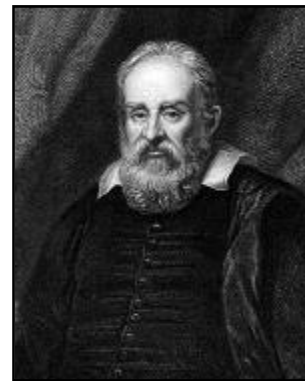


Galileo and the Catholic Church – Faith and Reason

The class focused on the conflict between **Galileo** and the Catholic Church in the early 17th century. The old opinion on astronomy held by Aristotelian university professors around 1600 was the geocentric system whereby all the bodies visible in the heavens revolved around the earth (**geocentric** system). Research in astronomy and physics quickened in Europe in the 16th century, the most famous achievement being Copernicus, *On the Revolution of the Heavenly Bodies* – he asserted that the sun is at the center of the solar system with all the planets (excepting the moon and including the earth) revolving around the sun. He did not use any physical observations or experiments to demonstrate his system, but relied only on the principle of mathematical simplicity to show reasons for preferring it.

Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) was highly interested in **mathematics** (influenced by neo-Platonic philosophy, he was convinced that the physical world behaved as if it were following mathematical laws), and in **empirical observation**, i.e., you have to conduct experiments (controlled observation) to confirm physical laws of nature. He reportedly dropped two objects of unequal weight from the Leaning Tower of Pisa to contradict Aristotelian physics; he ridiculed the old-style university professors who relied exclusively on theory and authority and refused to see for themselves; they also tended to be allied to the Catholic Church. From a scientific point of view, Galileo’s greatest contributions were in the realm of physics.



Galileo at About 60

Much more controversial and public were his publications on astronomy. He invented and used the **telescope** (you have to have instruments to measure physical phenomena in experiments) to make observations on heavenly bodies (sun, Jupiter, moon, Venus, etc.) to demonstrate to his satisfaction that the solar system is **heliocentric** (sun-centered) and not geocentric. He did not invent the heliocentric system, but used controlled observations – such as the correlation between the size of Venus’ disc and its phases – through the telescope to verify its existence. Whether he was able to *prove* the reality of the heliocentric system is open to interpretation.



Pope Urban VIII

To Galileo’s surprise, the **Church** authorities in Italy took great exception to his contention. Galileo protested that he wasn’t speaking about the Church’s privileged subjects – faith and morals -- but only about physical nature; the Good Lord gave us a brain to figure out the laws that God set down for nature; let the scientists uncover the laws of nature while the Church (in Italy) deals with broader philosophical and theological subjects. The Church however, concerned about the status of its **authority** in the era of the Counter-Reformation, instructed Galileo in 1616 not to teach the heliocentric system any more. In their arguments against Galileo, defenders of the traditional position often argued from texts in the Bible that asserted the geocentric position, e.g., “The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose.” Ecclesiastes 1:5. Galileo, who was not a person to step back from a good fight, obeyed only half-heartedly. When he published his

famous *Dialogue on Two World System* in 1628, he gave the advantage in his book to the proponent of heliocentrism, and he implied the thick-headedness of the pope, Urban VIII, who was an illustrious scholar himself and a (former) friend of Galileo. As a result, the Holy Inquisition moved against and brought him to **trial in 1633**; Galileo recanted, and was condemned to house arrest for life; he may, or may not, have said as he exited the room, “E pur si muove (And yet it does move).” He continued his research and publication activities, but died blind still under house arrest in 1642. The enmity between the authority of the Catholic Church and the findings of science was clearly established.

Transition to the Enlightenment

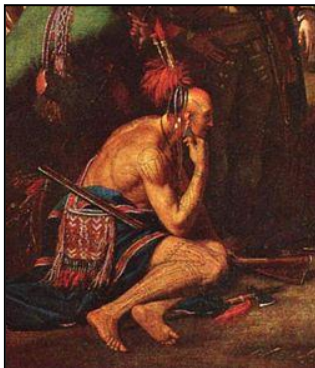
The **impact** and significance of Galileo’s trial are manifold. It established science (i.e., uncovering scientific laws through mathematical analysis and experiments) as the ‘via regia’ (main road) to the discovery of truth about the physical world. Scientific discovery of course was just getting started, and has continued unabated until the present.

