On the eve of the French Revolution, Evangelicalism was an emerging movement. Hylson-Smith notes that in 1789, "there were possibly no more than forty or fifty Evangelical clergy" (1989:68). Yet, by 1800, at the end of the French Revolution, the Evangelical clergy swelled to nearly 500 and would continue this growth well into the 19th century (Hylson-Smith 1989:68). While it should not be assumed that the French Revolution was the sole cause of the dramatic growth of Evangelicalism, there are significant reasons to consider its influence. As the Whig lawyer Lord Henry Cockburn observed, "Everything was connected with the Revolution in France, which for twenty years was, or was made, all in all, everything: not this thing or that thing, but literally everything was soaked in this one event" (cited in Hylson-Smith 1989:63-64). This present study then will examine how the French Revolution impacted Evangelicalism and in what ways, Evangelicalism responded to it.

Arising out of the religious traditions of Pietism, Puritanism and Methodism, Evangelicalism is a cross-denominational movement that unites Christians who share common characteristics. Bebbington isolates these characteristics as conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism (1989:3). Evangelicals assert that *true* Christianity requires an inward transformation through personal faith (conversionism) in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross (crucicentrism). This transformation must, by definition, reveal itself through works, such as charity, evangelism and a general concern for God's creation (activism). Evangelicals place great emphasis on the authority and consequently, the study of the Bible (biblicism).

In addition to these characteristics, inclusivism is one more, often overlooked characteristic of Evangelicalism. Evangelicals do not generally regard church government as a central concern of essential Christianity (Gascoigne 1989:251). Evangelicals, therefore, could be Dissenters, Methodists or Anglicans and would disagree on many doctrinal issues. But, despite their many differences, adherents to these various denominations increasingly recognized and promoted their common characteristics. As a result of this unity amidst disunity, historians incorrectly identify Evangelicals with particular denominations. F.K. Brown observes that some historians identify Evangelicals with liberals and other historians identify them with Methodists

(1961:5). Brown and still others following him argue that Evangelicals were "not dissenters and not Methodists but deeply conservative members of the Established Church" (1961:5). In reality, Evangelicalism embraced individuals from all of these groups. While these individuals continued to assert and defend the doctrinal distinctives of their different traditions, their common characteristics brought them together as Evangelicals.

Because Evangelicalism did not share homogeneity in all its doctrine, let alone its politics, there was a divided reaction and response to the French Revolution. With the fall of the Bastille in 1789, a storm of controversy ignited among Evangelicals in England. John Clayton, an Evangelical Dissenter from a Presbyterian background, decried the Revolution in a publication entitled *The Duty of Christians to Magistrates* (Watts 1978:482). Similarly, most Evangelical Methodists, following John Wesley's views on government, also opposed the Revolution. The Evangelical Baptist ministers Mark Wilkes and Robert Hall as well as many other Evangelical Dissenters, however, hailed the downfall of the *ancien regime* as a decisive victory for "Christian" values of freedom and toleration. Many of these Evangelical Dissenters saw in *The Declaration of the Rights of Man* the hope of achieving toleration in their own country, specifically they hoped that Pitt's government would repeal the Test and Corporation Acts:

> Nothing affected English politics more powerfully, in the first stage of the Revolution, than the contrast between the sudden victory of the theory of tolerance in France and the position of the Dissenters in England. Religious and political reform went together (Brown 1965:29).

Alongside the Evangelical Dissenters, prominent Evangelical Anglicans Hannah More and Thomas Clarkson also praised the Revolution. More "characterized the fall of French absolutism as the demolition of one of Satan's 'great engines'" (Ford 1996:104). More also hoped that the new French constitution would provide freedom for the slaves. On this count, Clarkson optimistically attempted to secure support for abolition among the French revolutionaries. In August 1789, while visiting Paris, he wrote William Wilberforce to express his hope that the National Assembly would soon end the slave trade:

> LaFayette had undertaken to propose the Abolition in the National Assembly, which would probably, as soon as he ceased speaking, carry the question by acclamation. In eight or ten days the subject will be brought into the National Assembly. Evidence will not be necessary: and I should not be surprised if the French were to do themselves the honour of voting away this diabolical traffic in a night (Wilberforce and Wilberforce 1839:229).

