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A table of contents for the *Congregational Studies Conference Papers* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_congregational-studies-conference_01.php



1992 Congregational Studies Conference Papers

**When Evolutionary Thought and
Congregational Thinkers Meet**

Rev. Arthur Fraser

Living Stones—Our Heritage, Our Future

Rev. David Saunders

**John Cennick—Conflict and Conciliation in the
Evangelical Awakening**

John Little

**Congregational
Studies Conference
Papers
1992**

**Arthur Fraser,
David Saunders,
and
John Little**

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Papers, contact:
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Contents

Foreword
Rev. DO Swann, BA, BD

When Evolutionary Thought and Congregational Thinkers Meet 5
Rev. Arthur Fraser, PhD

Living Stones—Our Heritage, Our Future 21
Rev. David Saunders, MA, BEd

John Cennick—Conflict and Conciliation in the Evangelical Awakening 31
John Little, BD

The papers are printed in the order in which they were given at the Conference; as usual each contributor is entirely responsible for the views expressed in his paper.

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Foreword

‘History is bunk’. Henry Ford’s sweeping condemnatory statement, may find an echo in the mind of a hard pressed student of history. Similarly, the Earl of Chesterfield’s equally depressing assessment of history, ‘History is only a confused heap of facts’, may confirm the average man in his conviction that the study of history is just a waste of time. Cicero, on the other hand, had a much higher view of the subject, ‘not to know the events that happened before I was born, that is to remain always a boy’. Oliver Wendell Holmes Jnr was also more optimistic. ‘When I want to understand what is happening today or try to decide what will happen tomorrow I look back’, and again, ‘A page of history is worth a volume of logic’. Scripture certainly affirms the value of knowing and appreciating past events. The psalmist frequently looks back on the events of the past and draws fresh encouragement for the present and future. For example: in Psalms 44, 68 and 105–107, as well as in many others.

The truth is, we can *learn* from history. It provides us with examples to be followed, as well as warnings to be heeded. We ignore history at our peril. There is nothing new under the sun, only variations on a theme. No situation from the past is ever *exactly* reproduced in the future, but no problem, whether theological, doctrinal, or experimental, is entirely new. Somewhere, someone, some community in this God created historical time zone will have faced our problems or at least others very similar. To ignore the past is both foolish and arrogant.

This year’s conference provided us with three very varied papers. Dr Arthur Fraser lucidly explained the reaction of some American Congregationalists to the rise of Darwinism. David Saunders took us, at a fair gallop, through the 400 year history of the Rochford Church, of which he is now Minister. John Little concluded the day with a warm appreciation of John Cennick. Questions followed each session and at about 4.30 the Conference closed. A day in the past served to catapult us, much refreshed, into the future.

At next year’s Conference, on Saturday 20 March at Westminster Chapel, we will be commemorating the 400th Anniversary of the death of the Fleet Martyrs. Dr R Tudur Jones and Rev. Alan Tovey will be our speakers.

Derek Swann

Conference Chairman

When Evolutionary Thought and Congregational Thinkers Meet

Arthur Fraser

Few if any of us here today will need reminding that the history of the interaction between theology and advancing scientific ideas has been marked more often than not by controversy. Nowhere has this been more evidently so than in the fierce debate which has followed in the wake of Darwin's famous (or infamous) book *The Origin of the Species* published in 1859, a debate which continues unabated to the present time. The conflict between evolutionary thought and Christian belief has indeed often been depicted in terms of a military engagement with all the vivid imagery associated with it. Part of my aim today must be, as far as possible and in the words of Hooykaas, to 'stand outside the heat of battle instead of joining in it',¹ and to let the chief combatants in the warfare convey to us the progress of the battle.

As an early example of the suspicion, if not outright antagonism, with which the scientific enterprise was viewed by orthodox Christians, we may quote William Cowper, the hymn-writer. In his poem, 'The Task' (1785), he well and truly takes geologists to task, employing the military metaphor to good effect:

So write a narrative of wars, and feats
Of heroes little known; and call the rant
An history ... some drill and bore
The solid earth, and from the strata there
Extract a register, by which we learn
That he who made it, and reveal'd its date
To Moses, was mistaken in its age ...
Great contest follows, and much learned dust
Involves the combatants; each claiming truth
And truth disclaiming both.
And thus they spend
The little wick of life's poor shallow lamp,
In playing tricks with nature, giving laws
To distant worlds, and trifling in their own.

Cowper's disapproval of geologists clearly irritated Hugh Miller, the stonemason from Cromarty in the north of Scotland who, though self-educated and something of a mystic, came to be recognised universally as an outstanding geologist who made an immense contribution to a knowledge of

the subject. During a tour of England in 1845, Miller wrote a letter to his wife from Olney:

Directly opposite Cowper's house in Weston Underwood I picked up a fossil pecten and terebratula (small marine organisms), and bethought me of his denunciations of the geologists,—who, to be sure, in his days were a sad infidel pack.

Some would say that geologists are no better now!

Hugh Miller had made a dramatic entry onto the national and religious scene in Scotland some six years earlier by writing a pamphlet in strong support of Scottish congregations having the right to choose their own pastors. As one of the Evangelical Party, he was naturally fiercely opposed to patronage. The pamphlet was so successful in championing the evangelical cause that he was offered the position of editor of *The Witness*, a new journal specially instituted to represent the evangelical viewpoint on the issues of the day. From this uniquely influential position, Hugh Miller—along with Rev. Thomas Charles, also something of a naturalist—mobilised those forces which led to the 1843 Disruption and the establishment of the Free Church of Scotland. Without question, Hugh Miller can be regarded as one of the leading founder members of the new denomination.

In his capacity as editor, Miller used the columns of *The Witness* to write geological articles with a popular appeal and such was the success of these essays that Miller was encouraged to develop them into a full-length book entitled *The Old Red Sandstone*, a book which went through no less than 26 editions. The mature fruit of Miller's geological and philosophical researches are contained in a later book, *The Testimony of the Rocks*, in which he boldly attempts a synthesis of his evangelical beliefs and his science. Basic to that attempt was to harmonise the geological data with the Genesis account of the creation. Because of his deeply-held convictions on the validity of science, and contrary to the views of his friend Chalmers, Miller interpreted the days of Genesis 1 as vast periods of geological time; the so-called day-age theory of the earth.

But why devote so much space to Hugh Miller who was neither a Congregationalist nor a contemporary of Darwin? The fact is that Hugh Miller's influence on the relationship between geological science and Christian belief was very far-reaching. Pre-eminently this was so in his native Scotland where his tenets were freely absorbed by evangelical theologians and ministers in a way and to an extent which never happened in England. Peter Bayne writes,

Hugh Miller saw with grief inexpressible that the Evangelical party in England ... was taking the fatally wrong turn in the matter of science and religion. In Scotland, during his lifetime, there was not much cause for alarm. While Fleming, as Professor of Geology in the Free Church College, sent out clergymen to teach and preach that pain and death existed myriads of ages before Adam, that the starry heavens and the earth were of an antiquity to be measured in millions of years, that the Noachian deluge was local, and while the leading religionists of Scotland recognised with gratitude and approval the importance of Miller's own services in the cause of religious truth, he had no occasion to fear. But the Evangelicals of England never shared the courage and faithfulness in this matter of the Evangelicals in Scotland, and the lamentable exhibitions we have recently had have painfully demonstrated that Hugh Miller's expostulations, printed in his *Impressions of England and its People*, have been of none effect.

In sharp contrast to their reception in England, the literary offerings of Miller were widely circulated and eagerly devoured on the other side of the Atlantic. Amongst those whose enthusiasm was fired by them was the Rev. Edward Hitchcock. A thumbnail biographical sketch has been given by the contemporary historian of science, David Livingstone:

Professionally respected, ecclesiastically Congregationalist, and temperamentally hypochondriac, Hitchcock championed the cause of the geologist-theologian in the United States for nearly half a century. The story begins in 1814, the year he came of age. It was also the year his health broke down. While convalescing, he fell from a chilly Unitarianism into the warmth of evangelical grace. The plain old-fashioned doctrines of the Puritans, as he described it, had led him back into the orthodox Congregationalism of his father, and within two years, while holding the principalship of Deerfield Academy, he embarked on a course of study for the ministry of the church.²

He did not remain in the ministry for long and had pastored the Congregational church in Conway, Massachusetts, for just four years, when he accepted the professorship of chemistry and natural history at the newly formed Amherst College.

Hitchcock, whose theological stance would have been very similar to that of Miller, strongly asserted his twin faith in science and religion in his most widely circulated work, *The Religion of Geology*, the first edition of which appeared in 1851. His main object, he said, was 'to exhibit all the religious bearings of geology' which he acknowledged to be 'a most difficult subject'. Hitchcock clearly had no patience with 'the efforts of men ... deficient in knowledge [of science]'. That apparently meant the majority of authors who

although men of talents, and familiar, it may be, with the Bible and theology, had no accurate knowledge of geology. The results have been, first, that, by

resorting to denunciation and charges of infidelity, to answer arguments from geology which they did not understand, they have excited unreasonable prejudices and alarm among common Christians respecting that science and its cultivators; secondly they have awakened disgust, and even contempt, among scientific men, especially those of sceptical tendencies, who have inferred that a cause which resorts to such defences must be very weak.

The language of war to be sure! However, he immediately follows that with a good balancing statement about those who advanced principles 'false and fatal to religion'.

Not surprisingly, as a Christian minister-cum-geologist, Hitchcock passionately believed that students training for the ministry should be taught by men familiar with the natural sciences. He writes:

So well satisfied are two of the most enlightened and efficient Christian denominations in Great Britain, the Congregationalists and the Scottish Free Church, of the need of more extensive acquaintance with the natural sciences in ministers of the Gospel, that they have attached a professorship of natural history to the theological seminaries. That in the New College in Edinburgh is filled by the venerable Dr Fleming, in the New College in London by Dr Lankester.

Perhaps the main point to emerge from this lengthy introduction is that many of what we would regard today as the most controversial issues arising from the interaction of Biblical Christianity and geology were perceived as being settled in favour of geology long before Darwin ever came on the scene. Hitchcock himself, for example, lodged a plea that all the available evidence for 'the earth's high antiquity' be 'carefully weighed'; if this were done, everyone would be 'entirely convinced' of its validity. 'Must we not then,' he went on, 'regard this fact as one of the settled principles of science.'

Hitchcock lived only five years after the publication of the *Origin of the Species*. He did, however, in a final publication address himself to the issues of evolution as expressed by Darwin. In keeping with his evangelical convictions, he naturally insisted on the Biblical doctrines of human depravity and redemption. At the same time, he refused to dismiss well-established scientific evidence simply because they did not accord with his Christian pre-suppositions. He said:

the real question is, not whether these hypotheses (on evolution) accord with our religious views, but whether they are true.

This statement represents a radical shift from the position he adopted earlier in his career when he believed that all new scientific evidence would always accord with, and indeed support, the traditional interpretation of the Bible, except, as we have already seen, on the age of the earth.

In the debate sparked off by the publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, there are two Congregational figures who stand out prominently, both of whom lived and worked on the other side of the Atlantic. The first of these, Asa Gray, a medical doctor turned botanist, was an outstanding natural scientist who came to occupy the prestigious Fisher Chair of Natural History at Harvard in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1842. He was the author of two monumental works on the Botany of North America.

