroughs**. (Pierson 1998) In our context, God is raising up a generation of Christian scholars whom he is sending as missionaries into the academy. The academic preparation in their discipline constitutes the language and cultural learning necessary to communicate the Gospel in the terms of that discipline. This work is akin to missionaries doing linguistic and translation work so that others can hear the word in their native tongue. Unfortunately, few Christian scholars have done the work necessary to integrate their fields with Biblical revelation. The result is that few academics have heard the gospel translated in terms of their language and world views. Dallas Willard, Philosopher from USC, is concerned about this problem. We have interacted with him about forming a partnership with us in which he would take university professors through training patterned after our work with pastors which has both an inner life track and an outer life/leadership/mission track spanning two years time. Dallas Willard would lead

these academics in the outer track to do a major integration project over a two year period.

8. Finally, Wilberforce's deep love for people is a wonderful model. Generation X and the Millennials long for relationships and community. Wilberforce was always available to people. Relationships with them took precedence over structures, organization and his schedule. He truly was a people-centered Christian. His warmth and love were evident to all. He lived with the members of Clapham community whom he "loved like a brother." May God multiply in our day many such lay leadership communities of grace—people committed to the spirituality and mission to which God has called them.

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Wilberforce was born in 1759, was educated in the 'usual way' and entered politics in 1780. He was influenced by an Oxford theologian called Isaac Milner and changed from being a fun-loving man to being oppressed by a sense of sin and guilt. He sought out John Newton who advised Wilberforce to serve Christ where he was - in politics. From Newton, Wilberforce learned a deeper and more personal religion, finding serenity, tranquility and composure in his faith; he became heavily involved in the campaign for the abolition of slavery. The Clapham Sect acquired its name because its leading members lived in Clapham. They included Henry Thornton, M.P. for Southwark; Zachary Macaulay, James Stephen; Lord Teignmouth, Charles Grant, Charles Simeon and John Venn. Wilberforce publicly stated his mission often, only to have his pleas fall on deaf ears. And this is where the hard work of leadership begins. Simply put, most leaders are too impatient while waiting for their people to mentally transition to accept the mission. They want followers to listen to them and change immediately. But Wilberforce also employed the help of those that had authority that he lacked. He employed the assistance of leaders who might be able to advance his cause, like Great Britain's Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger. Remember Nehemiah of the Diaspora who returned to his homeland to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, but he did so with the authority and resources of the King of Persia. William Wilberforce regarded slavery as a national crime for which all Englishmen were responsible. In 1818 he wrote in his diary, "In the Scripture, no national crime is condemned so frequently and few so strongly as oppression and cruelty, and the not using our best endeavors to deliver our fellow-creatures from them." Wilberforce and his friends engaged in an antislavery public opinion campaign unprecedented in English history. Wilberforce was one of five members of the Clapham Sect (the aristocratic circle of Christian activists) who held seats in the House of Commons who never lost a parliamentary election. In the summer of 1833, Parliament passed the second reading of the Emancipation Act, ensuring the end of slavery in the British Empire. Three days later, Wilberforce died. Clapham Sect, group of evangelical Christians, prominent in England from about 1790 to 1830, who campaigned for the abolition of slavery and promoted missionary work at home and abroad. The group centred on the church of John Venn, rector of Clapham in south London. Its members included William, a leading member of the Clapham Sect, an austere, evangelical branch of the Church of England, and was a close associate of William Wilberforce in his campaign against slavery. In 1782 Thornton was elected to Parliament for Southwark, a seat he held until the end of his life. Thornton, who Anglican Evangelical. many leaders were the influential Clapham Sect, a group of wealthy lay persons prominent in England from about 1790 to 1830. Posted in William Wilberforce | Tagged biography, Clapham Sect, history, OUP, Wilberforce. The Bristol slavers and the Wilberforce link. Posted on June 8, 2020 by Anne Stott. Charles Pinney's house in Great George Street, Bristol, now open to the public as "The Georgian House". In a previous post I wrote about the links between the Clapham sect and the Brontës, partly inspired by my reading of Claire Harman's biography. Her earlier biography of Fanny Burney opens up a new connection. In the summer of 1812 Fanny Burney, or Madame Arblay as she was known following her marriage in 1793 to a French émigré, was back in England, having been immured in France since the resumption of hostilities in the spring of 1803.