Clarkson's optimism seemed especially warranted when the National Assembly made him and Wilberforce citizens of France (Coupland 1945:127). Wilberforce, contrary to Clarkson, distanced himself from this honor and assumed a more pragmatic stance towards the Revolution. Wilberforce was suspicious of the events in France and the Pitt government, of which he was an ally, maintained an official policy of neutrality towards the Revolution (Coupland 1945:128). Wilberforce regarded Pitt's support for abolition as critical to the ultimate success of the cause. As such, he did not want to challenge the policy of neutrality and risk losing Pitt's support. Other prominent Evangelical Anglicans, such as Samuel Hoare and Isaac Milner, showed an equal reluctance to support the Revolution (Coupland 1945:127-128). They all reasoned that events in France were far from settled.

With the events of 1792 and the rise of the Terror in 1793, Hoare, Milner and Wilberforce's initial skepticism of the Revolution proved prophetic. The French Revolution became progressively more radical as the Jacobins imprisoned and then, executed Louis XVI. Under the leadership of Robespierre, the Jacobins sponsored a program of dechristianization. The regicide and the program of dechristianization galvanized Evangelical supporters of the French Revolution.

While a few Evangelical Dissenters, such as Mark Wilkes, continued to support the Revolution as well as radicalism in England, Robert Hall and most Evangelical Dissenters increasingly expressed their disillusionment and even disdain for the direction the Revolution had taken. Watts writes, "As anti-revolutionary sentiment intensified, so the official representatives and leaders of Dissent vied with those of the Methodists in their declarations of loyalty to king

and country" (1995:356). In 1794, the *Protestant Dissenter's Magazine* confidently asserted that the majority of Dissenters abhorred French principles (Watts 1995:356).

Leading the Evangelical charge against the French Revolution, however, were Isaac Milner and Cambridge Evangelical Anglicans. One of the chief characteristics of Milner's attack on the French Revolution was to equate any type of dissent from the Church and State with Jacobinical principles. As Vice-Chancellor, Milner completely suppressed Cambridge radicalism, whether political or religious. William Frend, a prominent radical and supporter of the French Revolution, was banished from the University after a notorious trial that ended on May 30, 1793 (Gascoigne 1989:232). With the support of Charles Simeon, the prominent Evangelical minister of Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge, Milner established the University as a center for church and king Evangelicalism. This accomplishment was vital in achieving acceptance for Evangelicalism in political circles and society at large. Milner and Simeon recognized that "any challenge to established institutions took on a political aspect" and it was, therefore, critical to demonstrate loyalty to these established institutions (Gascoigne 1989:258).

As the Terror in France increased, the British government became increasingly paranoid and even oppressive. In 1792, a proclamation was issued against seditious meetings and publications, which aimed to close down societies supporting the Revolution. In 1794, a special act suspended Habeas Corpus. Members of societies supporting the Revolution were taken into custody and brought to trial. Following Milner and Simeon, Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect supported these government measures. Wilberforce argued that the suspension of civil liberties was "a temporary sacrifice by which the blessings of liberty may be transmitted to our children unimpaired" (Coupland 1945:164). Hannah More, at the request of the Anglican Bishop Beilby Porteus, wrote *Village Politics*, a tract that trumpeted the loyalist cause. In 1793, she wrote an open letter to Jacob Dupont decrying his atheism and the depravity of the French people. Both Wilberforce and More championed the British constitution and denounced the evils of Revolutionary France.

Together with the church and king Evangelicalism of Milner and Simeon, More and Wilberforce's support for Pitt's government was not well received by Evangelical Dissenters. The Evangelical Anglican response indiscriminately called the loyalty of Dissenters into question and fueled an hysteria whereby Dissenters were associated with radicalism and labeled as Jacobins; this despite the professed loyalty of at least Evangelical Dissenters to king and country. Robert Hall went so far as to reproach Simeon in the *Cambridge Intelligencer* (Gascoigne 1989:259). The enduring legacy of these events on Evangelical Dissenters is that it encouraged many Dissenters to adopt a posture of "apolitical quietism" (Watts 1995:353,355,357). The Staffordshire Congregational Association declared, "in worldly politics we have no concern" and likewise, Andrew Fuller, "the authentic voice of Evangelical Dissent," asserted that "taking an eager and deep interest in political disputes" was a major cause of apostasy (Watts 1995:356-357). The French Revolution, its radical shifts and its impact on England convinced Dissenters that politics was simply too dangerous for them.