When the Enlightenment began in the 18th century, philosophers and writers in France considered **science** the most prestigious intellectual endeavor: if you wanted to know something for sure, you didn’t have to resort to faith or authority, but you found out for yourself using the **scientific method**. The Enlightenment may be defined as the application of this method to the study of human affairs; ethics (right and wrong), politics (the best possible state), society (why is there so much misery in the world?), economics (what is the system that creates the most wealth?), and even religion could be best studied by a pseudo-scientific endeavor – **reason looking into nature**. Why not use the brilliant method of rational investigation developed by Galileo and Isaac Newton to clarify the human universe? We can discover true and objective knowledge about human affairs, and then move to make reforms that would make people happier.



The great mathematician and physicist, Isaac Newton

By opposing and condemning Galileo, the Catholic Church chose to establish a position hostile to science. It began to adopt a **“bastion” (fortress) mentality**, walling itself off from major developments, intellectual and otherwise, in the secular world, and as time went on making it appear that the Church was benighted and ignorant. When Enlightenment investigations began, the **Church was in part irrelevant** – the Church-controlled universities in France played no role in the Enlightenment – and it was in part **the enemy**, since Church authorities often tried to repress Enlightenment activities and publications, e.g., the famous ‘Encyclopédie’ that Enlightenment writers composed in France.



An American Indian as the Noble Savage

The result of the Church’s obstructionism was that the Enlightenment movement often went beyond religious neutrality and was actively **anti-clerical** (hostile to the established church).

The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was an intellectual and social movement centered in **France** (there were strong Enlightenment movements

also in Britain, Germany and the American colonies) lasting from about 1725 to 1775. The word is a literal translation of the German term ‘**Aufklärung**’ coined by the German philosopher, Gottfried Lessing, signifying that mankind was entering a new era marked by reason and knowledge. Typical members of the Enlightenment were Voltaire and Montesquieu in France, John Locke and Adam Smith in Great Britain, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin in the USA. The supporters of the Enlightenment ideology were mostly men and women of middle class origin working **outside the universities**, which were controlled mostly by the churches; some aristocrats such as the Baron de Montesquieu (‘The Spirit of the Laws’) also participated.

It was an informal system of **shared ideas** based on the following values – with of course a great deal of variation among individual philosophers. It had an **optimistic assessment of human nature** – human beings were basically rational rather than emotional, sociable rather than destructive; it follows that humans are not condemned always to misery, but that the human condition is **perfectible**. It was a **secular** system concerned with the well-being of human beings in this life, and not the next; what mattered was the furtherance of human **happiness (bonheur)**. Enlightenment thinkers had a great faith in **reason**; by imitating the scientific method and exercising "**reason looking into nature**" we could discover why misery and exploitation are paramount now (i.e., we are not currently happy), and what we have to do to make the world better. You could study history, compare contemporary European society to other “purer” societies such as Confucian China and the “noble savage” in North America where the Indians were not corrupted by the wealth and idleness of civilization; simply open your eyes to the exploitation of human by human around you; you cannot help but wonder why we have to put up with huge gaps between rich and poor, cruel and unusual punishments in the court system (e.g., hanging, drawing and quartering), and religious intolerance and persecution.



Gottfried Lessing, the German philosopher who coined the term ‘Enlightenment’



William Blake’s Creator
the social sciences, the Enlightenment was essentially a secular **reform movement** intended to enhance human happiness.

By and large, they found that what made people happy was **liberty**: if humans were left alone to make their own choices, then they would decide what was best for them, and in the process the condition of humanity would be improved. *Philosophes* were particularly fond of **freedom of religion** (opposed to an established church and favoring unlimited religious toleration), freedom of the press and **freedom of speech** (writers and intellectuals should say and print what they want). It is important that people resolve to institute **reforms** and improve conditions of life; educational reforms were considered especially important. If we become conscious of the human condition and push for reform, then we can expect humanity to **progress** gradually and steadily toward a brighter future. Revolution that would try to change the condition of the world suddenly and all at once was not considered a good idea. Basing itself on a rather naïve view of the potential of the

Natural Religion

Natural religion or **Deism** was a typical approach to religion by intellectuals (especially in England and France) in the period of the Enlightenment; it affirmed the existence of God. The tenets of natural religion were supposedly **derived from the exercise of reason** and not revelation, i.e. not through the authority of scripture or the pronouncements of the pope. Enlightenment commentary on religion was **skeptical**, i.e. you don't accept assertions on religion unless you can demonstrate it through reason. If you wanted to find out about religion – whether God exists, whether the soul is immortal, whether evil people are punished in a next life, etc. – you need to think and reason about it, not rely on revelation or the Bible, which is essentially an unreliable collection of fairy tales, with the possible exception of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

According to **Lord Herbert of Cherbury**, an English deist of the early 18th century, deism consisted of five principles:

- there is a divine being, who created the universe the way we see and study it; they generally believed that the **existence of God** could be proven by the argument from harmony and design.
- he should be recognized and worshipped;
- the worship consist primarily in moral obedience and piety (**good behavior**);
- good moral behavior is rewarded, bad behavior is punished;
- the **soul is immortal**, and the reward/punishment will be continued in the next life.