Asa Gray was actually raised as a Presbyterian in upstate New York, though whatever Christian influences there may have been at home failed to prevent him drifting into worldly and materialistic ways of thinking. Helped by his fellow botanist, John Torrey, Gray professed the Christian faith; in his own words turning to God, 'who is able and willing to save all who come unto him'. Gray's faith was immediately tested when he moved to Harvard. For one thing, Harvard was dominated by Unitarians to such an extent that it was regarded by some as a sectarian institution, and we may note in passing that Oliver Wendell Holmes, Unitarian writer of the hymn 'Lord of all being throned afar', was a promising Harvard student when Gray was there. Another factor was the bitter feelings which accompanied the separation of the orthodox Congregationalists from the Unitarians in nearby Boston and which was still fresh in the minds of the Cambridge residents, and there was clearly a good deal of resentment against the schismatics. In the circumstances, Gray showed no little courage in parting from most of his Harvard colleagues, opting to become a member of the Congregational Church after transferring his membership from Bleeker Street Presbyterian Church in New York. However, apart from attending the services and at times teaching a Sunday School class, Gray does not seem to have been a particularly active member of his spiritual home.

Obviously, to regard Gray as a Congregational thinker is to put a generous interpretation on his denominational affiliation! But since, as will become apparent, Gray was a key figure in the Congregationalist response to Darwinian evolution, we must give him some attention. Gray had first met Charles Darwin at Kew Gardens during a visit to England and the Continent in 1839, but it was not until some sixteen years later that a close friendship began to develop between them based on their common professional interests. Darwin evidently found in Gray a fellow-scientist whom he greatly respected and in whom he could confide his developing theories on evolution. Indeed, Asa Gray became one of the so-called inner-circle of Darwin's friends, a very select group that included Thomas Huxley and Herbert Spencer.

When the *Origin of the Species* was subsequently launched onto a largely unsuspecting world, Gray, no doubt anticipating a hostile reaction in various

quarters, was anxious to give Darwin's views a fair hearing on the American side of the Atlantic. At the same time, he endeavoured to show that a Christian faith was not incompatible with the evolutionary theories put forward by Darwin.

In a whole series of essays and reviews in a publication called the *Atlantic Monthly*, Gray gave a formulation of his detailed response to Darwin. With Darwin, he believed 'that species vary and that Natural Selection works'. The one major problem with evolution for Gray was how to introduce design into the Darwinian system. The strong influence of Paley's *Natural Theology*, first published in 1802, lay behind Gray's difficulty. William Paley used the well-known illustration of a watch to prove the existence of God as the designer of nature. A watch clearly implies a watchmaker. As one examines the watch, the conclusion cannot be avoided that the watch was designed for a specific purpose and to perform particular functions. By analogy, the same is true of everything in the natural world. Different animals were adapted to their specific environments to suit their requirements. For example, the wings of a bird to fly in the air and the fins of a fish to swim in the water. How could the chance variations and the struggle for existence in which Darwin believed be reconciled with the beneficent God of creation who was the Grand Designer of Nature? That was the nub of the problem for Gray. In other words, the real obstacles confronting Darwin's theory were theological rather than scientific in character.

Gray was undoubtedly very anxious to overcome the problem raised by Paley. He told Darwin:

I am determined to baptise it (*The Origin of the Species*) willy-nilly, which will be its salvation.

Darwin was most grateful to Gray for all his efforts on his behalf and complimented him on his skill in communicating evolutionary views to the American Scientific community, singling out for commendation his 'admirable clearness'. Darwin went so far as to write to one correspondent:

No one person understands my view and has defended them so well as Asa Gray, though he does not by any means go all the way with me.

The caveat entered was, of course, a reference to Gray's design argument which Darwin found increasingly difficult to accept even though he had deeply imbibed Paley's natural theology earlier in life. Gray made strenuous efforts to reconcile natural selection with design, but they ultimately failed to win over Darwin. He wrote to Gray:

I had no intention to write atheistically. But I own I cannot see ... evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me to be too much

misery in the world ... I grieve to say I cannot honestly go as far as you do about design.

From then on, the fundamental disagreement remained. Gray lost his place in the inner circle of Darwin's friends and allowed the way to be opened for the agnostic Huxley to determine the future shape and course of Darwinism. The rupture between the two men had as much, if not more, to do with Darwin's increasingly atheistic outlook as with Gray's holding fast to Paley's design argument. Opposing the opinion of Gray and others, that species variation is guided by the hand of God, Darwin argued that

the view that each variation has been providentially arranged ... makes Natural Selection entirely superfluous, and indeed takes the whole case of the appearance of a new species out of the range of science.

Design in nature, he said, 'would be absolutely fatal to my theory'.

Gray's articles and reviews on evolution in the *Atlantic Monthly* were written anonymously. Why he did so can only be conjectured. Quite possibly he was aware that he was handling a hot potato! Be that as it may, his articles on Darwin were read with increasing and sympathetic interest by a theologian and geologist named George Frederick Wright who, anxious to track down the author, eventually did so by contacting the publishers of the anonymous material.

Wright's background and career are of unusual interest. Brought up in conservative Congregationalism, he was student at Oberlin College where he came under the spell of President Charles Grandison Finney, and remained at the college after his graduation in 1859 to complete his theological course. One assumes that Wright was something of an admirer of the famous Finney, judging from his writing of the standard biography of the American revivalist, but that someone with the distinctively Calvinistic convictions he held throughout his life should have done so is intriguing!

In 1862, Wright became pastor of the Congregational Church in Bakersfield, Vermont and, notwithstanding all his ministerial duties, he read through the Bible in the original languages, translated Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and studied major philosophical works. Ten years later, he became minister of the Free Christian Church in Andover, Massachusetts. The theological seminary at Andover was the then intellectual centre of Congregationalism, and the home of Edwards Amasa Park who was extremely concerned that the evangelical tradition he had upheld at Andover should be maintained after his retirement. He had good reason to be alarmed for already there was afoot a belief in 'future probation' for unbelievers along with an increasingly critical attitude towards the Bible. The continuation of these

trends later resulted in the trial of five professors for heresy. Park, on his retirement in 1881, urged Wright to write vigorously against the threatened departure of Andover from the true faith and, in another gesture of complete confidence in his orthodoxy, also handed over to him the editorship of the Congregational monthly *Bibliotheca Sacra*, a position Wright held until his death in 1921. Meanwhile, in 1881, his old college, Oberlin, offered him the chair of New Testament language and literature, a position he accepted knowing that he would thereby be released from a minister's busy schedule to pursue his scientific and theological work. During the following ten years, Wright developed an earlier enthusiasm for geology and mastered the subject to such an extent that he became one of America's leading authorities on glacial geology. His final academic appointment was in 1892, when he became the professor of the harmony of science and revelation in Oberlin.

Wright's literary output was prodigious. He published two books and more than forty articles on the relationship between science and faith, apart from his other writings. Recognised widely for his skills as a communicator on such matters, he was invited to contribute to a series of twelve booklets published between 1910 and 1915 under the title *The Fundamentals*, from which, incidentally, the Fundamentalist movement got its name.

The combination of his wide scientific knowledge and profound theological understanding made Wright uniquely equipped to tackle the questions raised by Darwinism. We have already referred to the considerable influence of Gray's anonymous essays on Wright, who saw them as providing suitable ammunition against atheistic evolutionists on the one hand, and as a suitable response to men like Charles Hodge who rejected evolution as atheism on the other. Wright persuaded a reluctant Gray to reproduce the essays in a single volume, which duly appeared in 1876 under the title 'Darwinia'. Subsequently, Wright and Gray collaborated on a number of literary projects all dealing with the same general issues provoked by the Darwinian controversy.

By way of comment, there is little doubt that Wright's evangelicalism was more robust than that of Gray. There may even be a question as to where the latter really stood, confessing only in later life that he was an adherent of the Nicene Creed. Wright was a different kettle of fish and he was able to deal with the theological aspects raised by evolution at a depth and to an extent that Gray was incapable of doing. Wright's own contributions to the subject are very substantial in volume and content and time prohibits any detailed analysis. I deliberately pluck out one important strand in Wright's arguments, not so much because it is provocative, which it certainly is, but because it

embraces Wright's attempts to resolve the vexed question of design within a framework of natural selection.

As a theologian with strong reformed convictions, Wright viewed Darwinian evolution through Calvinistic spectacles, and perceived a special relationship within the two thought-systems. In one essay he drew five analogies between Calvinism and Darwinism, coming to the remarkable conclusion that Darwinism was 'the Calvinistic interpretation of nature'. I am sure that many will wonder how he ever got to that position! Reference to one of his analogies may help us here, regarding the perplexity of the Calvinist holding together the doctrines of free-will and fore-ordination in his theology, and the parallel perplexity to the Christian Darwinian of holding together chance and design in the evolutionary scheme. He emphasised that the 'fundamental principle' of divine sovereignty which 'comprehends' free human actions and ordains the system of the universe in which all its parts needs to be understood and accepted. Wright put it in these words:

The Calvinist assumes that the highest good of the whole (creation) is consistent with that constituted order of things in which sin is allowed to exist, and in which the freedom that makes sin possible and actual may be put to good use, and even the wrath of man may be made to work God's praise ... (The Christian Darwinian) is compelled to assume that the revelation of method and order in nature is a higher end, and so a more important factor in the final cause of the creation than are the passing advantages which organic beings derive from it as the scheme of nature is unfolding.

As to design, Wright pointed to the waste and apparent failures and imperfections in the development of life, and claimed that a larger concept of it was needed than was given by Paley. Paley's argument from the perfect design of a watch for its intended purpose leads to a danger of 'arrogance' in supposing that man can identify the ultimate reasons which lie behind God's bringing certain things into existence and in choosing the way in which their existence has been achieved. Wright expressed his conception of design in the illustration of a saw-mill:

A combination of reasons, no single one of which may have been sufficient alone, accounts for the existence of each particular saw mill. ... All the profits of the mill may be in the sale of the slabs, or in economising them and the sawdust as fuel. The uses the miller's children may make of the refuse for play-houses, and the miller's wife for kindling, are none of them so insignificant as not to be taken into account. The children ... might, at a certain age, fix upon their incidental advantage as the main object, or final cause, for which the mill existed. And their error may not be half so ludicrous as that we make in assigning the temporal advantages we derive from them as the exhaustive

reason for the existence of some part of the universe that come within the range of our limited observation ... the highest conception of the perfection and design of the divine workmanship which our imagination can compass, is but a partial appreciation of the utility of the chips that have fallen off incidentally in the process of rearing the walls of the city of God.

