

Devotion and Polemic in Eighteenth-Century England: William Mason and the Literature of Lay Evangelical Anglicanism

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ABSTRACT William Mason (1719–1791), an Anglican evangelical layman of Bermondsey, London, published extensively on theological issues to educate the Anglican laity in the Church of England’s Reformed tradition. Despite the popularity of his writings, Mason has been neglected by scholars. By providing the first large-scale examination of Mason’s works, Simon Lewis shows that eighteenth-century Calvinist evangelicalism benefited from an active and vocal laity, whose evangelistic strategies were not limited to preaching; provides a model for how scholars can integrate piety and polemic in their explorations of religious print culture; and enhances our understanding of the laity’s engagement in theological controversies.

KEYWORDS: devotion; polemic; Anglicanism; Methodism; Calvinism

ONLY RELATIVELY RECENTLY HAS SCHOLARSHIP of evangelicalism in eighteenth-century England benefited from fresh attention to the laity. In *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment* (2008), Phyllis Mack considers the ways in which female Methodist leaders—particularly Mary Bosanquet Fletcher—discerned spiritual authority and direction from their dreams.¹ Antje Matthews similarly emphasizes lay experience by exploring the evangelical painter John Russell, who recorded his feelings and anxieties.² While these studies of lay spirituality have certainly enhanced our understanding of eighteenth-century evangelicalism, their emphasis on religious experience has meant that the importance of polemic has often been neglected. The question of whether devotional piety took priority over religious

1. Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism* (Cambridge, 2008).

2. Antje Matthews, “John Russell (1745–1806) and the Impact of Evangelicalism and Natural Theology on Artistic Practice” (PhD diss., University of Leicester, 2005).

polemic is a matter of contention among historians of Protestantism in early modern England.³ Yet, as several recent works on eighteenth-century evangelicalism have shown, religious devotion and doctrinal controversy were rarely mutually exclusive.⁴ Sometimes, devotional piety and polemical divinity converged in the works of lay evangelicals. According to Michael Sciretti, the “poetry and hymnody” of the Baptist Anne Dutton was grounded firmly on a “strong supralapsarian Calvinist foundation,” which angered many of her readers.⁵

The works of William Mason, an Anglican layman of Bermondsey, London (fig. 1), illuminate this interweaving of devotion and polemic. Originally a follower of John Wesley, Mason quickly abandoned Wesleyan Arminianism in favor of the Calvinist teachings of George Whitefield. As the author of numerous theological works, he engaged with doctrinal issues, including justification by faith, predestination, and the afterlife. Many of Mason’s works sold very well and went through multiple editions. Mason’s literary success can be attributed to the fact that he wrote primarily for a lay readership. His works were often digestible publications of fewer than forty pages. Thus, they were generally priced competitively at sixpence or less, which made them available to a wide market. Equally important was the accessibility of Mason’s style. In the preface to *A Spiritual Treasury, for the Children of God* (1765)—a devotional work that was republished throughout the nineteenth century—Mason informed his readers that this piece contained neither “silver, of human eloquence” nor “gold, of human literature.” Rather, like seventeenth-century Puritan writings, it sought to convey “plain truth in plain stile.”⁶ As a follower of Whitefield, Mason believed that he had been tasked by God to fulfill a role in which many “moralistic” Anglican divines seemed to be failing—namely, educating the laity in the Church of England’s Reformed tradition.

While Mason’s condemnation of “moralistic” clergymen was often scathing, he continually asserted his loyalty to the Church. As did Whitefield, Mason often argued that it was he—and not his clerical antagonists—who was the Church’s loyal

3. In response to Alec Ryrie’s *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford, 2013)—which prioritizes the devotional over the doctrinal—Peter Lake and Isaac Stephens have stressed the importance of theological disputes in early Stuart England. See Peter Lake and Isaac Stephens, *Scandal and Religious Identity in Early Stuart England: A Northamptonshire Maid’s Tragedy* (Woodbridge, U.K., 2015).

4. See *Heart Religion: Evangelical Piety in England & Ireland, 1690–1850*, ed. John Coffey (Oxford, 2016); D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Spirit of Early Evangelicalism: True Religion in a Modern World* (New York, 2018); and Isabel Rivers, *Vanity Fair and the Celestial City: Dissenting, Methodist, and Evangelical Literary Culture in England 1720–1800* (Oxford, 2018).

5. Michael D. Sciretti Jr., “‘Feed My Lambs’: The Spiritual Direction Ministry of Calvinistic British Baptist Anne Dutton During the Early Years of the Evangelical Revival” (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2009), 176.