Joseph Addison

Deists were normally **not Christians**, although English deists – moderate in their approach – were often friendly to the Christian churches. Some, especially in France where there was great resentment against the authoritarian French Catholic Church, were hostile to Christianity.

Examples of Deism in the 18th Century: **Joseph Addison's** poem (England) on the Augustan heavens expresses a typical Enlightenment deist view of God. The poem focuses on contemplation of the heavenly bodies and evokes the astronomy and science of the 17th and 18th centuries. Heaven is cold, orderly and regular, and is obviously following laws of motion. The poem gives a "**proof**" of the **existence of God** (the argument from order and harmony); and expresses the Enlightenment idea of a "watchmaker"

God who creates the universe, endows it with certain properties and then sets it in motion, leaving it to its own devices. In this scheme God does not appear to have any providential care of human beings. The poet concludes: the heavenly bodies "In Reason's ear they all rejoice,/ And utter forth a glorious voice;/ Forever singing as they shine,/ 'The Hand that made us is divine.'"

The Enlightenment is typically deist, but **not Christian**. A Christian apologist in this period, especially in England where deists and the Church of England were often intertwined, would use similar arguments, but in a more positive tone about God.

Voltaire was the most famous and influential member of the French Enlightenment; he was famous for his defense of **civil liberties** (an apocryphal but typical saying "I may disagree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.") and for his condemnation of established religion and **intolerance** ("Écrasez l'infâme!"). In his hostility to the Catholic Church he was typical of the French Enlightenment.

His article on "**Arius**" (heresy in the Christian Church in the 3rd and 4th centuries that denied the full divinity of Jesus Christ) mocks the dogmatic/theological/ metaphysical approach of western religion – e.g., arguing over the metaphysical nature of Jesus and his relationship with the Father: Does Jesus ‘Proceed’ from the Father? Does the Holy Spirit “proceed” from the Father and the Son? Such focus is meaningless (it is impossible to understand such things) and it leads to religious conflict and intolerance, whereby different Christian sects fight over words. Voltaire says that Constantine, the Roman Emperor, might have been a “detestable tyrant,” but he had the good sense to tell all Christian sects to quit fighting over meaningless theoretical distinctions (“so trifling a matter”) and to focus on what is important, which is proper behavior and service to your fellow men. Voltaire urges us to treat **Jesus as a sage** (i.e., not a divine being) who taught us an admirable ethic -- love your neighbor, practice religious tolerance, help the weak, the poor and the ill, etc. Enlightenment *philosophes* often use Jesus as a stick to beat the established Christian churches with.



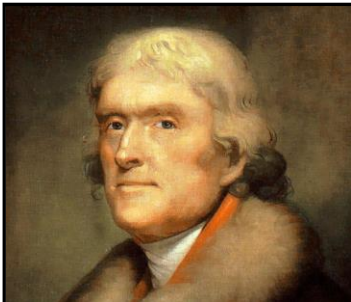
Voltaire

Although most Enlightenment thinkers emphasized that they were not radicals, they usually denied Jesus any divine status and were **hostile to established churches**, especially the Catholic Church.

American Authors

American authors of this period, many of whom were deists, agreed with Voltaire. **Thomas Jefferson** described much of the Christian New Testament as “untruth, charlatanism, and imposture” and he qualified Paul as the “first corrupter of the doctrines of Jesus.” He published a book on Jesus, in which he denied that Jesus was God (Jefferson was not a Christian), and he expunged all references to angels, Jesus’ genealogy, prophecy, the trinity, miracles, exorcisms, and the Resurrection from his abbreviated edition of the New Testament known as the *Jefferson Bible*. The short work ends with the following words:

Now, in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus. And rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.



