



## RELIGIOUS PAMPHLETS & GOSPEL TRACTS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

*A Report Presented by Jeff Talley, at the Red-River Meetinghouse, Logan County, Kentucky,  
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**A**N attempt to discuss all religious material either printed or in circulation in the British North American colonies and the early United States during the 1700's would be a sizeable task. Even upon narrowing the concentration to only small publications (such as religious booklets, or evangelistic pamphlets, or gospel tracts), there remains a great deal of information to cover.

Furthermore, the focus upon only the Kentucky and Cumberland area in the two decades preceding the Revival of 1800 would still require an analysis of the printed material that may have been brought into the area. This remains a study of a large scope.

Therefore for this presentation, if it is not disagreeable, I shall not attempt to summarize the entire history of printing in the American Colonies. Instead, I shall narrow the focus to only a few specimens. From each example, I will broaden the discussion to see if any general conclusions or noteworthy observations can be drawn.

### *Sample No. 1, Church of England pamphlet, 1708*

**T**O this day, there are still quite a few Church of England (Anglican) 18<sup>th</sup> century pamphlets on the market. This may be either because they were produced in abundance, or because they were not read as frequently, and thus better preserved. Perhaps it was a little of both. The state-sponsored Church of England would certainly have had funds at its disposal for a sizeable printing effort.

To get an idea of how sermon pamphlets evolved throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it may be helpful to go back to England to the very first decade of that century. Our first example is a very old sermon pamphlet from 1708 entitled "The Greatness of Hell-Torments", by Sir William Dawes, D.D. The title page and the second page are reproduced below:

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A  
**SERMON**

Preach'd before  
**KING WILLIAM,**  
A T  
Hampton-Court, *Novemb. 1700.*

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MATTH. 25. 41.

*Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels.*

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By Sir **WILLIAM DAWES**, Baronet, D. D.  
and Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty.

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THE SECOND EDITION.

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Published by His Majesties Special Command.

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PART. III.

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London: Printed and Sold by H. Hills, in Black-fryars, next  
the Water-side. For the Benefit of the Poor. 1707.



MATTHEW 25. 41.

*Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels.*

**H**AVING, in my former Discourses upon these words, finish'd what I propounded first to treat of from them, *viz.* the *Certainty of Hell-Torments*, from Principles of Nature and Reason; I shall now proceed, according to the method which I set my self, to consider the Greatness of them, and, in so doing,

*First*, To shew that they will certainly be inconceivably great; and

*Secondly*, To enquire, as far as we are able, wherein the greatness of them will consist.

And, forasmuch as, in my former Discourses, I have so far gratify'd some Men, as, chiefly for their sakes, to argue only from Principles of Nature and Reason, for the proof of that, which is the main point in dispute between us, *viz.* the *Certainty of Hell-Torments* (tho' still with this caution, that the fullest and clearest proof of this matter must be had from the Holy Scriptures) I shall now be less solicitous about gratifying them as to what follows, and shall freely argue from Revelation, as well as Nature and Reason, and tho' I shall not neglect or pass over proofs from these, yet I shall no longer confine my self wholly to them.

*First* then, I am to shew that the *Torments of Hell* will certainly be inconceivably great. And this is so plain a truth, that the very *Heathens* themselves, by the meer light of Nature, seem to have been perfectly well assur'd of it. For not only their *Poets*, (whose heated fancies and imaginations may perhaps be suppos'd to have carry'd them a great deal too far, upon this subject (tho' even these in my Opinion, are not wholly to be slighted in this case, because *Poets*, especially good

This pamphlet describes its author as "Sir William Dawes, Baronet, D.D., and Chaplain in Ordinary to His Majesty." It is true that Dr. William Dawes (1671-1724) actually became King William's chaplain in 1696. Later, Dr. Dawes became the Archbishop of York, which was one of the highest-ranking bishops in England.<sup>1</sup>

Although this pamphlet is noted that it is part 3 of a sermon series, it was probably sold as a stand-alone 16-page pamphlet. This can be determined by the fact that on page 3, there is a "signature" on the bottom of the page marked "A2." That printer's note indicates that it forms the second sheet of an "A-section," which basically means that no sections came before it in that particular edition. Note also that whenever a Bible verse is quoted, it is put in italics instead of quotation marks. (Numbers, however, do not have an italic form.) This was common printing practice in the 1700's.

