

What authority has experience over
a man's religious life?

This is the great question which the Methodist movement of the 18th century
in England, and the great awakening
in this country asked of the religious
mind.

I venture, at the risk of repetition, to
state the general conditions in which the
religious life of England was at the
time when this great revival ~~swept~~
swept over the country, beginning in
1736. There are at least three points which
must be very remembered in arriving
at any comprehension of the significance
of the revival, and ① we must remember
that the Puritan movement had been
successful in establishing the Bible,
the inspired word of God, as
the final authority of the religious life.
In the Protestant movement, the Bible
was to be the oracle of wisdom
and divine power instead of the Catholic

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church. According to its watch of mirclom were all things to be derided. It was the source of Divine Truth. But (2) we must remember that as a matter of fact, the real authority was not the Bible. But John Colvins interpretation of the Bible, & or to put it worse plainly, John Colvin had made use of the Bible to support and defend his theological system. and this Colvinism had become the generally accepted theology of the Anglican Church. (3) we must remember that during the years of reaction after the feverish excitement of the Puritan movement, that religion interested no one. that all the fine, delicate sentiments of life were crushed beneath the general coarseness and vulgarity of the times, and ~~men~~ regarded religion as a mere superstition. Absolute indifference to what we call the finer sentiments was the common thing. (4) In spite of this attempt to ruthlessly crush

all interest in truth, goodness, and beauty ¹³
beneath the earth, and to destroy them
by the grinding heel of passion, and
inanity, the finer sides of life were
coming to the front again. The revival
of Shakespeare's plays, new interest in music,
the appearance of things literary, were
ministers to the dawn of a new day.

These are the four things which are
to be born in mind, as we trace the
movement which resulted in Methodism.
As I have said people were in the habit
of just existing, catching at some chancery or
of pleasure, or excitement, drifting through
life with no other end or aim than to
get all the pleasure of excitement that might
come to them. In 1709 Mrs. Wesley wrote
to her son at College, advising him to turn
his business into some method. "After put
this question to yourself, - why do I do this
or that?" "By which means you shall
come to such a steadiness and constancy
as becomes a reasonable creature and a
good citizen."

It is probably as a result of this motherly advice, that amid the more litter-skinned university life of that day, a few serious minded youth come together into a little society which endeavored to act upon principle".

These chaps became famous in their university world, and the natural banting and buffoonery which fell upon them from less serious students tended to isolate them of general life. It may be that they went to extremes of religiosity, and self examination in their attempts to answer the question which had been given them "Why do I do this? But the fact remains that in the hands of these students overflowed the task of lifting from the low ethrel, religious, and moral condition, in which she was, while John & Charles Wesley and George Whitefield were preparing for orders in the English Church. Here are the three men about whom the interest centers. Of the three I

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suffice that we must regard Whitefield
as the real fountain head of the revival.
He is an interesting character. Born in 1714.
Entered Oxford, and was ordained June
20th, 1736, at Gloucester. During this period
he went through the dark gloom of
despondency which severe infatuation
brings on. He became converted, and
began a thorough study of the Bible. About
this time, "he says" God was pleased to enlighten
my soul, and bring me into the knowledge
of his free grace - and the necessity of
being justified in his sight by faith
only."

In August 1736 he preached his first
sermon, This and others to follow were of
great significance. He soon went to
for a missionary tour. Took friars' orders
in 1739, upon his return from Georgia. Then
began the great revival which like wild
fire spread over England. His few months
of service in England before his visit
to Georgia, had given him something

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of a serpent. Consequently when he began his preaching in the winter of 1738-
and 9. he found many fulfils stored
against him. In spite of this he preached
wherever a fulfil was open to him.
But at last there was no fulfil open to him
and he began to preach every where
regardless of places, or people, on street-
corners, in fields, to congregations which
numbered thousands. It is said that
he was at times surrounded by 30000
people, who listened with such
intensity as to be of one mind.
Conversions came by the thousands
and excitement in the things of
religion passed all comprehension. He
reached the people of the lowest type,
drunken, brutal beings, and under
the power of the revival enthusiasm
they were lifted to a noble religious
life. He came to this country and
in 1840 he went swept like a
cyclone across the up and down

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the stoter here, carrying all before him,
and leaving behind wonder and awe-
ment. I cannot relate to you the great
story of this period. It is indeed exciting
and thrilling. For many years the
flame of religion had been smoulder-
ing beneath the mass of rubbish
and now Whitefield had struck
the spark that set the whole mass
into one flame. and the religious fire
burned brightly.