Thomas Jefferson

Jefferson did however express admiration for Jesus as a moralist, qualifying “Christianity as the highest expression of natural religion and Jesus as an incomparably great moral teacher”. He indicated that he didn’t mind being called a Christian if that meant admiration for Jesus’ ethical teachings but denial of the Trinity and of the claim that Jesus was God. The *Jefferson Bible* was not published until 1895.

In the Declaration of Independence Jefferson used the deistic expressions “Their Creator” and “**Nature’s God**”, while never making an explicitly Christian reference.

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the

powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.



Anti-Jefferson cartoon compares him unfavorably to Washington

was quite skeptical about the behavior of organized Christian religions: “[Creeds] have been the bane and ruin of the Christian church, its own fatal invention, which, through so many ages, made of Christendom a slaughterhouse, and at this day divides it into castes of inextinguishable hatred to one another.” (Letter of 1822)

Although Jefferson never joined the **Unitarian Church** being formed at that time (he always remained formally enrolled in the Episcopal Church), he often let it be known that he was sympathetic and that he shared many of their beliefs. (Unitarians held to a belief in a beneficent God, they denied the Trinity and thus Jesus’ divinity

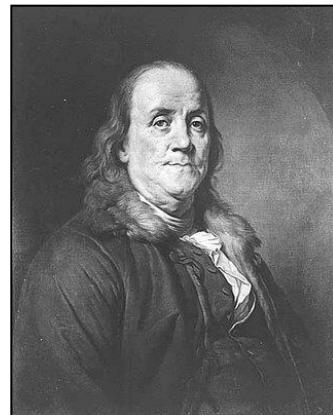
and emphasized tolerance of all religious beliefs.)

He was thus concerned that there not be an established religion in the newly created USA nor any other form of favor shown to a particular religion by the government. Since “the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions,” he argued indefatigably for the erection of a “**wall of separation** between Church and State” in the USA and he succeeded in having the principle enshrined in the U.S. constitution.

The illustrious Catholic theologian Avery Dulles sums up Jefferson’s religion succinctly. Although he never called himself a deist, he fit the definition:

In summary, then, Jefferson was a deist because he believed in one God, in divine providence, in the divine moral law, and in rewards and punishments after death; but did not believe in supernatural revelation. He was a Christian deist because he saw Christianity as the highest expression of natural religion and Jesus as an incomparably great moral teacher. He was not an orthodox Christian because he rejected, among other things, the doctrines that Jesus was the promised Messiah and the incarnate Son of God. Jefferson's religion is fairly typical of the American form of deism in his day.

In his priceless letter to Ezra Stiles **Benjamin Franklin** indicated that he admired and followed the teachings of Jesus (“As to Jesus of Nazareth, my Opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think the system of Morals and His Religion, as he left them to us, the best the World ever saw or is likely to see”), but he wasn't so sure about the contemporary churches that called themselves Christian, nor was he sure whether Jesus was truly God (since he was 84, he wasn't going to worry about the question too much, since he anticipated that he would find out soon). He defined his religious creed – deism – in terms almost identical to Cherbury’s. He advocated an easy-going tolerance in religious matters and he



Benjamin Franklin

maintained good relations with all the Christian churches around him (“...as I have never opposed any of their Doctrines, I hope to go out of the World in Peace with them all.”).

His tone contrasted sharply with the shrillness and **anti-clerical aggressiveness** of Voltaire's remarks on the Catholic Church in France. French deists tended to be anti-Christian. English, American and German deists were friendlier and more easy-going, since they did not have the onerous weight of the privileged French Catholic Church to deal with. Because of the oppressive weight of the established Catholic Church, reverse **anti-clerical intolerance** was to become common in Catholic countries in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Church of England in the 18th Century

The **Church of England** was not noted for its “sacrificial ardor” in the 18th century. Much of the theology written by Anglicans was tainted by **natural religion**, and while nominally Christian, it did not emphasize the sacrifice or divinity of Jesus (e.g., John Toland's *Christianity not Mysterious*) and it strongly played down the importance of Scripture in religious belief and practice. The Church was wealthy, and men entered the ministry often because it offered a **comfortable** and non-demanding life and a good income rather than because of a real religious vocation. The religious enthusiasm of the 16th and early 17th centuries had died away by the beginning of the 18th.