Another thing of note is that this pamphlet was to be sold "for the benefit of the poor." Therefore, it was not given away. However, since it was not sold for profit, its printing may have been subsidized by either the Church of England or a concerned individual. This pamphlet is a second edition, printed seven years after it was preached. Its initial audience had been Anglican church-members (those of the king's court), not unbelievers. However, whoever sponsored the printing of this very solemn topic doubtless also had the un-churched in mind. Dr. Dawes warns near the end of this sermon, "Oh let us then frequently, with an eye of faith, take a view of the Torments of Hell: and then we shall be most ready to do or suffer any thing, for the avoiding of

them: *to pluck out a right eye, to cut off a right hand, that is to part with any thing, however dear and precious to us, rather than our whole body should be cast into Hell. Matt. 5.29, 30*"

*Sample No. 2, Church of England pamphlet, 1771*

**A**LTHOUGH Anglicans may not typically be considered at the forefront of evangelism, or at least not to the same extent as separatist or dissenting groups of the period, they were some of the first English Protestants to have an organized and concentrated mission effort. One such Anglican mission society was the Society for Propagating (or "Promoting") Christian Knowledge, which was formed in 1699. According to the first edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1771), the SPCK is described as follows:

This was begun in 1699, by some persons of worth, &c. Its original design was to propagate religion in the plantations, to secure the pious education of the poor at home, and to reclaim those that err in the fundamentals of Christianity. In the year 1701, they had procured considerable charities, and transmitted the same to the plantations, in libraries, bibles, catechisms, &c.<sup>2</sup>

From the above description, it would seem that the SPCK was interested in distributing printed material from the day of its origin. Later in the 1700's, the SPCK sponsored printing many sermons in London from notable Anglican ministers of the day. The sermon below, entitled "An Admonition Against Profane and Common Swearing", by Edmund Gibson, D.D., was found bound in a book of sermons from the 1760's and 1770's by various authors. This book was stamped on the back, "SOCIETY TRACTS," and indeed many of the sermons therein were noted on their title pages as, "Printed for JOHN RIVINGTON, Bookseller to *The Society for promoting Christian Knowledge.*"

AN  
A D M O N I T I O N  
A G A I N S T  
*Profane and Common*  
S W E A R I N G.

In a LETTER from a MINISTER  
to his PARISHIONER.

To be put privately into the Hands of Persons  
who are addicted to SWEARING.

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By the Right Reverend Father in GOD  
EDMUND GIBSON, D. D.  
Late Lord Bishop of LONDON.

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The TWENTY-SECOND EDITION.

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L O N D O N :

Printed by E. OWEN in *Warwick-Lane*, and  
Sold by W. JOHNSTON in *Ludgate-Street*.

MDCCLXXI.



A PRIVATE  
A D M O N I T I O N  
Against *Profane and Common*  
S W E A R I N G.

*Neighbour,*

IT is out of a true Respect  
I have for you, and a hearty  
Concern for the Good of  
your Soul, that I put into  
your Hands this *private* Admonition  
against SWEARING; since the *publick*  
Warnings you have heard from the  
Pulpit do not seem to have had their  
Effect upon you. If you will think and  
consider

A 2

The author of this sermon was Dr. Edmund Gibson (1669-1748), who was Bishop of London for about the last twenty-five years of his life. Many of his sermons and his other more lengthy religious works were published during his lifetime. The popularity of them may explain why this particular 24-page sermon was in its 22<sup>nd</sup> edition, and printed no less than 23 years after his death.<sup>3</sup>

Like the earlier example, this sermon may have primarily intended for the churchgoer, but Dr. Gibson made his warnings broad enough to bring fear to every one who generates profane conversation: "And the time is coming, (if he repent not) when he will have Cause to wish a Thousand Times over, that he had been born as dumb as the Beast that perish, or since he was not, that he had perished like them."