Despite promoting a church and king Evangelicalism, Evangelical Anglicans did not escape the age of the French Revolution unscathed. Wilberforce soon discovered that the label of Jacobin was not limited to Dissenters. Throughout the period of 1793-1799, Wilberforce had to respond to charges of Jacobinism whenever he introduced motions to abolish slavery. These accusations against Wilberforce became even more impassioned when Wilberforce sided with the Fox opposition against Pitt's government over the issue of peace or war with France. Though opposed to the French Revolution, Wilberforce, along with most Evangelicals, did not support a war with France. While the Evangelical Dissenters denounced any war on dogmatic grounds (Watts 1995:357; Ford 1996:125), Evangelical Anglicans opposed it for more pragmatic reasons. Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect believed that the prosecution of the war diverted attention away from the abolitionist movement (Ford 1996:125) and they also came to believe that peace, rather than war, "could bring about a counter-revolution" in France (Coupland 1945:152). When Wilberforce moved his pacifist amendment in the Commons in 1795, he was immediately ostracized by Pitt and characterized as a Jacobin. Fortunately, Pitt's government eventually

shifted its attitude towards peace and consequently, the two men reconciled. Wilberforce and Evangelical Anglicans, however, continued to be attacked from certain quarters, most notably the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, as Jacobins. The church and king Evangelicalism of Milner and Simeon as well as Pitt's renewed friendship helped to counteract that attack but despite their support, Wilberforce was unable to achieve abolition in the age of the French Revolution. For the aristocracy of Britain, the abolitionist movement seemed to rely too heavily on the Revolutionary battle cry of liberty, equality and fraternity.

While the French Revolution effectively halted the abolitionist movement, it provided an environment conducive to the Evangelical program of moral reform. As the French Revolution moved from its idealistic beginnings towards the Terror of 1792-1794, Evangelicals almost unanimously pointed to the rise of atheism and irreligion as the perpetrators of the barbarities. The Enlightenment, the ideological predecessor of atheism and the French Revolution, disseminated a doctrine of human nature that Evangelicals regarded as anathema to essential Christianity; that is, the doctrine of the innate goodness of human nature. In effect, this doctrine nullified the salvific aspect of the Christian message. Christianity was reduced to little more than a set of moral guidelines. The French Revolution, however, provided a clear example that humanity without religion, and specifically, without Christian religion, was depraved. In *A Practical View of Christianity* (1797), Wilberforce writes,

> A neighbouring nation [France] has lately furnished a lamentable proof, that superior polish and refinement may well consist with a very large measure of depravity. But to appeal to a still more decisive instance: it may be seen in the history of the latter years of the most celebrated of the Pagan nations, that the highest degrees of civilization and refinement are by no means inseparable from the most shocking depravity of morals (1996:212).

Given the obvious example of France, Evangelicals refuted the Enlightenment doctrine of the innate goodness of humanity and offered their *true* Christianity as a buttress to the social and political order of the nation.