6. William Mason, *A Spiritual Treasury, for the Children of God: Consisting of a Meditation for Each Day in the Year, upon Select Texts of Scripture. Humbly Intended to Establish the Faith, Promote the Comfort, and Influence the Practice of the Followers of the Lamb* (London, 1765), iv.

and true adherent. Sometimes, Mason highlighted his status as a layman who was uncorrupted by aspirations for “Gain and Preferment” in the Church. One early publication included an “Address to the Laity,” in which Mason—writing as a “Lay-Member” of the Church—urged his “brethren” to follow “*true Christianity*,” as taught in the Thirty-Nine Articles and the works of Reformed bishops, such as William Beveridge (1637–1708) and Ezekiel Hopkins (ca. 1633–1690).⁷ Yet, Mason also urged his lay readers to respect the authority of their ministers. In one work, he repeated the traditional Augustinian argument—outlined in article 26—that the unworthiness of a minister did not taint the sacrament over which he presided.⁸ Nor was Mason a political subversive. In fact, one of his most popular works was a theological attack on the American Revolution. Furthermore, Mason’s willingness to associate with the aristocracy was evidenced by his friendship with Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, a fellow Calvinist evangelical. Such social and political conformity culminated in Mason’s appointment as a magistrate. His correspondence—most of which, unfortunately, is lost—extended to evangelicals in Scotland, Ireland, and America.⁹ Despite the popularity of his publications, Mason has gained barely any scholarly attention.¹⁰ Those who have referred to his works have often erroneously attributed them to the eighteenth-century poet of the same name.¹¹ By providing the first thorough analysis of Mason, this essay will achieve several objectives.

First, by elucidating the polemical nature of Mason’s devotional works, it will provide a model for how scholars can integrate piety and polemic in their explorations of eighteenth-century religious print culture. Second, by exploring Mason’s

7. [William Mason], *Some Plain Queries Humbly Offered to the Clergy: With an Expostulatory Address to the Laity of the Church of England, on the Declension of Scriptural Christianity* (London, 1754), 7, 52.

8. William Mason, *The Christian Communicant: Or a Suitable Companion to the Lord’s Supper* (London, 1769), viii.

9. “William Mason, Esquire, of Bermondsey, Late Justice of the Peace for the County of Surry,” *Evangelical Magazine* 2 (1794): 3–11. Cited hereafter as *EM*. Some of Mason’s letters were reproduced in publications by his friends or those who subsequently researched his friends. A letter to William Shrubsole, dated September 24, 1775, appeared in Shrubsole’s *Christian Memoirs; or, A Review of the Present State of Religion in England; in the Form of a New Pilgrimage to the Heavenly Jerusalem* (Rochester, 1776), xi–xii. For another letter, dated January 26, 1765, to the Countess of Huntingdon, see *The Life and Times of Selina Countess of Huntingdon*, ed. A. C. H. Seymour, 2 vols. (London, 1839), 1:364–65.

10. Isabel Rivers is the only scholar who has paid any serious attention to Mason’s life and works: Rivers, *Vanity Fair*, esp. 138–39, 221–25, 381–82; and Rivers, “*The Pilgrim’s Progress in the Evangelical Revival*,” in *The Oxford Handbook of John Bunyan*, ed. Michael Davies and W. R. Owens (Oxford, 2018), 542–43.

11. Hoxie Neale Fairchild, *Religious Trends in English Poetry*, vol. 2, *Religious Sentimentalism in the Age of Johnson* (New York, 1942), 248; Brett C. McNelly, *Textual Warfare & the Making of Methodism* (Oxford, 2014), 187–88. For more on William Mason, a poet and clergyman, who was also a close friend of Horace Walpole, see *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Mason, William (1725–1797),” by Jules Smith, last modified September 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18293>.