The typefaces used on this sermon seem to be what is today common called a Caslon style. This is named after William Caslon (1692-1766), who operated a foundry in London that produced the handset metal type used in printing presses all over England and in her Colonies.<sup>4</sup> William Caslon made some design changes that gave his fonts a slightly more elegant, modern look, and his style was copied by his competitors. Therefore, while it may not always be possible to distinguish whether an imprint was produced from a true Caslon foundry-made type, the Caslon style of the middle 1700's is fairly easy to recognize.

Another thing of note about this printing is the extensive capitalization of nearly all common nouns, (perhaps, even more so than the earlier example from 1708). This was common practice in England from the late 1600's up until about 1760, and in the Colonies it lasted up to about the 1770's.

Since this sermon is a 23<sup>rd</sup> edition reprint of an earlier work, the printer or the editor may have chosen to retain the capitalization in order stay close to the original. Also, religious works tended to retain a more conservative, or older look about them, than did secular books or newspapers. (Ironically, English bibles printed in the early to mid 1700's never adopted this fad of extensive capitalization. However, when another work quoted from the bible, it often did capitalize all the nouns in the quote.)

This particular anti-swearing sermon is marked on the title page to be sold, but no price is given. Other sermons of that era often do have a price printed on the bottom. One sermon from 1768 from this same SPCK collection, has its price as "2d [2 pence], or "12s.6d a Hundred."<sup>5</sup> (Note that 12s.6d is 12 shillings and 6 pence, which is a total of 150 pence, and therefore a 25% discount for buying in bulk.) Another 1775 sermon from the same SPCK collection states, "Price 3d, or 2s.6d a Dozen to Those who buy them to distribute in Prisons."<sup>6</sup> (This is 36 pence worth for 30 pence, or a one-sixth, or 16.6% discount.) Yet another Anglican sermon pamphlet from 1779 states: "Price 3d, or 20s a Hundred to those that give them away."<sup>7</sup> (Since 20 shillings is 240 pence, this is a 20% bulk discount.)

It would seem that the SPCK did not necessarily give away sermon pamphlets directly, but they did want to make it easier for evangelistic-minded Anglicans to acts as secondary sponsors, who could buy in bulk, and then give these sermons and tracts away at their own discretion.

### *Sample No. 3, Colonial Presbyterian pamphlet, 1744*

**T**HE camp-meeting at Red River in 1800 occurred on the frontier. The nearest printing press was in Nashville, about 40 miles away. The first printing press west of the Alleghenies was set up in 1787 in Lexington by John Bradford, who started a newspaper called the *Kentucke Gazette*. He also printed the first pamphlet west of the mountains in 1788, which was *The Kentucky Almanac*. In 1795, three years after Kentucky became a state, a second print shop opened in Lexington. Louisville would not have printing for many years to come.<sup>8</sup>

Tennessee was not far behind. The territory's first newspaper was the *Knoxville Gazette*, begun in 1791 in Rogersville, before it could be moved to Knoxville. However, it was not until 1799 that the second printer appeared in the state, and that was John McLaughlin, who started a newspaper in Nashville, called, the *Rights of Man, Or, Nashville Intelligencer*.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, the first sermons of the Second Great Awakening of 1800 did not have the same advantage as those of the First Great Awakening of the 1740's; that is, nearby printing presses. For that first awakening, the presses of Boston and Philadelphia were busy printing sermons and discourses both for and against the various elements of the spiritual movements of that day.