At this point the genius of John Wesley
comes in, and through his efforts to-
gether with Whitefield and others, these
convents were organized into classes
for study and teaching. Prayer meetings
were held, and every possible channel
was made use of for directing the
tremendous enthusiasm into good
living. Itinerant and lay preachers
were employed, and the Methodist
societies, under their hands, and

subject to the overruling favorability
of John Wesley became organized
and soon began to meet in con-
ventions. In the course of time
the movement developed into
the various Methodist denominations.

But there are a few points that we
must remember in connection
with this great revival which
ushered in the spring and summer
after the long winter of religious
indifference.

In the first place, it was not a
separatist movement. Whitefield
and both of the Wesleys were strong
supporters of the Church of England.
They always remained true to
its form, and died within its
limits. In spite of the fact

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that they were excluded from preaching in its pulpits and were persecuted by its preachers, and ignored and ridiculed by its whole body. They remained true to its cause, and allowing the ridicule to fall from their heads still declared their allegiance.

But in spite of every attempt on the part of the English church to exclude the Methodists from ranks; denying them the rights of communion but every possible obstacle in the way of their attending services, the body of Methodists still clung to their allegiance to the church. They never held meetings of their own at a time when services were being conducted in the established churches. The Methodist leaders urged and

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exhorted their followers to attend services in the Established church, even when they had to do so in the face of insult and persecution. During the lifetime of the starters of the movement this attitude was still maintained, and to this day I believe there has been no formal act recognizing the separation of the two bodies.

In the second place, this great revival was no respecter of persons. The Anglican Church was then as it is now essentially the church of the better classes. Whitefield and Wesley did not recognize such distinctions. They preached their message unto whoever they might reach, whether it be to the nobility, or to the workers in the coal mines, or the most downtrodden of the

outcasts. Of these two men Wesley was the most democratic in spirit, while Whitefield became more closely associated with the aristocratic converts. This was a work ~~upon~~^{upon} which the unity of the movement was wrecked, Whitefield and his aristocratic followers became the Cohesionist Methodists, Wesley and his followers form among the middle and lower classes became the Separatist Wesleyan Methodists. The Whitefield following after the conflict between the two leaders had separated, gradually chickawy. The whole movement was in fact a religious movement of the middle and lower classes. It was a rekindling of the old Puritan fire.

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among the more humble people of the realm, and in this fact is found the essential reason why the Methodists did not find a warm welcome before the alters of the English church. For so pertinently chiding to the church, the Methodists are reproached by Bishop Gibson, in the following words, "This new sect of Methodists have broken through all these favorius and restraints..... They begin with evening meetings in private houses, but they have been going on from time to time to open and affixt public places of religious worship with the same freedom as if they were warranted by the act of toleration. And not content with that, they have had the boldness to preach in the fields and other

open places, and by public address
the meet to invite the rabble¹³ to be
their hearers."..... Julia Wedgwood's
John Wesley" Page 302.

That word "rabble" has the whole tone
of contention in a nut shell. The whole
essence of the article seems to have
been, as one of our very forcible ^{says}
said, "you shall not be allowed
to belong to the Church," because
they carried their message to the
"Rabble."

But curiously enough, while this
social controversy was at the bottom
of the rejection of the Methodists from
the Anglican Church, the dispute was
carried on upon a question of doctrine.
This is the third thing that we
must remember. The Anglican
Church was flying the flag of
Calvinism. Of the five strifes

which mode of the flog, the one ¹⁴
of the doctrine of Election was the
particular object of interest. It
throws much light upon the significa-
nce of religious dogma to notice
how closely allied these dogmas
are with the dominant social
ideals. Colvinism with its doctrine
of election, and of the few and
the eternal elimination of the many
is merely a religious interpretation
of the hierarchical form of gov-
ernment. To a people who are
accustomed to seeing the great
multitudes made use of for
the sole purpose of flogging, hounding
and adding to the glory of a king
and the few noble followers, Colvin-
ism is perfectly natural, and
as a matter of fact is simply

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the interpretation of our relation
to God in terms of the prevailing
social standards. But the Methodist
movement was based upon
another idea, the idea of religious
experience, the idea of the power of
the believer to surrender himself
to Christ, to be justified by faith
in Christ. Perhaps one or two extracts
from the minutes of the early confer-
ences of these societies will make clear
the general position. Question 26 of those
~~minutes is~~ ^{Minutes} "What way all believers
become children of God Grace, reconciled
to God, and made partakers of
divine nature." Ans. 16 Minutes.
Ques. 1. "What is it to be justified?" A
Ans. "To be pardoned and received into God's
favor; into such a state, that if we
continue therein, we shall be finally
saved.