polemical theology, it will enhance our understanding of the ways in which Calvinist evangelicalism benefited from an active and vocal laity. While scholarship of eighteenth-century Methodism has yet to fully escape the Wesley-centric approaches that have always dominated the field, studies of Calvinist Methodism are burgeoning. Unsurprisingly, much of this recent work has focused on Whitefield.¹² Although David Ceri Jones, Boyd Schlenther, and Eryn White explore various Calvinist evangelicals in *The Elect Methodists* (2012), they focus mainly on prominent leaders, such as Whitefield, the Countess of Huntingdon, and the lay preachers John Cennick and Howell Harris. Lesser-known Calvinist evangelicals, such as the layman William Cudworth, only gain a couple of brief mentions in the volume, which makes no reference to Mason.¹³ Since much of the work on the early Methodist laity has focused on preachers, it is unsurprising that scholars have neglected Mason, who declined invitations to preach (*EM*, 6).¹⁴ Mason may also not always be recognized by scholars as a Methodist. Admittedly, in an eighteenth-century context, *Methodism* is a notoriously difficult term to define. While *Methodist* originated as a pejorative title for members of the Oxford “Holy Club,” it quickly ceased to denote any individual leader or group. Followers of both Wesley and Whitefield, along with Moravians and evangelical parish incumbents, were often identified as Methodists. Some evangelicals, notably Wesley, reluctantly embraced the title.¹⁵ In 1749, Whitefield charged Wesley with “monopolising the name of Methodists to himself only.”¹⁶ Mason advanced his own definition of a “Church of England Methodist,” which was meant to exclude Wesleyan Arminians. An exploration of Mason’s polemical theology will illuminate the differing ways in which evangelicals—both Arminian and Calvinist—and mainstream Anglicans treated the Church’s Reformed tradition. Mason was a devoted follower of Whitefield. Since we have virtually no manuscript record of Mason’s thinking, Whitefield’s writings can help supply this lack, providing us with the theological background that likely motivated Mason’s published work. The Thirty-Nine Articles were

12. For some recent examples, see Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America’s Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven, Conn., 2014); *George Whitefield: Life, Context, and Legacy*, ed. Geordan Hammond and David Ceri Jones (Oxford, 2016); Peter Y. Choi, *George Whitefield: Evangelist for God and Empire* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2018).

13. *The Elect Methodists: Calvinistic Methodism in England and Wales 1735–1811*, ed. David Ceri Jones, Boyd S. Schlenther, and Eryn M. White (Cardiff, U.K., 2012).

14. For lay preachers, see Paul W. Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism* (Metuchen, N.J., 1991); and John Lenton, *John Wesley’s Preachers: A Social and Statistical Analysis of the British and Irish Preachers Who Entered the Methodist Itinerancy before 1791* (Milton Keynes, U.K., 2009).

15. Members of the Oxford “Holy Club” were branded “Methodists” because of their methodical piety. William Romaine was one evangelical Anglican incumbent who was often accused of being a “Methodist.” See William Gibson, *The Church of England 1688–1832: Unity and Accord* (London, 2001), 205; and Emma Major, *Madam Britannia: Women, Church, and Nation 1712–1812* (Oxford, 2012), 134.