Wright was here drawing upon Jonathan Edwards' comprehensive theory of virtue. To quote Moore, the scientific historian,

God, in whom choice and action coalesce, manifests the virtue (choosing the 'good of being') in working all things together for good ... Since human beings, however, must necessarily have a limited understanding of the good of being, they should not presume to give an exhaustive interpretation of any part of the creation. A full and correct interpretation belongs only to the Creator, who sees each part of the creation in its relation to all the other parts and in relation to the purpose of the whole.³

By demonstrating that Darwinism was no more (or less?) objectionable than Calvinism, Wright sought to win over anti-Darwinian Calvinists into an acceptance of evolution by natural selection. 'The Darwinian,' he said, adopting the metaphor of war, 'may shelter himself behind Calvinism from the charge of infidelity ... All the philosophical difficulties which he will ever encounter, and a great many more, have already been bravely met in the region of speculative theology. The man of science need not live in the fear of opprobrious epithets, for there are none left in the repertory of theological disputants which can be specifically aimed at the Darwinian advocate of continuity in nature. The Arminian, the Universalist, and the Transcendentalist long ago exhausted their magazines in their warfare against the lone camp of the Calvinist; while the Calvinist has stood manfully in the breach, and defended the doctrine that method is an essential attribute of the divine mind, and that whatsoever proceeds from that mind conforms to the principles of order: God 'hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass'. The doctrine of the continuity of nature is not new to the theologian. The modern man of science, in extending the conception of the reign of law, is but illustrating the fundamental principle of Calvinism.

Whilst Wright did not fundamentally alter his views, even when he contributed articles on evolution to *The Fundamentals*, he increasingly felt the need to defend the Bible against liberal theology rather than to promote the results of scientific research in the Christian community. In emphasising 'the mistakes of Darwin and his would-be followers' and in cautioning against what he called the 'indiscriminate laudation' of Darwin, Wright was doubtless aware of the threat to evangelicalism posed not so much by Darwinian evolution as by the heady mixture of Darwinism and the evolutionary scheme of Herbert Spencer, the social theorist. Spencer was a speculative philosopher who coined

the phrase 'survival of the fittest' and who also succeeded in convincing the general populace, notably in America, that evolution implied the progressive development of human society. This was the essential message of social Darwinism. The liberal theologians soon jumped on this bandwagon and the so-called social gospel of the late 19th Century was born. There is no time for detail but there is an important historical point to note here. Although Spencer was one of Darwin's inner circle, Darwin himself, despite adopting his catchphrase on the survival of the fittest, came to distance himself increasingly from Spencer, seeing him as he really was, an armchair speculator whose methods were largely unscientific. When Wright wrote his essay entitled 'The Passing of Evolution' he was refuting all these more speculative versions of it. Writing in 1909, the centenary of Darwin's birth, he maintained his conviction that:

Calvinism ... is comprehensive enough to shelter any reasonable system of evolution under its ample folds. If only evolutionists would incorporate into their system the sweetness of the Calvinistic doctrine of Divine Sovereignty, the church would make no objection to their speculations.

Needless to say, not all Congregational thinkers followed the line adopted by Wright and Gray when they encountered evolutionary thought. In particular, there was another clergyman-scientist, Enoch Fitch Burr (1818–1907) who has been described as 'one of the most influential of all ... writers against evolution' in the United States. Burr was minister of the Congregational Church in Hamburg, Connecticut, and earned an appointment in 1868 as Lecturer in the Scientific Evidences of Religion at Amherst College. Evolution, he asserted, teaches that

all things we perceive, including what are called spiritual phenomena, have come from the simplest beginnings, solely by means of such forces and laws as belong to matter.

This 'law scheme' was therefore, according to Burr,

not merely the most noted, plausible, influential and violent enemy of Theism in our day, but ... its only possible enemy for all ages to come.

The 'Theistic hypothesis', on the other hand, seemed a superior 'explanation of Nature' because it was the 'simplest' and 'surest' one possible. Burr confidently stated that

it is self-evident that there is some eternal substance, and that an eternal power is, in the nature of things, just as possible as eternal matter.

So everything in the rival hypothesis must be put on the 'basis of absolute certainty'.

Our brief, and highly selective survey, confirms the view of one modern

writer that 'Congregationalists showed the greatest affinity for evolution'.⁴ Quoting the same author:

The consensus seems to be that Unitarians in America were the most receptive to evolution, Congregationalists the most influential in interpreting and propagating it, Presbyterians alternately very hostile or quite accommodating, and Methodists, Baptists and Lutherans reluctant to become involved.⁵

Nevertheless, a sharp division of response to Darwinism certainly existed, as we have noted, and what is true of the Congregationalists is equally true in other sections of the Christian constituency. To take but one example, we can cite the great divines of the Presbyterian Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey. Charles Hodge, probably the greatest of the Princeton Theologians, subjected Darwinism to detailed and systematic critique, concluding, in his famous words: 'Darwinism is atheism'. What lay behind this conclusion was that neither evolution nor natural selection, nor even the two together, constituted Darwinism. 'It is that Darwin rejects ... the doctrine of final causes. He denies design ...' Although Hodge conceded in his Systematic Theology that 'there may be a theistic interpretation of the Darwinian Theory', and that by implication evolution with design was Christian, his stance was strongly anti-evolutionary, certainly to evolution as Darwin conceived it. By contrast BB Warfield, another Princeton divine, believed that evolution might supply a tenable 'theory of the method of divine providence', and regarded Calvin's doctrine of the creation, 'including the origination of all forms of life, vegetable and animal alike, inclusive doubtless of the bodily form of man', as a 'very pure evolutionary scheme'.

As then, so it is now. The Christian community is as divided as ever, if not more than it has ever been, over Darwinian evolution. We may state the two fundamental positions in summary form.

The first regards Darwinian evolution as pseudo-scientific, that it is essentially atheistic and that acceptance of it by Christians has been responsible for the erosion of Biblical authority and the rapid advance of an anti-Christian world view that has now permeated western society at every level. For Christians in this category, the Bible is the touch-stone for all interpretation. The results of scientific investigation must be made subject to the Bible.

The second believes organic (as opposed to philosophical) evolution to be scientifically well-grounded, and that as a valid scientific discipline, its conclusions must be incorporated into the Christian's view of creation, providence and the functioning of the natural world. Biblical interpretation must also proceed under the guidance of proven scientific findings.

What are we to make of these fundamental differences of approach to

evolution among evangelical Christians, and what are the lessons for us? Let me make just four points.

1. Our selective historical analysis seems to indicate that for scientists of Christian conviction, the issues arising from Darwinian evolution are not nearly as black-and-white as they are sometimes made out to be in certain kinds of Christian literature today. Clearly there must be arguments on both sides. Christians need to listen to each other carefully in a spirit free from rancour and suspicion. In particular, the language of warfare has to be set aside because nothing is to be gained from it. Christians should be learning from each other, not fighting with each other.

2. The Christian believer needs to be assured that there is nothing to be feared from genuine scientific research and discovery. It is important to have a high view of science. Such was certainly the case with Hugh Miller, Asa Gray and Frederick Wright. Hugh Miller's biographer, P Bayne wrote of him:

His Evangelical Religion was of that early and vigorous type which, having complete faith in truth, had no fear that there might turn out to be heresy in science.⁶

Again:

His reverence for God's truth was infinitely deeper than his regard for his own conceptions of it. That truth he would accept, howsoever and whensoever it was revealed, conscious that the wilful misreading of nature is a sin against him whose ordinance nature is. Hugh Miller dared not force his conscience to lie to God by bribing his intellect to lie for God.

Professor Donald Macleod has recently written in a similar vein:

... the universe is itself a reliable revelation of God. What Christ does reflects himself. This is why theories which suggest that the universe is misleading us (for example about its age) raise such serious problems for the Christian. Indeed confident scientific research, pushing against all the current frontiers of knowledge, is possible only for the Christian, because he always knows that the world he is exploring is made by his Saviour. Christ is the truth: and the Christian researcher goes about his work totally assured that he will never encounter truth that is a contradiction of Christ.

3. The Christian believer must be encouraged to have a right understanding of the relationship between God and his creation. If there is such a thing as 'natural selection' as Darwin understood it, the Christian can justifiably speak of 'supernatural selection', since God is everywhere in the created order, upholding it by the Word of his power moment by moment and everywhere fulfilling his purpose. Scientific laws are an expression of God's immanent and sovereign activity, not autonomous principles which he has built into creation. Perhaps a particular event from a well-known Biblical incident will illustrate

this point, viz. the flight of the arrow which killed King Ahab (see 2 Chronicles 18). On the one hand, the flight of the arrow from first to last was *supernaturally fore-ordained*. The position of Ahab's chariot relative to that of the archer, the extent to which the bow was drawn, the direction in which the arrow was aimed etc. were all exactly right for the predestined end in fulfilment of God's word. On the other hand, to the purely scientific observer, the arrow's flight and target would be a purely 'natural' event, in other words it could be entirely explained by the operation of 'natural law'. Ahab's death from it would, of course, be regarded as 'pure chance'; the odds against it happening would have been given as millions to one. Both explanations are entirely valid within their own framework. What seems unacceptable is to say that the event was partly 'natural' and partly 'supernatural', since that would inevitably lead to the view that God 'intervenes' in a universe which is otherwise governed by natural law.

This is in line with the teaching of Calvin, as well as other reformers, who never used the words 'natural' and 'supernatural'. Instead there are regular, less regular, and even unique manifestations of God's will. Calvin makes no essential distinction between ordinary events, belonging to the order of nature (the rising and setting of the sun), extraordinary events (great drought), and miraculous events.

Wright seems to have been applying and extending this principle in his view of evolution. In all the chance happenings, the apparent waste and failures in the progressive development of life, God is at work fulfilling his purpose. The 'all things' that work together for good include things beyond our understanding, indeed at times they seemingly contradict the good end for which we hope. There is mystery in life which is inscrutable. We cannot make proper sense out of it. To try to interpret the divine plan becomes a futile and frustrating exercise. This is indeed the message of Ecclesiastes. We walk by faith not by sight. Yet we know that there is a divine plan and that plan is being fulfilled however strong the evidence to the contrary may appear.

4. Despite the favourable response of Congregational thinkers, and those of other denominations, to evolutionary thought, a final word of caution is appropriate. Although causal connections cannot be made categorically, there are lines of evidence which, at the very least, indicate that serious damage may have been done to the evangelical cause by the over-zealous acceptance of evolutionary theory. For example, it is arguable that the relatively rapid and sad decline of the virile evangelicalism of the Free Church of Scotland towards the end of the 19th Century was a consequence of the widespread acceptance of the views of Hugh Miller and Dr John Fleming. The Higher Critical movement made its presence felt in a number of places and in 1881 a Free

Church professor in the College at Aberdeen, Dr Robertson Smith, was dismissed for holding opinions contrary to the inspiration of Scripture.

Some evangelical scholars⁸ have pointed to the increasing accommodation of Biblical Commentators to evolutionary ideas in interpreting certain passages of Scripture and have argued that this has led to a serious undermining of the authority of the Bible.

The acceptance of Darwinian views can also be shown to have caused a crisis of faith amongst many Christians and some have had faith shipwrecked by its teaching. One secular author has written:

Clergymen, more than others, were affected by tensions in their beliefs. One cannot minister long to the spiritually needy when the grounds of one's own faith is uncertain. In the United States, Minot Judson Savage laboured as a Congregational missionary and pastor until 1873, when, under the impact of Darwin and Spencer, he became a Unitarian.⁹

These examples are solemn warnings which need to be heeded, and which underline the necessity of seeking God's help as we approach this whole matter.

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Living Stones ...