Gilbert Tennent (1703-1764), an Irish-born Presbyterian minister burst on the national scene in 1740, with his sermon, entitled, "On the Dangers of an Unconverted Ministry," (which was printed in Philadelphia by Benjamin Franklin). This sermon, which suggested that pastors who stood in opposition the current revival could have been unconverted, created quite a controversy throughout the colonies.<sup>10</sup>



Sample No. 4, Methodist pamphlet, 1777

CHARLES Wesley (1707-1788), the famous hymn writer and younger brother of John Wesley, is a household name and needs no introduction. Below is a copy of a 16-page sermon that he preached in 1742, entitled "Awake Thou that Sleepest." This copy was printed in England 35 years later (in 1777), and it is nothing less than a twenty-fourth edition!

A  
S E R M O N

PREACHED ON  
SUNDAY, April 4th, 1742.

BEFORE THE  
Univerfity of OXFORD.

By CHARLES WESLEY, M. A.  
STUDENT OF CHRIST-CHURCH.

Vain Man wou'd be wife, tho' Man be born like the  
wild Affes Colt. *Job xi. 12.*  
It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the Flefh profiteth no  
thing. *John vi. 63.*  
He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the Wis-  
doms in himfelf. 1. *John v. 10.*

THE TWENTY-FOURTH EDITION.

N A N T W I C H:

Printed by TAYLOR and SNELSON 1777.



EPHESIANS V. 14.

*Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the  
Dead, and Chrifl: fhall give thee Light.*

**I**N difcourfing on thefe Words, I fhall with the  
Help of God,  
I. Describe the Sleepers to whom they are  
fpoken.

II. Inforce the Exhortation, *Awake thou that  
fleepeft, and arife from the Dead.* And

III. Explain the Promife made to fuch as do awake  
and arife: *CHRIST fhall give thee Light.*

I. 1. And firft, as to the Sleepers here fpoken to. By  
Sleep is fignified the natural State of Man; that deep  
Sleep of the Soul into which the Sin of *Adam* hath caft  
all who ifpring from his Loins; that Supinenefs, Indo-  
lence and Stupidity, that Infenfibility of his real Con-  
dition, wherein every Man comes into the World, and  
continues 'till the Voice of God awakes him.

2. Now they that *leep, fleep in the Night.* The State  
of Nature is a State of utter Darknefs; a State wherein  
*Darknefs covers the Earth, and grofs Darknefs the People.*  
The poor unawakened Sinner, how much Knowledge  
foever he may have, as to other Things, has no Know-  
ledge of himfelf: In this Refpect *he knoweth nothing yet  
as he ought to know.* He knows not that he is a fallen  
Spirit, whole only Buſinefs in this prefent World, is to  
recover from his Fall, to regain that Image of God  
wherein he was created. He fees no *Necelfity for the one  
Thing needful,* even that inward univerfal Change that  
*Birth from above,* figured out by Baptifm, which is  
the Beginning of that total Renovation, that Sanctifi-  
cation of Spirit, Soul, and Body, *without which no Man  
fhall fee the LORD.*

Charles Wesley may have preached this at the University of Oxford, which was noted for its divinity school. However, Wesley's target audience was clearly the non-Christian, or the unconverted. More properly, he was directing this at non-Christians, even students preparing for the ministry, who thought they were already converted. He asks, "In what State is thy Soul? Was God while I am yet speaking, to require it of thee. Art thou ready to meet Death and Judgment?"

While this sermon follows nearly the same 18<sup>th</sup> century printing conventions of the other examples, it is different in that it has a Baskerville typeface instead of Caslon. In the late 1760's, John Baskerville operated a foundry that modified Caslon's older typeface designs, and tried to achieve a softer, more modern look. However, in the 1770's, most English printers still seemed to be using a Caslon style.

Charles Wesley's "Awake Thou that Sleepest" continued to be printed in pamphlet form for many years later. I have seen a version as late as 1803.