Q(2) Is faith the condition of justification? ¹⁶

A. Yes; for every one who believeth not is condemned, and every one who believeth is justified.

The essence of the thing seems to be this. That though Christ God offers ~~offers~~ opens the way of salvation, man repents, believes, and is justified by faith, and in this justification is saved."

This idea was the great stimulus to the preaching activities, for by touching the sinner's heart so that he would repent, and believe would ~~offer~~ save him from the punishment. I cannot explain further this doctrinal issue, except to point out that it is the application to the practical problems, the ideas which were gaining currency in English social life, viz. that man is

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power, influence and society position
in society did not rest alone
upon his election to Aristocratic
circles by virtue of his birth, but that
he may enter into the realm of the
Aristocratic and influential members
of society by other methods. In short
the growth of these so-called Amnian
ideas in theology is simply the theological
afflications of the more democratic
habits and customs which were
working their way into this new
English life.

To summarize. (1) The Methodist move-
ment was essentially middle class.
(2) Its exclusion from the English church
rested upon class-distinctions.
(3) The theological circumstances turned upon
the Calvinistic doctrine of election.

But it must be remembered that
the separation ^{from} of the English church
did not take place until after

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the death of the master and Whitfield.

The movement was one of great
affect from the fact of its numerical
growth, and general moral and
spiritual contributions to society
and individuals.

In the opening conference, the first
question ^{is} asked is this. Q. How far
does each one of us agree to submit
to the judgement of the majority?
Answer. "In speculative things, each
one only submit so far as his judge-
ment shall be convinced; in every
practical point, each will submit
so far as he can without wounding
his conscience."

Q. 3. Can a Christian submit any
further than this to any man,
or number of men upon earth?

A. It is plain, he cannot, either

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to Bishop. Convocation, or general council
And this is that general principle
of private judgement, on which
all the reformers proceeded. "Every
man must judge for himself,
because every man must give
an account of himself to God."

You see it is a very liberal
and open door start off. It is a pity
that the right of private judgement
has not been held to with more
fidelity. But the truth is that while
John Wesley was a man of such
great power, his mortal influence
had one bad effect, viz. the exactness
with which he organized made the
exercise of this right of private judge-
ment very difficult, but such
a declaration even was very
significant.

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upon the idea
The emphasis that religion upon
conviction rests upon personal ex-
perience, was another great step.
A man must see God, to believe in
him, that is, that religion is not a
mechanism, not an institution, but
a thing of personal experience, of personal
relationship to God. To my mind
this is a fundamental truth of the
religious life, as it is of all life. The
only way open for a man to know and
realize the power and richness of
the religious life, is to live, to give
it trial, to prove its effectiveness
by direct experience. I cannot show
a man what the religious life is. All
I can do is to say. Come and see
for yourself."

To my mind the limitation of
this doctrine of Experience as

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exounded by the wesleys and their followers in this. They limit its power to those within the folds of Christianity. Still relying upon the idea of the infallibility of the Bible, ~~and~~, they held that this experience was possible only to those whom it is offered by the atonement of Christ. ~~though~~ There is one place in the minutes where they seem to show some doubts upon this point. Question 6. is. "But my soul can never go to heaven with it (Faith in Christ)" The answer is. "It does not appear from holy writ that a man who hears the gospel can, whatever a heathen may do."

But the why was not clear for them to take such a radical step, and the extreme care with which Wesley

organized the following, has made it ²² more difficult for the Methodist denomination to do so since then.

But we shall see how the admission of these two principles into the church, viz. the right of private judgement, and the authority of experience in religious life raised the question of the infallibility of the Bible. If one has the right to judge for himself and bases his judgement upon personal experience, he cannot submit to the authority of the of any kind beyond a point where his conscience is involved. In the course of a few years, this authority of experience, and private judgement come face to face with the Bible, and in our next ~~lecture~~ lecture one month from to night

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we shall take up the topic and that
we leave hanging here, and
ask what authority the Bible has
over a man's Religious life?

But before leaving the subject to
night, I wish to point out its relation
to the lecture next Sunday night.
Method and Whitefield held that
the fruits of this faith must be
"Peace, joy, love, power over all outward
sin, and power to keep down inward
sin." When we come to see the
influence of social life which
this great movement exerted, we
shall ~~have to see~~ discover that
its power manifested itself in
all directions, towards ameliorating
the conditions of life in the English
world which in our last lecture

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me found to be so depressing.
The consideration of that subject
aspect of the movement will be
taken of next Sunday evening.