Our Heritage, Our Future

A record of some of the people and incidents that make up the history of Rochford Congregational Church

David Saunders

Editor's Note

Those who attended the 1992 Congregational Studies Conference at Westminster Chapel will be aware that the paper printed here does differ in some respects from that given on the day. When the paper was read use was made of pictures and overhead transparencies to aid the listener and of course the responsiveness and empathy between speaker and hearers cannot readily be reproduced in print. Consequently we have here what is basically a report of the paper given, rather than a reproduction of it.

When he gave the paper David Saunders pointed out, by way of prelude to the address, that the subject he wished to deal with is the ordinary men and women who by the grace of God and through faith in the living Lord Jesus Christ came to be known as the Rochford Congregational Church. The attention in giving the paper was not to draw attention to ourselves, an ever present danger when personal testimony and details are given, because the glory belongs not to man but to God alone for the Church is always HIS Church.

Because of the amount of detail available, David's paper is necessarily selective and aims to highlight key events and personalities rather than to be exhaustive.

In its own simple yet profound way, Scripture explicitly depicts the Church of Jesus Christ as a Body, a Bride and a Building ... a building made up of living stones. Hence our title—as we look back, the story we tell will be of real people changed by the grace of God. Our future is only secure in terms of a continuing work of God in the lives of men and women like us.

The Struggle to Begin

Dale shows how Congregational Churches had existed in England before Browne and Barrowe formally developed Congregational Polity.¹ Essex had several ‘gathered congregations’ and Rochford appears to be amongst them. Situated on the ‘south-end’ edge of the Thames, some forty miles from London as you leave the town square, a simple plaque on the wall tells of John Simpson, burnt at the stake in the square, because of his convictions in 1551.

An entry in the privy list of expenses for Henry VIII dated 2 May 1532 relates to ‘my Lady Anne of Rochford’. Certainly a lot of attention was being paid to the Rochford Hundred: timber was cut in the woods for shipbuilding and deer stocks at Greenwich and the adjacent parks were replenished from the woods at Rochford. Henry would, in the course of time, declare his marriage to Katherine of Aragon null and void in order to avow his love for the lovely Anne Boleyn of Rochford Hall. The year 1533 was to be the year of their marriage and Anne would urge the king to read a copy, which she possessed, of Tyndale’s translation of the Gospels.² In due course Ann Boleyn gave birth to the future Queen Elizabeth I.

By 1553 Lord Richard Rich (Ryche) would be in possession of the manor at Rochford. His history shows him to be a real time-server and deceitful character in both his religious and political life. Robert Rich took his place in entertaining Queen Elizabeth at Rochford in 1579, prior to his death in 1580. All this is to show the background to the significant events which took place in the following year 1581 when the then Lord Rich invited Robert Wright of Antwerp to be his domestic chaplain at Rochford.

Wright had been tutor to the Earl of Essex, Rich’s brother-in-law, and ‘having scruples about ordination in the Church of England had gone to Antwerp and was ordained according to the views of his co-religionists.’³ Keen to fill the pastoral office, Wright expressed the view to Lord Rich that the election of ministers ought to be by the flock or congregation. This is of course a basic tenet of Congregational polity and practise. Lord Rich agreed to the formal establishing of a Church at Rochford Hall and that Wright should take the oversight on the call of the Church. At this stage the group did not withdraw themselves from the worship of the Parish Church, which stands opposite and a hundred yards away from the Hall.

They held their meetings in the Hall, usually at eight o'clock in the evening. Such was the blessing and growth that they must have experienced that in no time at all John Greenwood came from his living in Norfolk to be assistant pastor. A contemporary of Robert Browne at Cambridge, Greenwood was ordained in the Church of England but later became a Congregationalist as a consequence of studying the New Testament.

The measure of blessing experienced in the congregation is witnessed to in a letter the mother of Francis, afterwards Lord, Bacon sent to Lord Burleigh:

and I also confess, as one that hath found mercy, that I have profited more in the inward hearing of God's holy will—by such sincere and sound opening of the Scriptures—than I did by hearing occasional services at [St] Pauls well nigh twenty years together.

To avoid pressures from the ecclesiastical authorities, an unsuccessful attempt was made to obtain a preaching license so that Wright would be able to preach without conforming. Bishop Aylmer's refusal to grant the license was to instigate a fist fight. Bishop Aylmer had 'a fiery, ungovernable temper' and the argument developed to such a pitch that Lord Rich's uncle took the Bishop by the collar and 'gave him a thrashing'! Aylmer's own description was that: 'he did hereupon so shake him up, that—he was never so abused at any man's hands since he was born'.⁵

When the Queen heard that 'disorders were practised in Essex and particularly in the house of Lord Rich' she commanded Bishop Aylmer to bring the abuses to an abrupt end. Wright and Rich were both arrested and Wright was sent to the Fleet prison and Rich to the Marchalsea. A commission was then sent to Rochford and with the help of various witnesses, these included some six local Rectors and Vicars, they set out the accusations being made against the accused:

that he calleth the preachers that followed the Book of Common Prayer dumb dogs; that the people were driven away from a sermon at the Church at Rochford by the tolling of a bell; (that) in a sermon preached by him (Wright) at the Hall, that he found fault with the law ecclesiastical, and depraved (sharply criticised) the ministry; that preachers were openly examined and rebuked for their sermons in a great audience in the Hall of the Lord Rich by procurement of Wright.⁶

Wright was removed from the Fleet prison to the Gatehouse and stayed there until a joint petition secured the release of Wright and Lord Rich on 11 September 1582. Greenwood had meanwhile left Rochford to set up a secret London congregation which met at the house of Henry Martin, at St Andrews-in-the-Wardrobe near St Pauls. Henry Barrowe was soon to belong to that same congregation and, when Greenwood was arrested shortly afterwards, Barrowe was arrested and placed in the Gatehouse when visiting him in 1586.

In the following year, 1587, they were both transferred to the Fleet prison and after savage ill treatment, being exposed to hunger, cold and nakedness, they were eventually brought to trial and executed at Tyburn on 6 April 1593.

The Church at Rochford went through a bitter stormy period in its history and was driven underground. Their experience of persecution was very similar to that of the Eastern European Church in our own times. Some fled the country and an iron ring reputedly still exists on the steps at Leigh-on-Sea marking where the boat which took some of the Church members to join the Mayflower Pilgrims in 1620 was moored.

Following the Act of Uniformity in 1662 and the 'Great Ejection', of ministers who would not conform to the 1662 Prayer book, events saw some one hundred and fourteen ejections taking place in Essex alone. Groups of believers continued to join with the ejected pastors and met in private houses, barns, or whatever accommodation they could obtain.

Relief came to these dissenting congregations through the Act of Toleration in 1689, which followed the accession of William and Mary to the throne. It was to be a welcome respite and brought four major benefits to the congregations. Firstly: Dissenting meeting places for public worship could be freely built. Secondly: It was safe to meet and so it was safe to sing. This is why Isaac Watts *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* was published in 1707. Thirdly: The dissenting congregations could now work out in a practical way the doctrine of the church. Fourthly: They were free to make preaching, rather than liturgy, the central and most important factor in their worship.

Surveying the available evidence, it appears that the Church at Rochford opened their first building in 1690 on the site, or in the area of the site, where Ernest Doe and Sons the Agricultural Merchants are now situated in Weirpond Road. A bricked-up arch (doorway) in the old wall surrounding their car park is believed to have been the entrance to the church vestry.

The present building was opened in 1741 and was built to roughly half the size of the building now occupied. Tudur Jones states that the characteristic of an eighteenth century Meeting place is that it will be 'plain, simple and dignified'. An observer looking around the building today will appreciate those characteristics are present. However the significance of the building being erected in 1741 is not simply the style that it was built in.

Three great issues had been creating conflict for the Church and believers during the first part of the 18th Century. They were rationalism, empiricism and deism and their influence had swept the land. The Divine inspiration of Scripture was rejected, the miraculous was ridiculed and, as society degenerated, moral standards were falling, social unrest multiplying and crime increasing. God's answer was revival and the peak of that great spiritual

awakening is considered to have been between 1738 and 1742 with the key figures being Whitefield and Wesley in England and Howell Harris and Daniel Rowlands in Wales. A direct consequence of this great movement of the Holy Spirit was the increase in congregation and the subsequent need for a new building in Rochford.

The Church's contact with the revival came largely through the Dissenting Academy in Northampton which is associated with the name of Philip Doddridge. The Academy's students came regularly to preach at Rochford and in 1741 one of them, John Tailor, was ordained as the minister at Rochford. Later that year they opened their new building. You will recollect that one of Doddridge's hymns, which was sung at that time by the members at Rochford, contains the following words:

Revive thy dying churches Lord,
And bid our drooping graces live;
And more, that energy afford
A Saviour's love alone can give.

God graciously answered that request for that generation of Christians and we petition him to do the same for us today.

Insights from the Records

A 1748 Account book tells of a Mr William Wallman building and presenting to the church a Manse. The Trustees were to include at least six of the 'present preachers of the Tuesday Lecture at Pinner's Hall in Broad Street, London'. The Pinner's Hall lectures had been established in 1672 with John Owen and Richard Baxter among the first preachers. In 1759 the Church wanted to invite a pastor but the London Ministers feared that they were in too much of a hurry ... the wording used was 'too precipitant'.

The congregation had not heard the man preach more than sixteen times!

The many different entries give an insight into the life of the congregation at that time. A license for the Meeting House obtained at the Quarter Sessions cost 11s od: and Dr Watts' *Hymns and Psalms* for the Clerk 4s od. In the 18th Century, the Rochford Hundred was not a particularly desirable place to live as the whole area was 'subject to malaria, mildew and stinking fogs'. Ague was said to hang on every bush. An open sewer ran in front of the Church so a payment was made in 1748 'for a bridge to the Meeting House 16s 3d'. The water in Rochford was not really fit to drink and so the Minister had a Brewhouse so as to brew his own ale. These facilities are no longer provided for the present pastor!

What about this comment made on 22 June 1768?

By order and desire of the Church and principal subscribers paid—Mr Thos Linnett for account of himself and the Rev. Mr Field ... £11/11/00. The former for Roaring nine Sabbath days, the latter for preaching ditto. From ignorant enthusiastical and biggod lay-preacher Good Lord deliver us.

We have details of payments for sand for the floor, whitewash for the walls but no heating costs; all of which give an impression of what it was like to worship at the Rochford Meeting House. Gifts to help the poor and needy: cloth to one, a pair of shoes to another, gifts to a stranger. Here is a short extract from the accounts for the year 1758:

To white washing the inside of the meeting 17s/8d
To persons setting up with Mrs Boosey 2s/6d

To Mrs Boosey and bottle of wine 1s/od

To Mrs Boosey for wood 1s/2d

Paid for cloth for Jno Belgood 9s/od

Jno Belgood for shoes 6s/od

Given to a stranger 2s/6d

We also find notes about the members which are of a more 'spiritual' nature:

June y^e 1st (1776). Mr Wm Conder departed this life in a most comfortable and Christian like manner that did real credit to his profession (of faith in Jesus Christ).

We also have details of how the Church dealt with the perennially difficult question of calling a pastor. An entry in August 1803 tells of inviting Rev. M Piper for seven weeks LONGER with a view to accepting a call to the pastorate. He accepted that call eventually and in the service of dedication which followed there was much praise 'with the lifting up of hands'!