English country church

Sacrifice and enthusiasm were not much valued at Oxford or Cambridge University, where ministers in the Church of England were trained; students and professors were interested more in the good life than in intense study or the pursuit of religious perfection. Attending lectures and writing exams had become “half-hearted formalities.” (Tomkins) The costs of the Church

were born either by the state or by the income derived from property attached to parishes or bishoprics. Ordained **ministers** almost always came from “**gentle**” (middle class) backgrounds; and bishops got their appointment from the government (remember that the King is the “governor” of the Church) based on their wealth and their social and political connections.

Bishops, while usually not scandalous, were often careerists interested in a comfortable lifestyle and honor due to their rank and service in the House of Lords. The clergy of the Church of England were known as bulwarks of the **established** social and political order. Although no one denied the existence of God, it was not considered seemly to show religious fervor in this period.

Hogarth's famous cartoon has everyone sleeping during an Anglican sermon, with the exception of the clerk who was casting a surreptitious glance on the *décolletage* of the servant girl (who was also sleeping). Other cartoons have Anglican parsons engaged in sexual romps (lust), or more commonly partaking enthusiastically of the pleasures of the table (gluttony).

The **Rev. James Woodforde** was an Anglican parson who served in a parish in Norfolk (eastern England) in the late 18th century. His ‘Diary’ is very well known for its description of the life of a ‘typical’ clergyman of the Church of England in this period. Woodforde was certainly not a bad man – he was regular in performing his priestly duties including the distribution of charity to the poor of his parish –



Parson James Woodforde

but he **lacked the ‘sacrificial ardor.’** His diary is concerned largely with his own physical well-being: **food** (he ate a lot of it and gave the reader exhaustive lists of the food and drink at his table), his health (he suffered from the gout and complained about it at great length), and the weather (he made the first reference in the English language to an umbrella – in 1791). Perhaps the most famous incident was his officiating at the funeral of an infant child; rather than reflect on the sadness of the occasion, he complained about the cold weather and the cutting wind. Nowhere does he conduct an examination of conscience, reflect on moral issues, or in another way show a spiritual sensitivity; God and the progress of his spiritual life are mentioned only occasionally.

Two General Reasons for the Success of Wesley



William Hogarth, ‘Gin Lane’ on 18th century London

Evangelicalism as a religious movement is generally associated with the following: **enthusiasm** and emotionalism in religious life, sometimes through openness to the operation of the Holy Spirit in us; a personal **relationship with Jesus Christ** that is based on faith in Him and a commitment to his person; and a renewal of attention to and reliance upon the **Bible** – evangelicals usually insist on a literal or plain reading of scripture. (Billy Graham is a good example of an evangelical.) Evangelicals were very successful in 18th century England (Wesley), Germany (Pietists were intent on reinvigorating the Lutheran Church in much the same way Wesley was acting on the Church of England), and the North American colonies (the Great Awakening under George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards). The time was ripe for evangelical

movements in these countries.

England in the 18th century was going through an important **demographic transformation** that helped open the way for religious movements such as John Wesley’s. Population growth resumed early in the century, and industrialization began in the second part of the century. The result was that large numbers of former peasants were **moving to cities and new industrial centers** to find work, and that the population weight in England was shifting from the older, generally rural South to the more industrialized North. These new populations were not cared for sufficiently by the established Church, thus leaving the way open for evangelical movements like Wesley’s.

John Wesley and the Success of Wesleyism (Methodism)

John Wesley grew up in **Epworth, Lincolnshire** the son of an Anglican parson who was a rabid Tory, and of **Susanna**, a strong woman of spiritual sensitivity, who had no problem standing up to her imperious husband and who had an important influence on her son. The families of both of his parents’ families had been Puritans in the conflicts of the 17th century, but they were of Tory (High Church) sympathies at the time of John’s birth; thus his parental



The Rectory at Epworth

influences combined High Church ideas – sacraments, liturgy, performance of good works, the sacredness of the priesthood – with Low Church ones – reliance on the Bible, the primacy of faith, simplicity in worship. Even as a child John was stubborn and when pressed, was always able to give ample justification for his beliefs and actions; he liked to **reason** and argue. John and his mother were convinced that God had given him a **mission** to accomplish something important in his life.