Sample No. 5, Shorter Catechism, 1749

**C**ATECHISMS are mentioned frequently in the literature of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Throughout its history, from 1690 to well into the 1800's, the *New England Primer* included the Shorter Catechism questions and answers (but omitting the Bible references) in its lesson plan. Without a doubt, many students memorized this Shorter Catechism in its entirety.

The Shorter Catechism was formalized in 1647, at same time as the Longer (Westminster) Catechism was written. It became the standard of all nearly all English speaking Calvinist, or reformed-minded churches, including the Puritans of the 1600's the Congregationalists and Presbyterians of the 1700's.<sup>11</sup> This particular 32-page catechism is from Edinburgh (Scotland), printed in 1749, and is heavily worn from use. Note that it was printed over 100 years after it was written.

T H E  
S H O R T E R C A T E C H I S M  
O F T H E  
*Reverend Assembly*  
O F  
D I V I N E S :  
W I T H T H E  
P R O O F S  
T h e r e o f , o u t o f t h e  
S C R I P T U R E S ,

I n W O R D S a t L e n g t h ;

Which are either some of the former quoted Places, or others gathered from their other Writings. All fitted, both for Brevity and Clearness, to this their Form of sound Words.

*For the Benefit of Christians in general, and of Youth and Children in Understanding in Particular, that they may, with more Ease, acquaint themselves with Truth, according to the Scriptures, and with the Scriptures themselves.*

E D I N B U R G H,  
Printed and Sold in PEARSON'S Close, opposite to the Cross,  
North-side of the Street, 1749.

The Shorter  
C A T E C H I S M  
O F T H E

*Reverend Assembly of DIVINES,*  
With the PROOFS out of the SCRIPTURES, at large.

1 Q. *WHAT is the chief End of Man?*  
A. Man's chief End is to glorify God *a*, and to enjoy him for ever *b*.

*a* 1 Cor. 10. 31. *Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the Glory of God.*

*b* Psal. 73. 25. *Whom have I in Heaven but thee? and there is none upon the Earth I desire besides thee, Verse 26. My Flesh and my Heart failed, but God is the Strength of my Heart and Portion for ever.*

2 Q. *What Rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?*

A. The Word of God ( which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament *c* ) is the only Rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him *d*.

*c* Eph. 2. 20. *And are built upon the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief Corner Stone.*

*d* 2 Tim. 3. 16. *All Scriptures is given by Inspiration of God, and is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness.*

*e* 1 John 1. 3. *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have Fellowship with us, and truly our Fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

3 Q. *What do the Scriptures principally teach?*

A. The Scriptures principally teach, what Man is to believe concerning God; and what Duty God requires of Man *e*.

*e* 2 Tim. 1. 13. *Hold fast the Form of sound Words, which thou hast heard of me, in Faith and Love, which is in Christ Jesus.*

4 Q. *What is God?*

A. God is a Spirit *f*, Infinite *g*, Eternal *h*, and unchangeable *i*, in his Being *k*, Wisdom *l*, Power *m*, Holiness *n*, Justice, Goodness and Truth *e*.

*f* John

Although in the early 1800's the Cumberland Presbyterian Church moved away from strict reform theological roots, (and thus away from the 1647 Short and Long Catechisms), the SC would have still been highly favored among the earlier Presbyterians ministers of the Kentucky and Cumberland settlements of the 1780's and 1790's. It is very likely that many of the Presbyterians who gathered at Red River in June 1800 would have carried a copy of it.

### Conclusion

**W**HAT influence religious pamphlets or gospel tracts had on the Red River revival of 1800 would be very difficult to determine. It is likely that they had little or no *direct* effect. However, all of the above mentioned types of pamphlets did have an *indirect* influence because religious literature was an overall significant part of the founding years of the American republic. The seeds of this revival may be impossible to determine, but many seeds were planted in places and times far removed from the Cumberland frontier of 1800.

### References

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