Ebenezer Temple

In the September of 1835 Ebenezer Temple came to Rochford to consider taking up the pastoral oversight of the congregation. Physically he was not a strong man and the climate at Rochford was a considerable hazard to his health which contributed to bringing about his premature death. Temple was the man for the hour: preacher and fiery evangelist, a giant in faith and Christian zeal. From the first days there was such a bond between pastor and people that enabled them to face opposition and conflict as they established preaching stations and new causes far and wide. Distributing tracts, using rooms to preach the gospel in other towns, gaining permission to visit the inmates of the workhouse, an unusual privilege for a Dissenting Minister, all reveal the extent of his zeal for the gospel.

The congregation helped Temple form a lending library and Temple himself made up his mind to give a copy of Watts' *Hymn Book* free to all the poor in the district. The latter task proved to be beyond his means but he did buy seven hundred copies at 9d each and announced from the pulpit the following Sunday that the poor could buy copies for 6d each. Such was the blessing of God on the Church at this time that the original building was now far too small. The chapel was enlarged to nearly double the size for a cost of seven hundred pounds. Still the crowds continued to attend and the life-changing power of the Holy Spirit was experienced in many lives.

We get a taste of the nature of his ministry from his wife's description of a visit he made to preach at Donhead, near Birdbush, a place where he had formerly had a pastorate. When he arrived he found a crowd of people outside the chapel unable to get in for it was already full to overflowing. The service was held in an adjoining field, the congregation sitting on forms from the chapel and whatever they could borrow in seating from nearby houses. The preaching was so in the power of the Spirit that it caused many to follow him back to his lodgings, anxious for a word from him about their spiritual state before he returned to Rochford. The elderly folk, in particular, were fearful that they would not get another opportunity to see and hear him.

On his return to Rochford he threw himself into his work with renewed zeal. Facing opposition at Battlebridge, over the proposed building of a new chapel, Temple said: 'If I consulted man I would stop; but if I consult God, I say go on.'

By November 1840 it was obvious that he was gravely ill yet he wrote:

I can truly say I only wish to live that I may more and more preach Christ, live to him and be useful in his service.

He was buried in the Rochford Chapel graveyard on the 6 February 1841 and, despite the bad weather and the ground covered with thick snow, several hundred people gathered to say farewell to their beloved pastor. On the day of his burial all the shops in the town were closed, such was the esteem in which he was held.

The Rev. Edward Bodley was to follow him in the pastorate and the Church records show that in the period between December 1841 and July 1846 ninety eight persons were received into membership. Many stated when giving an account of their spiritual experience that their 'instrument of conversion' were sermons preached by the Pastor.

The Church was active in other areas of endeavour also and, as far back as 1750, the Church at Rochford had established a Dissenting School. When others were afraid of educating the children of the lower classes because they

might prove a danger to the state, our forefathers at Rochford ensured that they had ‘a plain and useful education’. The church also had close links with some of the missionaries sent out by the London Missionary Society and this is particularly so in the case of Thomas Chalmers of New Guinea. The close link was forged because Chalmer’s stepson, the Rev. Harrison Chalmers, was Pastor at Rochford until 1914. The bond with the Church is shown in a letter Chalmers wrote to the Church in January 1901:

I am well, lonely and often have a terrible gnawing at the heart strings but he is faithful who hath promised ... do keep very near to Christ, be saturated in his Spirit. May his love consume you altogether for himself.

After the ministry of the Rev. Harrison Chalmers, the life and ministry of the Rochford Church has continued throughout the 20th Century through the instrumentality of men like Harry Bevan, Albert Fitton, Arthur Jones, Hector Watson, John Fennell and, for the past twenty two years, David Saunders.

In Conclusion

The story of our Church at Rochford then and now is about the heartaches and tears, the fears and frustrations, joys and blessings of real people ... living stones. Pastor and people together have known and continue to know the grace of the Living Lord Jesus Christ. So what of the future?

Our hope for the future is best expressed in the words of the letter to the Hebrews (Hebrews 12:1–2):

Let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight ... and let us run with patience the race that is set before us ... looking to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

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John Cennick: Conflict and Conciliation in the Evangelical Awakening

John Little

(Editor's note—some updating and standardisation of quotations has taken place in order to ensure easier reading)

Before we look at the life of the Rev. John Cennick it may be helpful to briefly outline what is meant by 'revival' and what the elements present in a biblical revival are. Jonathan Edwards defines revival as: 'a great outpouring of the Spirit' and states:

Though there be a more constant influence of the Spirit attending his ordinances, yet the way in which the greatest things have been done [is] by effusions at special seasons of mercy.

Another writer defines revival as 'a copious effusion of the influence of Divine grace'.

Concerning the elements of revival we firstly look for a *heightening of normal Christianity*. Iain Murray writes:

The first thing to be looked for in an alleged revival is not the extraordinary and the unusual but the normal work of the Spirit ... in any biblical revival the norm is heightened, it is not suspended while another type of Christianity is introduced.

Convictions of sin may therefore be deeper, feelings may be intense, but there are no particular physical manifestations or signs which automatically authenticate the work.

Secondly; there is *an awareness of the nearness of God* both in the personal experience of the preacher and among the congregation. Edwards' description of Northampton in 1735 provides a pertinent example of this: 'The town seemed to be full of the presence of God.'

Thirdly; *remarkable success attends gospel preaching*. As examples: Between 1740 and 1742 approximately 50,000 souls were added to the New England churches; after the first service at Whitefield's Tabernacle in London 350 awakened souls were received into the society in one day; Rev. Mr Cooper, a minister in Boston, Massachusetts records how in one week more people came to see him under conviction of sin than in the previous 24 years of his ministry

put together; Rev. William Grimshaw saw a growth from 12 communicants to 1200 during his ministry at Haworth.

Fourthly; *the spirit of prayer is revived* and this is both personally and corporately. As one example amongst many, in Kirkintilloch the awakenings followed a children's barn prayer meeting.

Fifthly; *there is a growing love for the word of God*. The preaching is soundly and clearly biblically based. For example, in Cennick's first printed sermon there are at least 82 references to Scripture.

Sixthly; *there will often be errors, excesses and counterfeits mixed in with a genuine work of the Spirit*. Dr Ashbel Green wrote:

It may seem mysterious that God should permit a work of his own holy and blessed Spirit to be accompanied, marred and perverted by errors and abuses but so it has been from the beginning.

Seventhly; *there is a concern for the glory of God*. This should lead to humility, holy living and a holy boldness.

What I propose to do in this paper is to look chronologically at the life of John Cennick, with particular emphasis on the first 22 years of his life. This will mean that we look at the events leading up to his conversion, noting the inner conflicts which he endured. Then we will note the areas of disagreement between him and John Wesley, particularly concerning the physical manifestations in the early meetings, perfectionism, eternal security and election and predestination. We will also note the opposition Cennick faced in his preaching from clergy, gentry and the mob. Intertwined with this, reference will be made to Cennick's role as a conciliator.

John Cennick was born in Reading, Berkshire, on 1 December 1718 (Old style, new style Gregorian calendar 12 December). As far as can be ascertained he was the seventh of eight children and was baptised, aged three days, at his local parish church of St Lawrence's, Reading by the Rev. Phaniel Bacon, Vicar from 1688 till 1742. His parents were George and Anne Cennick and they had three sons and five daughters. Two, another John and Anna, died in infancy and two, Mary and Elizabeth, died aged 14. Elizabeth died when John was aged five. The other four children survived into adult life. John's mother, formerly Anne Grove, was a staunch Anglican and his father was brought up as a Quaker. Their marriage took place at St Lawrence's Church on 12 June 1698 and on 6 February 1700 George Cennick was baptised into the Anglican fold.

John Cennick gives us a little information in his autobiography about his paternal grandparents:

my grandfather and grandmother Cennick were once very great traders in the clothier's way ... they suffered the loss of all things, and were imprisoned in

Reading gaol, and (I have heard my mother say) were so far reduced that my grandmother knit or wove halfpenny laces for her living, in the prison.

Although I have been unable to find details of his grandmother's prison record, I can confirm that Thomas Cennick, his grandfather, was imprisoned on at least four separate occasions for being at unlawful gatherings (Quaker meetings) and that he spent at least three years and four months in Reading Gaol and the House of Correction.

In prison he used a small loom to make silk laces for ladies stays (bone ones were considered worldly by the Quakers). When the other imprisoned Quakers, who were engaged in the less lucrative trade of making pegs, found out about his business enterprise, Thomas was summoned to appear before the Quakers' Monthly Meeting to explain this and his neglect of attendance at some of the Quaker meetings. Thomas would have secured an early release from prison if he had sworn the Oath of Allegiance but the Quakers were opposed to oaths and Thomas refused to compromise his principles. John Cennick shared his grandfather's principles about oaths and was arrested in Ireland for refusing to swear the Oath of Allegiance. When released from prison, Thomas made ends meet by digging graves.

Little is known about the previous generations of the Cennick family. They were most probably of Bohemian Protestant descent and had found refuge in England following the Battle of White Mountain during the Thirty Years War.

Knowing something of John's ancestry we are not surprised to find that he had a very strict religious upbringing and that his mother ensured that he attended church regularly. He was, he says 'carefully instructed by my mother in the principles of religion'. John was taught to pray morning and evening and was not allowed to play games on Sunday but instead his mother 'consigned me to read or say hymns all day long with my sisters. This then I counted the worst of bondage and indeed cruelty.' The Vicar and his family lived next door and were on very close terms with the Cennicks.

The first incident which left a lasting impression for good was a visit to his mother's aunt, who was dying. When John entered the room he heard his aunt speak to her maid:

Mary, I have something to say to you: it may be that you may think it a lie, but indeed it is truth. This night the Lord stood by me, and invited me to drink of the water of life freely; and I shall stand before the Lord, bold as a lion.

John wrote:

I found, as she spake these words with uncommon cheerfulness, my blood chilled in my veins, and I was struck to the heart! I was set upon praying

immediately that before I died I might know (as I thought my aunt did) that I should go to heaven. Soon after my mother came into the room and hearing the dying woman shout for joy, and cry out in such assurance of faith, she drew near, and said with tears, Poor soul! My aunt scare heard her but she cried out, 'Who dares to call me poor! I am rich in Christ! I have Christ! I am rich!' and after this manner she rejoiced till we left her.

John continues:

'These were the most early convictions I can remember; nor do I know any time between whiles till my conversion, when I did not meditate on my aunt's last words, for it was not long after I had seen her, that she slept in the bosom of the Lamb.' May we be so enabled to finish our course with joy.

John grew into a dutiful and serious-minded youth. He was afraid of either swearing or blaspheming. He was, however, fond of play, fine clothes and of praise. He could be obstinate, furious when provoked and untruthful, though he tells us:

after my passion was over, I commonly dreaded to go to bed, lest I should drop into hell before morning. Nor did I dare to sleep till I had said my prayers, and promised God how good I would be the next day.

He tells us that when he had sinned in any gross way; by lying, sabbath breaking, stealing from schoolmates or disobeying his parents; then these words would be brought to mind (Proverbs 30:17): 'The eye that mocketh at his father and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it.'