In the early 18th century, **Oxford** was a wealthy and relaxed institution devoted mainly to good living and the training of Anglican clergymen. When John went up to Oxford, he at first lived a pleasant, worldly life, studying a moderate amount, mainly drinking (moderately), chatting, playing cards, flirting with women, enjoying the social round. He soon however became dissatisfied with his rather aimless existence. He embarked on a vigorous reading program, concentrating on Catholic-oriented authors like the **Baron de Renty** (French 17th century) and the



Magdalen College, Oxford

famous **Thomas à Kempis**, author of the ‘Imitation of Christ.’ He decided he needed to make **rules** for himself to follow so that he would no longer waste valuable time – early to wake, certain hours of study, spiritual meditation, frequent reception of the Eucharist, and rounds of **charity work** including visiting prisoners and the sick and helping the poor. He started keeping a diary (later metamorphosed into his ‘Journal’), in which he kept a running critique of his lifestyle, his spiritual successes and failures. He and his followers were called the ‘**Methodists**,’ afterwards, he organized the ‘**Holy Club**’ (satirical name given by other undergraduates). After this **first conversion** John was

obviously trying to perfect himself and gain a stronger faith through **wholesome good works**. He graduated from the university and was ordained a clergyman. Nevertheless, he remained dissatisfied with his “comfortable faith.” He was disturbed by his “**invincible sensuality**” (which seems to have consisted primarily of flirting with young women and having “impure thoughts”). As a result, he decided to take up a mission to Georgia, where he hoped to escape the tired Old World atmosphere of Oxford, and work among the “unspoiled” new colonists and the American Indians.

His short experience in **Georgia** was a disaster. On the way over he was struck during a violent storm by the peaceful **acceptance of the imminence of death by the Moravians** who were also on the ship, whereas Wesley was trembling with fear at the prospect. In Georgia he was much too stiff necked and orthodox for the average Georgia Anglican. He had stormy romantic difficulties with ‘Miss Sophy’ that were the scandal of the colony. Caught in a dilemma between his attraction to women and his sense that celibacy was the path to perfection, he always had a difficult time making up his mind when dealing with women. After an inconclusive trial before the Savannah Grand Jury, he fled across the swamps to South Carolina, and eventually returned to England. He was very disillusioned with the potential for conversion among the American Indians. At this point he even **doubted** the truth of the Christian message. On the trip back, he had his fateful encounter with **August Spangenburg**, where the demoralized Wesley was further shaken up by Spangenburg’s pointed question, “**Do you know Jesus has saved you?**” (I.e., Are you certain that you have **faith** and the grace of Jesus?)



Young John Wesley

Wesley's **second conversion** experience was complex and intense. He was obviously in severe emotional and spiritual crisis. In London the Moravian **Peter Böhler** advised him (in Latin) to turn away from reason/natural religion and thinking about God with his head, and to rely on his heart – his intuition and his feeling. Wesley's brother, Charles, converted first before his brother. John was very tense in **May 1738**, and after (like Augustine) turning to a passage from *Romans* and Luther's commentary on Romans, he felt a strange warming, a sense of light and confidence. He now felt **confidence** in his conviction that he was saved by the blood of Christ; also confidence in his ministry. He went on to have many moments of weakness, but Bohler gave him the famous advice – "Preach faith until you have it, and then because you have it, you will preach faith;" he appears to be telling him that the good works he performs will perfect his faith. The author V.H.H. Green thinks John's personality was now integrated and poised for great things. John soon began to preach, with dramatic and emotional results in his listeners.



Wesley Preaching at Epworth

John's **relationship with women** was always unsuccessful, even disastrous. He seemed to have a strong attraction to women and he wanted to marry; but perhaps because of his sense that a true apostle would **remain celibate** or his conviction that no woman would ever measure up to the standards set by his mother Susanna, he would always back off when courting a woman. His tergiversations and vague commitments often created misunderstandings, hard feelings, and even scandal. After the bad experience with Miss Sophy, he had a similar series of misunderstandings with Grace Murray in 1749: he gave the impression that he wanted to marry her (his proposal was "If ever I marry, I think you will be the person."), but their plans broke down, Grace married a rival, and there were severe recriminations after she married the other man. Shortly after that, he married **Molly Vazeille** (it would appear on the rebound and much against the wish of his brother Charles). The marriage was a violent failure. At one point she broke into a dinner at which one of her husband's female followers was serving, and she shouted hysterically "The whore now serving you has three husbands living!" (Tomkins, 153) They separated not long after their wedding; and they continued to attack and vilify one another until her death in 1781. One wonders whether the "shadow of Susanna" (his mother) was just too long; he said so himself in a letter.