Evangelicals promoted a reformation of manners, or moral reform, to English society as a means of instilling this *true* Christianity in the people and protecting the nation against the assault of Jacobinism. Extremely critical of the Evangelical approach, Newman styles the Evangelical reform movement as a "cunningly directed . . . moral revolution" (1987:235). Newman claims that Evangelicals silenced opposition in the English upper class by labeling critics as atheists and Jacobins. Adopting the language of nationalism and seizing anti-French sentiment, Evangelicals condemned immorality, vice and irreligion "from the patriotic pulpit of anti-Jacobinism" (Newman 1987:234). The lower classes then became victims of an "anti-conspiracy . . . to subvert the established order" (1987:233, 235). In addition, he argues that the source of the Evangelical reform movement "inhered less in the Cross than in the wholesale consumption . . . of anti-French propaganda and of the accompanying doctrine of the seriousness, honesty and moral independence of the native Englishman" (1987:239). While the Evangelicals were not immune to using the popular ploy of attacking opponents as Jacobins, Newman's argument does not take seriously the strength of Evangelical convictions or England's historic commitment to Christianity as fundamental to its national identity. Evangelicals shared a "deep conviction in the religious underpinnings of elite status and sound politics" (Ford 1996:126). As such, Evangelicals interpreted the Terror as Providence visiting its judgment upon the immorality of the French people. The perceived apocalyptic significance of this judgment and a concomitant growth in millenarianism during the 1790s only added weight to this interpretation of the events. In turn, Evangelicals were convinced that comparable immorality among the upper and lower classes of England presaged a similar judgment:

> An Old Testament feeling was taking root of divine wrath visited on a chosen but erring nation; a nation chosen, that is, to save Europe and civilisation from France. There was an outpouring of mystical and prophetical interpretations of the great events of the day, which seemed to defy human understanding. Hence the call for a national reformation of manners (Kiernan 1952:50).

The English people needed to recognize their own moral degeneracy and reform it so that "the blessing of God might be drawn upon our country, and the strokes of his anger be for a while suspended" (Wilberforce 1996:211). Indeed, Wilberforce continues his exposition on the relationship between morality and politics by first challenging English society to recognize its own depravity: "The distemper of which, as a community, we are sick, should be considered rather as a moral than a political malady. Every effort should be used to raise the depressed tone of public morals" (1996:213). "But fruitless will be all attempts to sustain, much more to revive, the fainting cause of morals," Wilberforce adds, "unless you can in some degree restore the prevalence of Evangelical Christianity" (1996:215). Evangelicals judged that only a nation embracing *true* Christianity could withstand the assault of Revolutionary heresy. Consequently, Evangelical Christians emphasized the interrelatedness of public morality and *true* Christianity. The practice of morality, brought about by a reformation of manners, would make England moral, lead to a revival of *true* Christianity and save the country from Divine wrath. Furthermore, *true* Christianity was an essential characteristic of England's historic identity:

> This was the Religion of the most eminent Reformers, of those bright ornaments of our country who suffered martyrdom under Queen Mary [1516-58]; of their successors in the times of Elizabeth [Queen Elizabeth I (1533-1603)]; in short, of all the pillars of our Protestant church; of many of its highest dignitaries; of Davenant, of Jewell, of Hall, of Reynolds, of Beveridge, of Hooker, of Andrews, of Smith, of Leighton, of Usher, of Hopkins, of Baxter, and of many others of scarcely inferior note . . . every effort should be used to revive the Christianity of our better days (Wilberforce 1996:197, 215).

The truthfulness of this Evangelical claim is self-evident. It was not "self-serving propaganda," as Newman suggests (1987:238). The people already believed that England was a chosen nation; a belief eulogized and embedded in the national psyche by Handel's great oratories in the 1720s, 30s and 40s (cf. Kiernan above). The French Revolution created the urgency; moral and intellectual fidelity to the historic Christian character of England, however, was the motivation.

As Evangelicalism entered the Napoleonic Age, its encounter with the French Revolution had made a profound and lasting impact on its shape and character. The unity of the movement was severely challenged by the Evangelical Anglican retreat from inclusivism to the parochial structures of the Established Church. The abolitionist movement, such an integral part of its activism, was postponed. Still, Evangelicals managed to achieve great success in a program for moral reform. Offered as an alternative to revolution, the success of the Evangelical reform movement, a success that would continue into the 19th century, provided England with a new model for political change. And, with the looming crises of the call for parliamentary and social reform from the 1830s onwards, this model would prove critical in maintaining stability. Evangelicalism also proved its ability to adapt to change as well as pragmatically employ the system to forward its agenda. Evangelicalism emerged from the age of the French Revolution as a powerful and dynamic force with a critical part to play in Britain's Victorian Age. It now embarked upon a new phase in its ongoing development.

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