John continued to attend the daily prayers at St Lawrence's until he was thirteen and went to London to be apprenticed to a trade. Following nine unsuccessful visits, he was finally put on trial with a carpenter but even this fell through, because of the carpenter's objections, when the time came for him to be bound as an apprentice and so he was again disappointed. It is also probable that John's father died at this time for, although John makes no reference to it, the parish records note the burial of a George Cunnick on 9 November 1734, just before John's fourteenth birthday.

At 14 we find John feeling unsettled because of his unemployment. He began to learn two or three trades, certain that he would become a wealthy man. He then solemnly promised: 'To build a chapel, and erect a more strict order in the church, wherein people should fast duly according to the rubric, and sit up all night in prayer, and go plain in apparel' and, to show the seriousness of this promise, he committed it to writing. At 15 we find him reading histories and romances, singing songs, talking of the heathen gods and Jewish and Greek history, playing cards, sightseeing, going to horse races,

dancing, revelling and 'walking with young company' and he continued with this way of life until he was 16½.

During Easter 1735 he was staying with his brother George, who worked as a plumber in London, and felt unable to take communion on Easter Sunday because he hadn't fasted during Passion Week, through fear that George would laugh at him. At first he thought that this was the cause of his feeling particularly dejected but describes his experience:

as I was walking hastily in Cheapside in London, the hand of the Lord touched me. I felt an uncommon fear and dejection ... I knew not any weight before like this.

He made numerous attempts to divert his thoughts but remained under conviction of sin for over two years. He made a journey into the country, he developed a friendship with other serious minded young men, he stopped singing songs, card playing and seeing plays. He even considered entering a Catholic monastery but couldn't afford the journey. None of these remedies helped him and he writes:

All this while I had no power over sin, nor the least strength to resist temptation ... My chief sins were pride, murmuring against God, blasphemy, disobedience and evil concupiscence.

At this time his formal worship seemed to be a mockery of God and he was tempted to atheistic thoughts but, whenever he turned to the Scriptures, he couldn't help but say 'Doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth'. Sometimes he would feel that this was all part of God's chastening him for good and that one day he would bear the Lord's name before many people. The following words were strongly impressed on him: 'Fear not I am with thee, and thou shalt testify of me in every place whither I shall send thee. Lo! I will be a mouth to thee, and thou shalt bear my gospel even in the midst of the streets,' but he felt: 'But this being an unheard of thing, I regarded it not, and was soon as heavy as before.'

As he continued in personal and public religious duties, the Scriptures seemed like a closed book, with the exception of the law, the judgements and the terrors of God. Long periods of fasting, praying (kneeling to pray nine times a day), and mortification and self-denial, in which he existed on a diet of water, hard dry bread, acorns, leaves, grass and potatoes, brought no relief to his deeply troubled heart.

By August 1737 he had returned home to Reading and was working part time as a land surveyor and part time buying and selling on his own behalf; the latter enterprise failed. He was nearly 19 years old and felt at the end of his

tether. He sat alone in sight of Reading Abbey and committed his experience to verse:

Striving and wrestlings found I in vain
 Nothing I did could stay my pain:
 Then gave I up my works and will
 Resigned to share in heaven or hell.

Like some poor pris'ner at the bar!
 Conscious of guilt, of sin and fear;
 Arraigned and self-condemned I stood,
 Lost in the world, and in my blood.

He determined to leave home and go to a solitary place; he settled his debts, fixing the date of departure for 7 September 1737. Legalism, asceticism and good works had all failed to bring inner peace but on the 6 September he heard the St Lawrence's bell ring for prayers and entered the Church and knelt down, still weighed down with deep convictions of sin. The order of service specified that the 32nd, 33rd and 34th Psalms be read. Cennick wrote:

neare the end of the Psalms ... these words were read, 'Great are the troubles of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of them all! And he that putteth his trust in the Lord shall not be destitute'. I had just room to think, who can be more destitute than me? when I was overwhelmed with joy, and I believed there was mercy. My heart danced for joy, and my dying soul revived! I heard the voice of Jesus, saying 'I am thy salvation'. I no more groaned under the weight of sin. The fears of hell were taken away, and being sensible that Christ loved me, and died for me, 'I rejoiced in God my Saviour'. This joy and peace in believing filled me about three and four hours; and I began to vow everlasting obedience, and how faithfully I would stand for the Lord all the days of my life.

I have gone into much detail about this period in Cennick's life intentionally, to show that this great transformation which God wrought in his life was just that. It was no easy believism and, knowing something of what he had been saved from, he had experienced deeply the free grace of God. This is what motivated him throughout his life and he states in the Preface to the Reader in his autobiography:

I have hoped that those who followed after righteousness by works (as I did) and are ready to faint, may be encouraged by my example to look only to the free mercies of God in the wounds and blood of Jesus Christ, and find peace.

My eyes are now open to see how naturally men seem to believe they must prepare themselves to come to Christ, and to heal ... themselves, and then to come to the Physician, not knowing that our Saviour wants no better preparation than for us to know we are poor, and miserable, and blind, and

naked, and without him can do nothing, but must perish. It is because I see this ... that I have written mine experience. O that our dear Lord Jesus may bless it as a means of bringing others who are labouring in the fire, to come as they are to Jesus, who ... will heal all who come, of whatever disease they have.

It is important to realize that John Cennick knew of no-one else who had undergone a similar experience to himself. George Whitefield had been converted just over two years and it would be another eight months before John Wesley's heart was 'strangely warmed'. Within a short period he felt that the Lord had 'hid his face' but testified: 'I saw clearly the will of the Lord in calling me through much tribulation, and I said gladly "It is good for me that I have been in trouble".' Towards the end of 1738, over a year after his conversion, John borrowed part of George Whitefield's *Journal*. Here he read of someone who had shared similar struggles to his own and he immediately prayed that he would be able to meet Whitefield, who was then in America, at a future date.

Shortly afterwards, Cennick was invited to supper by a lady whose son and friend were back from Oxford University. When he twice declined an invitation to play cards, one of the young men said: 'There is just such a stupid religious fellow in Oxford; one Kinchin, whose brother is of our college.' Cennick determined to find this man and walked to Oxford on a wet Monday morning, following the morning service at St Mary's, Reading. He had forgotten the name of the man he wanted, remembering only he had a brother at Trinity College, but eventually he discovered that Kinchin was a fellow of Corpus Christi College. He was unable to find him that day and cold, tired and hungry returned to uncomfortable overnight lodgings. The next morning he made a final attempt to meet Kinchin and caught him as he went out to breakfast. Kinchin invited him in and asked John to join him in prayer. After breakfast in Bear Lane, Cennick, pressed by the lady of the house, related his own experiences to Kinchin and two other gowmsmen. Later he repeated his story to a small society, probably the Holy Club, and this led to Cennick becoming acquainted with the Wesleys and with Whitefield.

Kinchin no doubt informed John Wesley of this earnest young man, for on Friday 9 March Wesley, who was on his way to Dummer in Hampshire to preach for Kinchin, made a stop at Reading. He writes in his *Journal*:

I found a young man (Senwick by name) strong in the faith of our Lord Jesus. He had begun a society there the week before, but the minister of the parish has now well-nigh overturned it. Several of the members ... spent the evening with us and it pleased God to strengthen and comfort them. In the morning our brother Senwick rode with me, whom I found willing to suffer, yea to die for his Lord.

On returning to meet with the group, Wesley wrote:

We had appointed the little society at Reading to meet with us in the evening. But the enemy was too vigilant ... Almost as soon as we went out of town the minister sent, or went, to each of the members and being arguing and threatening, utterly confounded them, so that they were all scattered abroad. Mr Senwick's own (younger) sister (Anna) did not dare see us, but was gone out on purpose to avoid it. I trust however our God will gather them together again.

Cennick's older sister Sarah (Sally) was present and though convinced of their doctrine was deeply concerned that the meeting would lead to schism in the Church. Cennick wrote in a letter (18 March 1739):

she is very desirous of being born again, being truly convinced of her great necessity, but the rest of my brethren are still at a great distance, some care not to speak (former friends) ... and others only care how they may suppress my design. I purpose to meet every Sunday evening, but I can hardly promise my self 3 persons to assemble with me.

This gives an indication of the opposition he faced in an attempt to begin a Religious Society in his own home.

It was in 1735 that George Whitefield had begun his first society in Gloucester, so that people 'awakened' through his preaching were able to meet together. This society met each evening for between one and two hours. Psalms were sung, the Bible was read, an exhortation was given and prayer made. In 1736 a similar meeting for women was started. Knowing of similar societies, it is not surprising that Cennick began one in his own house, but what is significant is that it was not under the control, direct or indirect, of an ordained minister.

The society meeting brought trouble and opposition to Cennick and the society members. Years later Sally Cennick wrote:

the preaching being in our house, it made a great stir in the town and caused us much trouble and disgrace.

John Cennick wrote to Wesley at this time:

Mr Boody (the vicar) is indifferently silent, but ready to hear our reproach and to join in despising.

Cennick was discouraged to see this work thwarted, he was slandered and a gentlewoman sent him a message forbidding him to keep up a friendship with her son. In response to this Cennick decided to go for a walk, thinking 'to divert my soul in solemn solitude'.

After an hour's walking alone, Cennick experienced a tremendous sense of God's presence. He wrote to Wesley:

Heaven descended into my calm breast! and filled me with unutterable joy! and such Peace that neither the world could give or take away. My soul abode in this Transporting enjoyment ... I had sweet communion with God, and his Christ ... Within was Love and Peace, without Thankful Adoration, Amazement and Rejoicing! I beheld the Beauty of the Trinity Shining on my soul, as the sun in his strength! The Lamb of God embraced me as a son of his Love! And the Holy Spirit moved Prolific on my Spirit as it did once on the Confused waters in the Creation.

My barren bosom named as the Altar; when the bright Rays of the Sun of Righteousness shined upon me. My soul was ravished with the Angelic Harmony, and my Heart danced for Joy for lo! I saw the Day of Peace dawn, the eyelids of the morning were opened and the Promised Star of Jesse, arose in his Glory.

God had graciously met with his servant just when such a reassurance of Divine love was needed. Shortly afterwards John's mother, who was staying in London, heard of these irregular meetings and returned speedily to forbid their continuance.

On 14 May, Cennick, along with Kezia Wilmot and his sister Sally, visited the Fetter Lane Society. This society was becoming increasingly a Moravian body. The Moravians saw themselves as part of the Church of England, enjoying the privileges of the state church but not being subject to its control. Effectively they were 'a church within a church'. It was here that they first heard of the Awakening at Bristol and here also they met with George Whitefield. It is unclear whether this is the first or second time they met. Cennick tells us that he walked through the night from Reading to London the first time because he was so eager to meet Whitefield and wrote of their several days together: 'our communion was sweet continually'.

At this meeting Whitefield told Cennick of his plan to build a School at Kingswood near Bristol for the colliers' children and invited him to be its master. Whitefield then wrote to Wesley, who had taken over at Whitefield's request the leadership of the Bristol work, and Wesley wrote to Cennick imploring him to come. Cennick settled his affairs at Reading and went to Bristol where, when he arrived on Tuesday 12 June 1739, he found the school unfinished.