William Hogarth satirizes religious enthusiasm in "Enthusiasm Delineated"

John's **ministry** was instantly successful. One reason was his charismatic personality and great oratorical skills, although his preaching style was much calmer and gentler than that of his colleague **George Whitefield**. Whereas it was said that the fiery Whitefield could bring an audience to tears by merely pronouncing the word 'Mesopotamia', Wesley's 'style was the **calm, equal flow of a placid stream**'. Wesley nevertheless had a powerful impact on his audience, as testified one of his early lay preachers John Nelson:

As soon as he got upon the stand, he ... turned his face towards where I stood, and I thought fixed his eyes upon me. His countenance struck such an awful dread upon me, before I heard him speak, that it made my heart beat like the pendulum of a clock; and when he did speak, I thought his whole discourse was aimed at me

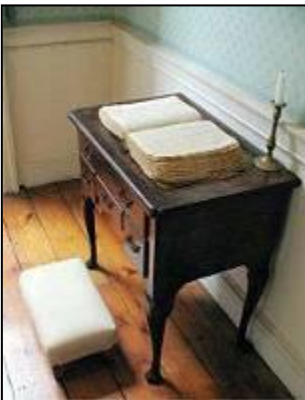
Another reason for his success was the failure of the Church of England in the 18th century to adapt to the new population patterns in England – large numbers of poor people moved to the industrial towns and cities located largely in the north of England. John’s converts were largely in these areas. John was enormously “**clean**” (he invented the phrase “Cleanliness is next to godliness”) and **energetic** – he traveled hundreds of thousands of miles in his career, all in the United Kingdom; he averaged about 5000 miles a year, all on horseback, with often four or five sermons daily delivered often in fields; he crossed the tempestuous Irish Sea 21 times to preach in Ireland. A famous portrait has him riding on his horse reading a book and letting the horse lead him to his next destination.

Everywhere he went he excited an **emotional, ecstatic reaction** from many of his listeners, who cried out spontaneously, broke into tears, had epileptic-like fits, flailed their arms, etc.; in the second phase of their experience, the subjects usually relapsed into a peaceful and joyful mood reminiscent of the way John had felt in his 1738 experience. Given the calm and reasonableness prized in the 18th century Church of England, these outbursts were often received scandalously by local gentry, and even Wesley, who had experienced peace and calm when he had his own conversion experience, was somewhat taken aback by the emotional violence. Disorders at his sermons abounded especially in the 1740s, when local notables (parish clergy, gentlemen, etc.) organized sometimes violent demonstrations against his presence. The upheaval abated in the late 1740s when political conditions in England had calmed down.



Anglican bishop 18th century

Even though he always emphasized that he was working to renew the Church of England from inside, he received a lukewarm, sometimes hostile, welcome from the **Anglican clergy**. The **parish clergy** were particularly disturbed at his preaching in their parishes without (usually) their permission. They were even more disturbed by his preaching in the fields when denied the use of the local church; some parsons asserted that he was subversive and inciting public disorder. John had coolly correct relationships with most of the **bishops** he contacted; they certainly didn’t much like what he was doing. Some told him that “you should be preaching a reasonable Christianity!” The famous Joseph Butler said, “The pretending to extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing, *a very horrid thing!*”), but they let him be and told him to work things out for himself. (The Church of England was a long way from the authoritarian intolerance of many churches in 18th century Europe.) Nevertheless, his relations with the Church of England were generally cool, and often difficult, during most of his life.



Wesley’s Prayer Desk

John was an iron-willed ruler of the Methodist societies; he was described as “more papal than presbyterian;” “**granite in aspic.**” He had a tightly knit organization with good control over local **societies** – this was called the **Methodist connexion**. He always insisted that the **lay preachers** he appointed to monitor his societies be loyal to the Church of England; that they respect the local priest, and that they hold their Methodist worship services on Saturday evening and encourage the Methodist loyalists to attend the Anglican Church and receive Holy Communion on Sunday. However, the formation of the Methodist societies and the appointment of the lay preachers drove an ever widening **wedge between the Anglican Church and the**

Methodist Connexion. The differences in class and education between the Anglican clergy and the lay preachers were too great; the priests ridiculed the puritan lifestyle of the Methodists, their penitents' meetings when backsliders would repent their mistakes and make public commitments for personal reform, and Wesley's periodic expulsions of recalcitrant members from the societies; and they resented the Methodists building up an alternative religious organization with separate meeting halls in their parishes. Lay preachers, convinced that the Methodists were the "true Christians" and that Anglicans were the "**almost Christians**," chomped at the bit and put pressure on Wesley to break with the Church.