On Thursday 14 June he joined others in walking the three miles to Kingswood to hear Sammy Nathan, a surgeon's apprentice, read a sermon in the open air to the colliers. These were the very early days of open air preaching. Earlier in the year Whitefield had 'broken the ice', as he put it, and preached in the open air to a crowd of over 200. Six weeks later John Wesley had 'submitted to be more vile' and preached outdoors; exclaiming: 'I should

have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not be done in a church.’ When Nathan was late in arriving, John Cennick was entreated to take his place and agreed to do so. Cennick describes the incident:

I was sensible of the Divine call in my heart beside the open door before me, but as I had never done such a thing and my conscience was exceedingly tender, I delayed, though persuaded on all sides, till Mr Nathan came, who joined with the others to entreat me to preach. We went aside into a little cottage near where the foundation of the new school was laid and there we kneeled down simply and asked our Saviour to make manifest his mind, and when we had done one wrote several lots which we cast before the Lord, and I drew out ‘To respond’. I stood under a sycamore tree and spoke to several hundreds with a boldness and particular freedom in my heart with a blessing and that ‘many believed in that hour’.

News about Cennick, who was one of the first lay preachers, spread around the area. The following day saw him preaching again in the open air—this time at White’s Hill, Kingswood. He made sure not to dress as a minister and wore either a dark or a very light coat.

Even though Cennick was not ordained, Wesley approved of him preaching in the open air. Whitefield had reservations at first and wrote to Wesley:

I suspend my judgement of Brother Watkins’ and Cennick’s behaviour till I am better acquainted with the circumstances of their proceeding ... The consequences of beginning to teach too soon will be exceeding bad ...

With Wesley’s encouragement, however, John Cennick continued expounding and preaching to the colliers and their children, and also in the societies. These were some of the happiest days of Cennick’s life and speaking of his relationship with Wesley during 1739 and most of 1740 he states

we enjoyed most sweet peace, and had many remarkable meetings at the school ... At some ... places God hath often appeared wonderful, both in shedding abroad his love in the hearts of the people by the Holy Ghost and also in awakening souls, and calling them to seek him. Neither do I remember any time ... those days when God was not pleased to bless our assemblies abundantly.

We will now look at the factors which eventually led to a split between the two men. The first area of disagreement was regarding the physical manifestations present under the preaching. Cennick states that the first instance was on 17 April 1739 when people began to fall into fits under the discourses, especially as Wesley began to preach perfection and to speak terribly out of the law. John Haydon, a weaver, groaned and cried out and although some called this ‘the pangs of the new birth, the work of the Holy Ghost, the bruising of the

serpent's head', others left the societies when Wesley encouraged this. Cennick disputed with Wesley for calling this the work of God. Also he states:

frequently when none were agitated in the meetings he (Wesley) prayed Lord, where are thy tokens and thy signs, and I don't remember ever having seen it otherwise than that on his so praying several men were seized and screamed out.

The only reference I have been able to note from Wesley's Journal which looks like an asking for signs is for 26 April 1739 when Wesley was: 'led, without any previous design ... to pray that if Free Grace was God's truth he would 'bear witness to his word''. The subsequent physical manifestations appear to confirm Wesley in his doctrine.

Cennick records instances of people foaming and agitating, needing six adults to restrain them. Others sweated profusely, their necks and tongues swelling and twisting out of shape. Some prophesied and some blasphemed. One Anne Roberts fell down as dead for up to 24 hours. One claimed to converse with saints in heaven in his fits. Cennick notes:

In the beginning, when Mr Wesley prayed for them, they recovered, sang hymns, and declared before all they had received the Holy Ghost etc. But oftentimes the same persons were seized again and grew intolerable, and though they prayed with them whole nights they were rather worse and worse.

On Monday 22 October 1739, Cennick was preaching at Two Mile Hill in Kingswood. Folk began to cry out while he was preaching and while he initially look little notice he tried to prevent it when it increased. That evening Cennick was preaching at the school on the forgiveness of sins and two people who had previously mocked cried out loudly. Within a short space of time some 20 people were roaring and shrieking together. Cennick wrote to Wesley:

Indeed it seemed that the Devil and much more of the powers of darkness were come among us. My mouth was stopped, and my ears heard scarce anything, but such terrifying cries as would have made anyone's knees tremble! ... It was pitch dark, it rained much and the wind blew vehemently. Large flashes of lightening and loud claps of thunder mixed with the screams ... many (ran) up and down crying 'The Devil will have me. I am his servant, I am damned!' A young man (in such horrors that seven or eight could not hold him) still roared like a dragon: 'Ten thousand devils, millions, millions of devils are about me!'

This continued 3 hours ... I have visited several since, who told me, their senses were taken away, but when I drew near they said they felt fresh rage, longing to tear me in pieces. I never saw the like, nor even the shadow of it before! Yet I can say I was not in the least afraid, as I knew God was on our side.

Cennick gave his own analysis of events in the same letter:

Far be it from me to attribute the convictions of sin (the work of the Holy Ghost) to Beelzebub! No; neither do I say that those strong wrestlings are of God only. I thought you had understood my opinion better ... before a soul is converted to God, the spirit of rebellion is in every one ... Now after the word of the Most High has touched the heart, I think the serpent is seeking to root it up, or choke the seed, but as the Spirit of God has gained entrance, he urgeth with all his might, and as far as he hath power, troubleth the soul with the justice of God, with fear of having passed the day of grace, or having sinned too greatly to be forgiven, in order to make them despair. Hence ariseth a fierce combat in the inward parts, so that the weaker part of man, the body, is overcome, and those cries and convulsions follow.

Cennick notes that in a genuine convicting work of the Spirit, there may be particular physical manifestations but that such manifestations may equally be the work of Satan. Elsewhere he states that there are those who behave in a certain way, because others around them are doing the same.

Incidents continued: three women claimed to be demoniacs and were able to accurately predict the future; in the meetings they would blaspheme and sing the Lord's Prayer to song tunes so as to be a cause of distraction to others. When anyone sought to pray with them, to calm them down, they would try to make them laugh. Cennick concluded that it was unwise to keep questioning them as they would become increasingly violent. Rather he decided:

neither to ask them anything, nor suffer them to speak, when they would say anything, and thus little by little it came to nothing in Kingswood.

Looking back, Cennick stated:

I myself went far from my first simplicity, but one day I walked by myself into the wood and wept before the Saviour ... and determined to preach nothing but him and his righteousness. And so all fits and crying out ceased wherever I came, and a blessing attended my labours.

Wesley and Cennick also disputed about perfectionism. According to Cennick, Wesley held that:

a man can become so perfect in this world that he shall not only not commit sin, but shall be without sin and be as inherently holy as God. All these I withstood, and at first we reasoned out of the Scriptures mildly for some months, but the number of perfectionists increasing and Mr Wesley declaring and maintaining such things in their vindication, we argued hotly and sometimes we were both to blame.

The situation was made worse when Society members claimed perfection and a Mr Nowers, who was later found to be a liar and a hypocrite, often preached 'I

am the sinless, perfect man' and when using the Lord's Prayer prayed 'forgive them their trespasses'. Others in the Society, including a Mrs Turner and Maxfield who was one of the first lay preachers, held the same views.

Linked with the perfectionist error was the danger of putting too much emphasis on impulses and impressions. Cennick tells of a condemned prisoner, William Snowde, about whom

Mr Wesley sent word to his people that he should be executed the Thursday following at 3 o'clock at which time they were to pray and fast for him. Accordingly they met and at three Mr Maxfield and Mrs Turner broke out in a transport of joy saying, 'There, there! I see his soul ascend into Paradise ...' The next news they heard was that the poor man was reprieved for transportation, and this mortified the perfect people excessively, and lessened their repute among the souls.

Unfortunately no disciplinary action was taken against those who spoke in error.

This danger of setting store by impressions was by no means confined to Kingswood and Bristol. Later Whitefield was convinced that his son John would be a great preacher but he died aged four months and in 1745 Jonathan Edwards wrote: 'Many good souls, both among the clergy and laity for a while mistook fancy for faith and imagination for revelation.' Some things never change! Whitefield's words from 1746 are worth repeating:

It is every Christian's bounden duty to be guided by the Spirit in connection with the written Word of God.

The third area of dispute between Wesley and Cennick was concerning Christ's righteousness being imputed to the believer and about the eternal security of the believer. Wesley held

a soul justified by the blood of Christ, and having the assurance of forgiveness and the witness of God's Spirit, bearing witness with his Spirit that he is a child of God, can finally and eternally perish.

Cennick and Wesley also disagreed concerning election and predestination. On 26 March 1740, Whitefield wrote to Wesley saying:

The doctrine of election and the final perseverance of those that are truly in Christ, I am ten thousand times more convinced of, if possible, than when I saw you last ... You think otherwise. Why then should we dispute when there is no probability of convincing ... I do not think ever to enter the lists of controversy with you in the points wherein we differ.

Cennick also had no wish to separate from Wesley. He writes:

I assured them I knew no Calvinist in the world, nor believed reprobation or in the least doubted universal redemption [Christ's death for all not salvation

for all], only I told them I should be glad to find a doctrine whereby election and universal redemption could be made to agree.

Some of these views were soon to change and it is clear from this statement that Cennick was probably uncertain as to what constituted a Calvinist.

Charles Wesley's notes in his diary for 27 July 1740 declared

our brother Cennick's entire agreement with me in the belief of universal redemption, and he confirmed my saying with an hymn of my own. Never did I feel my spirit more knit to him.

Exactly three months later Howell Harris wrote publicly against Wesley's doctrines in a letter to Cennick. He stated:

We preach two Gospels; one sets all on God and the other on man, the one on God's will, the other on man's will, one on God's choosing, the other on man's choosing, the one on God's distinguishing Love in making one differ from another, the other on man's being better than another and taking more pains and being a better husband of his Grace than the other ... my dear Brother deal faithfully with John and Charles. If you will you may read this to them—I must own the difference did not appear so great to me as tis now—but as the Glory of God's Grace is concerned in it I must declare it to all the world.

Cennick showed the letter to Wesley and thus joined Whitefield who had recently written to Wesley saying that election is an integral part of the Gospel: 'it is children's bread and ought not to be withheld from them.'

By November the Society at Kingswood was in a state of confusion. John Wesley was away in London and John Cennick had been in Wiltshire. In fact, over the past few months, Cennick's invitations to different parts of Wiltshire had been increasing, so much so that he had asked Wesley to appoint another member of staff for the school. This would enable the school to accept another 15–20 boys and Cennick would be able to restrict himself to 1–2 hours a day in the school. School life was encouraging but the life of the Society was not. Charles Wesley wrote to John on 30 November:

The poison of Calvin has drunk up their spirit of love. Alas! we have set the wolf to keep the sheep. John Cennick has been undermining our doctrine and authority.

John Wesley hastened back to Bristol and noted that there was a measure of coldness from Cennick. When they met again on the Friday and Saturday of the same week Cennick:

now told me plainly he could not agree with me, because I did not preach the truth in particular with regard to Election. We then entered a little into the controversy but without effect.

Wesley then took possession of the school and Cennick was forbidden to preach there.