John's **theology** was really rather traditional (and much more familiar to American Protestants). He rather over-emphasized the importance of works during his Oxford years, and he then reverted to an emphasis on faith alone during and after his 1738 conversion. Most of the time, he was a died-in-the-wool **Arminian** (Christ died for us all and not for a select few; every individual has the **free will** to choose to follow Jesus Christ, whether to accept his grace generated on the cross). He added his idea of **sanctification or perfection**: i.e. the moment of conversion does not make you a 'perfect' Christian, but you must devote your life to good works (go to church, preach, visit prisoners, etc.) so that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit you may improve yourself in the eyes of God; in this way you actually **perfect the faith** that you have received from God, although you will never of course approach the perfection of God. (Tomkins, 38) Wesley sometimes caused controversy when in some of his writings and sermons he seemed to say that moral perfection in this world could be reached and that the Christian life could be free from sin. He once said that our aim is to be "perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect."



Jacob Arminius, who first proposed Arminianism

John was viciously attacked, mostly by Calvinists, for his Arminian beliefs; after a while, he responded with great passion ("You make God worse than the devil!..."), and aggressively ferreted Calvinists out of his Methodist societies. He seemed to fear that **predestinarian beliefs** would expose the people to the temptation of **antinomianism** (since one is saved by God's will, we don't have to worry about observing the law; we can sin all we want). In the first years of his ministry up to the 1750s, John emphasized the experience of faith (conversion) without so much emphasis on works; but as he experienced the challenges of organizing his church and the attacks of Calvinist enemies, he reverted to his Oxford days in stressing **the importance of works** (liturgy, prayer, good works) in the process of sanctification.



William Wilberforce

The first substantial step toward **separation** from the Church of England came in the early 1780s, when Wesley broke with the apostolic tradition of the Anglican Church and began to **ordain priests himself** for service in the former **American colonies**. He argued that, since there was no distinction in the New Testament between priest and bishop, it was not necessary to have an Anglican bishop to ordain new priests. The American Methodist societies were almost as populous as the English, and they naturally had much greater difficulty integrating their Methodist activities with continued membership in the Church of England, especially after the success of the American Revolution. This process of separation continued fitfully, finally resulting in the formal separation of the Methodist Church from the Church of England after Wesley's death.

Wesley was a man of curious **apparent contradictions**. He was on the one hand not a personal and empathetic person. He rarely spoke about his personal life to others or in his own Journal; he didn't even mention the name of Grace Murray when he was suffering a personal crisis about marrying her. He was quite detached when he felt compelled to give consolation to friends and relatives for the death of a loved one. He tended to be aloof, blunt, and unsparing in his criticism of friends and colleagues. On the other hand, he loved humanity as a whole, and he worked indefatigably for their well-being. He traveled probably 300,000 miles preaching; he gave away practically all of his income to charitable causes; he was a **humanitarian**, who found the institution of slavery (then still legal in the British Empire) "execrable."

Wesley's impact on American and English religion after 1800 was significant. The Methodist churches, while often split into separate organizations, shared a common viewpoint that continues into the 21st century; the splits common in the 19th century have tended toward reunion in the 20th. He made a great contribution to the growth of evangelicalism – the religion of the heart – in the 18th century. Modern-day Pentecostals owe much to Wesley.



A typical Methodist church in the 19th century

Wesleyism also had an **influence on the Church of England**. The (more or less Calvinist) Evangelical movement inside the Church of England owed much to the influence of Calvinists inside and outside the Methodist movement, and to the humanitarian impulse of Wesley. The **Evangelicals**, while very puritanical, were also humanitarian reformers; they were based at Cambridge University; leaders like William Wilberforce pushed hard for the **abolition of the slave trade (1807)** and the abolition of the institution of slavery in the British Empire (1834). ("Amazing Grace" is an entertaining and moving film about Wilberforce.)



William Hogarth's famous picture of the English insane asylum 'Bedlam'.

Another long-term influence of Wesleyism was the tradition of **humanitarian reform** – e.g., better conditions in prisons and public hospitals, kinder and more humanitarian ways of taking care of the poor and the mentally ill (see picture of Bedlam), etc., all of which were important parts of reform movements in the 19th century. Wesley would probably be opposed to the death penalty and in favor of rehabilitation as the purpose of prisons. Aside from Wilberforce, Methodists had a great impact on Liberal and Labour Party movements in the 20th century; the Labour Prime Minister of England in the 1960s, Sir Harold Wilson, was a devout Methodist.