Returning to Bristol to preach a few days later Wesley found the congregation had gone to hear Cennick, leaving only about six folk behind, the same number as he had had on one or two previous occasions. This gives some indication of the strength of Cennick's support. Cennick was not rejoicing in the numbers coming to hear him but rather felt that the continued disputes and divisions at Bristol and Kingswood were causing him to 'go heavily all the day long'. On the 17 January 1741 Cennick wrote to Whitefield pleading:

that you might come quickly ... how gloriously the Gospel seemed once to flourish in Kingswood ... With Universal Redemption brother Charles pleases the world, brother John follows him in everything. I believe no atheist can more preach against Predestination than they; and all who believe Election are counted enemies to God and called so. Fly dear brother. I am as alone ...

Cennick here was referring to Charles' 'Hymns on God's Everlasting Love' to which were added 'The Cry of the Reprobate' and 'The Horrible Decree'. A copy of Cennick's letter somehow fell into Wesley's hands, who read it to the company gathered at the Kingswood Love-Feast on 22 February.

After this meeting Cennick and 15–20 others came to speak to Wesley. Wesley said they had not done right in speaking against him behind his back. This was refuted:

They had said no more of me behind my back than they would say to my face, which was that I did preach up man's faithfulness and not the faithfulness of God.

Also Wesley noted that some Kingswood Brethren had formed themselves into a separate Society. Cennick replied:

We are willing to join with you, but we will also meet apart from you, for we meet to confirm one another in those truths which you speak against.

Wesley saw this as supplanting him in his own house, stealing people's hearts and separating friends.

It was decided that Cennick and Wesley meet the following Saturday. Before that date Wesley met the bands and 40 people voluntarily separated themselves from the Society. Wesley also used the time between the meetings to prepare a full charge against Cennick. When they met, Wesley's opponents were publicly rebuked, this was the first recorded instance of such severe disciplinary action in a methodist society. Accusations were levelled against Cennick and others which included:

tale bearing, back-biting and evil speaking ... dissembling, Iying and slandering.

The verdict was then pronounced:

I, John Wesley, by the consent and approbation of the band-society in Kingswood, do declare the persons above-mentioned to be no longer members thereof. Neither will they be so accounted until they shall openly confess their fault.

They refused to acknowledge any fault both then and the following night and were given a week to reconsider.

On the morning of Saturday 7 March, Wesley drank tea and conversed at Cennick's. Wesley believed that matters must be delayed no longer and that he could no longer tolerate Cennick's society meeting separately while still being part of his own. Bissicks, a leader of the 'breakaway' society offered to disband it, should Cennick be received back into employment by Wesley. Wesley said that people must choose which society they wished to be in. After a short time of prayer, Cennick and about half of those present left together. Cennick writes:

When we were separated we were in number 12 men and 12 women, and having a house just by where we had the liberty to meet we sat down and wept and cried to the Lord, because we believed a breach was made that day in Israel.

Numbers in the separated society soon grew to 130.

The division between Wesley and Cennick took place on the 7 March and on 25 March, Whitefield wrote to Wesley:

I am now constrained on account of our differing in principles, publicly to separate from my dear, dear old friends Messrs John and Charles Wesley whom I still love as my own soul.

It was not long before Cennick and John Wesley met to pray together, as Cennick sought to restore fellowship. Whilst it was not possible to work together at this point, it was possible to pray together. When John Cennick and Charles Wesley met later in the year, to dine together, the topic of conversation turned to election. Cennick said that he believed it, but did not believe in reprobation. Wesley rose from the table in a fury, saying that he would preach against Cennick, alleging that:

I confessed to him that children were in hell of a span long ... he also called Calvin the first-born son of the Devil.

Despite their differences Cennick asked Charles to edit his first volume of hymns, *Sacred Hymns for the Children of God, in the Days of their Pilgrimage* in 1741.

Cennick penned about 700 hymns; almost all of them between 1741 and 1745. His Sacred Hymns for the Children of God was published in 3 volumes as was his Sacred Hymns for the use of Religious Societies. His last volume was produced specifically for children and was entitled Hymns to the Honour of Jesus Christ, composed for such Little Children as desire to be saved, and go to Heaven ... printed in 1754. His best known hymns include the original version of 'Lo, He Comes With Clouds Descending', 'A Good High Priest Is Come', 'Children of the Heavenly King', 'Ere I Sleep for Every Favour', 'Jesus, My All to Heaven is Gone', 'Rise My Soul Adore Thy Maker' and he also wrote the two well known graces 'Be Present at our Table Lord' and 'We Thank Thee Lord For This Our Food.' These two graces were inscribed on two teapots which Josiah Wedgwood gave to John Wesley, so Wesley could not have a cup of tea without being reminded of John Cennick.

Later Cennick tried to heal the rift by suggesting a joint conference between the leaders of the three main evangelical groups. In May 1743 the Calvinist Howell Harris wrote to John Wesley:

I think I can honestly say ... I will, with great Expectations await for God's time and way to bring us fully and outwardly one.

The conference was not held, for while Whitefield, Harris and Cennick approved the plan and the Wesleys travelled to London, the Moravians refused attendance unless the Archbishop of Canterbury was present. The following year Whitefield called for a day of prayer and fasting in support of Wesley's persecuted and plundered people in Wednesbury. Some £60 was collected and a measure of fellowship was restored but not entire harmony. Neither Cennick nor Whitefield entered into controversy with the Wesleys again and later Whitefield preached for Wesley and arranged for Wesley to preach his funeral sermon.

Briefly I would like us to return to John Cennick. Whitefield's Tabernacle was opened in June 1741 for Whitefield's services, in the same area as Wesley's Foundry. Cennick's time was spent mainly in Bristol, Kingswood, Wiltshire and also in helping frequently at the Tabernacle. He made frequent contributions to *The Weekly History*, a Calvinistic Methodist Magazine which was first issued in April 1741 with Cennick, Harris and Humphries being its main contributors.

Cennick was now to face a different sort of conflict. In June 1741 he teamed up with Harris, four years his senior, for open air preaching in the Swindon area. Thousands attended these open air meetings and there were glorious conversions but there was also bitter persecution. Cennick gives us an account of what took place in his diary:

On Tuesday June 23rd with about 24 on horses he accompanied me to Swindon about 10 miles from Brinkworth and not far from the Vale of the White Horse where I had appointed to preach. We found a large company assembled in the Grove with whom I sung and prayed but was hindered from preaching by a great mob who made a noise and played in the midst of the people and then with guns fired over our heads, holding the muzzles of their pieces so near our faces that we were both black as tinkers with the powder. We were not affrighted but opened our breasts and told them we were ready to lay down our lives for our doctrine and had nothing against it if their guns were levelled at our hearts. They then got the dust out of the highway and covered us all over and then played an engine upon us which they filled out of the stinking ditches till we were just like men in the pillory, but as they played on Brother Harris, I spoke to the Congregation and when they turned their engine upon me, he preached, and thus continued till they had spoiled the engine and then they threw whole buckets of water and mud over us. When we had stood in this manner more than an hour a spectacle of the utmost shame before many weeping people and before the whole mob, we were led up to the town, to the person's house who had invited us thither where we borrowed some things to change us and came back to Brinkworth. This persecution was carried on by Mr Gothard, a leading gentleman of that place, who lent the mob his guns, halberd and engine and bid them treat us as bad as they could only not to kill us, and himself sat on horseback the whole time laughing to see us so treated. After we had left the town they dressed up two images and called one Cennick and the other Harris and then burnt them.

He writes of a later occasion:

I had appointed sometime after to preach in Stratton a place not more than 3 miles from Swindon, at which time, as was supposed, because I preached much upon the blood of Christ, the chief persons in the former mob got a butcher to save all the blood he could, that, as they said, they might play it out of the engine upon us and so give us blood enough. But before I came to Stratton God struck with particular judgement all the authors of this design at once. Mr John and Thomas Violet Esquires, the Parson of Stratton, and Mr Silvester Keen a bailiff all bled at the nose and some at the mouth without ceasing till the one of the former fell into dead fits and could not any more be trusted alone. The Minister did not recover till it brought him to his grave and Silvester Keen continued to bleed at times at such an extravagant rate that it threw him into a deep decay in which he lingered 10 days without having anyone to visit him because he stunk alive and in March 31st following he died cursing terribly.

Again:

As I was preaching in Farmer Smith's hay-yard in Preston late in the evening for the sake of the working people on Wednesday August 12th Mr Skull of

that place hired some persons to disturb our meeting by ringing bells, and engaged a poor fellow to get through the crowd and pull me down, but as the man attempted it he was so affected and struck with what he heard that he could not proceed, and this he confessed afterwards.

It was obvious that a closer working relationship would now be possible between the Welsh and English preachers in the Awakening. Four ordained men and four lay men met on 5 and 6 January 1743 for the first Calvinistic Methodist Conference. Whitefield was appointed Moderator for life. Cennick moved to Tytherton in Wiltshire and in 1744, at Cennick's special desire, an Association of ministers and preachers met in his house. This group consisted of 4 ministers, only Whitefield among them was ordained, and 4 exhorters. The aim of this meeting was to organise and to co-ordinate the work in England in a more regular manner. The key areas were London, Bristol, Kingswood, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. There was a pyramidal structure with the stewards being in subjection to the exhorters, the exhorters to the preachers and the preachers to George Whitefield. All this was prior to Wesley holding his first Methodist conference.

When Whitefield went to America in August 1744 Cennick was placed in charge of the work in England but he found it hard to deal firmly with some of the difficulties and disputes which arose. His emphasis on preaching the person of Christ, as well as his rejection of reprobation, were more in line with Moravianism than Calvinistic Methodism. Accordingly in December 1745 Cennick handed the superintendency of the work over to Harris, who wrote:

Bro Cennick took his leave of the people and committed them to me. The people meek and weeping (he being in an excellent spirit). He prayed too most earnestly for me.

About 400 people left the Tabernacle with Cennick and became Moravians. Cennick spent some time at the Moravian headquarters in Germany before returning to England to marry Jane Bryant. Prior to his marriage he cast lots, a practise which he never gave up, on whether or not to marry. They had three daughters, one of whom died in infancy.

Cennick was invited to Ireland by two Baptist merchants, who had heard him preach in England. He was to enter upon the most fruitful period of his ministry and within a year of his arrival in Dublin there was a society of 526 members. When a dispute later arose about the premises which Cennick was hiring he remained gracious, even though he had to give up the rooms in Skinner's Alley, Dublin. He had been paying £8p.a. and, despite having spent £60 on renovation, was dispossessed by Wesley and his followers who paid £16 p.a.

In 1753 Cennick sought to restore harmony between Whitefield and the Moravians following a tract Whitefield wrote against some of the Moravian practises. Cennick was heartbroken, believing that such grievances should firstly have been aired privately and not in print. His attempts at conciliation failed.

At this time he wrote a poem entitled 'Longing for Home', in which he admitted that he felt tired and weary. The poem was found in his pocket book when he died of consumption two years later, at the age of 36. The closing lines read:

Meanwhile shall I awake in Jesu's arms
Above the reach of slanders, wrongs and harms
And with my dear acquaintance gone before
Stay with the Lamb and go from him no more.

We may echo the words of tribute of Adam Smith to John Wesley now inscribed on his tomb:

If thou art constrained to bless the instrument. Give God the glory.
May God in his mercy visit us again for his Glory.