16. Quoted from *Elect Methodists*, ed. Jones, Schlenther, and White, 154–55.

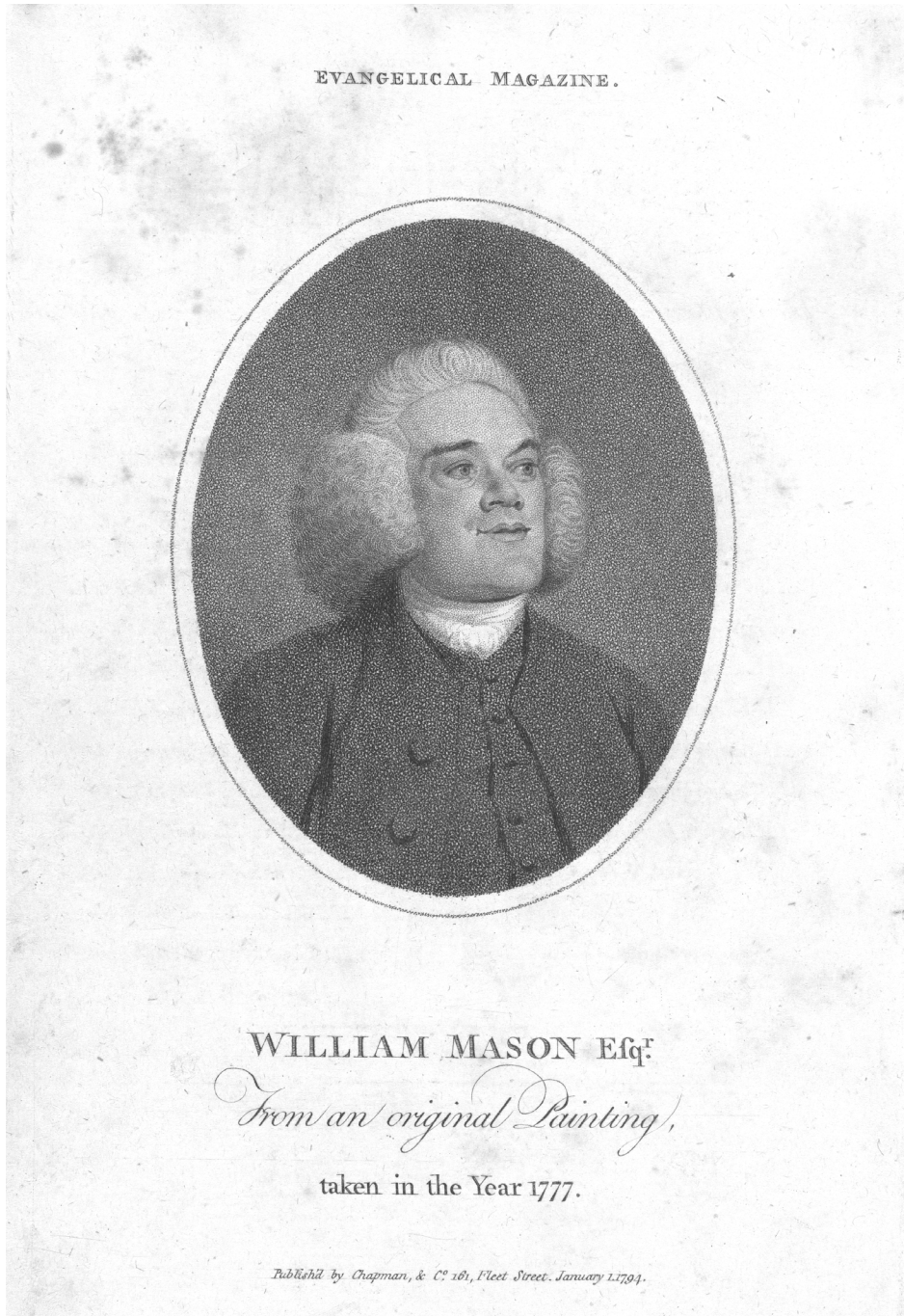


FIGURE 1. Portrait of William Mason, *The Evangelical Magazine* 2 (1794), frontispiece. Reproduced from the copy in the Andover-Harvard Theological Library, Harvard Divinity School, Period. 565.

fundamental to the eighteenth-century theological debates in which Whitefield and, subsequently, Mason engaged.

George Whitefield and the Thirty-Nine Articles

Under the terms of canon 36, all eighteenth-century Anglican divines were required to subscribe “willingly and ex animo” to the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, both upon ordination and when they were admitted to a new living.¹⁷ The articles were passed by the Convocation of 1562 and ratified by the Parliament of 1571 as a means of clarifying exactly where the Elizabethan Church stood in relation to Roman Catholics, on the one hand, and Protestant sectarians, on the other. Thus, the articles maintained the ethos of the Reformation by endorsing such doctrines as justification by faith alone (article 11) but also stressed the legitimacy of some of the Church’s traditions, such as infant baptism (article 27). Article 35 encouraged those presiding over services to use the First (1547) and Second (1563, 1571) Books of Homilies—collections of prepared sermons that taught various Reformed doctrines, including justification by faith alone.¹⁸ The most contentious article has undoubtedly been article 17: “Of Predestination and Election,” which, despite its Calvinistic tone, lacks explicit support for double predestination.¹⁹ In eighteenth-century England, the most influential work on the articles was Gilbert Burnet’s *Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles* (1699), which argued that clergymen were free to interpret the articles in an Arminian fashion if they wished. Thus, subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles was not something that attracted any serious opposition from Anglican divines until the 1760s, when several Latitudinarians, such as Francis Blackburne, the archdeacon of Cleveland, started questioning the legitimacy of mandatory subscription to extrabiblical creeds and confessions.²⁰

Nevertheless, during the Restoration period, the Church’s Reformed doctrinal heritage caused discomfort to a growing number of divines, who associated

17. Church of England, *Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiasticall* (London, 1604), sig. H3r.

18. *Certayne Sermons, or Homelies Appointed by the Kynges Maiestie, to bee declared and redde, by all Persons, Vicars, or Curates, euery Sondaie in their Churches, where they haue cure* (London, 1547); *Second Tome of Homelyes* (London, 1571), first published 1563.

19. Article 17 stated that, before Creation, God “decreed” to “deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind,” bringing them “by Christ into everlasting Salvation.” See Gilbert Burnet, *An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* (London, 1699), 145. For the Thirty-Nine Articles, see John Walsh, “The Thirty-Nine Articles and Anglican Identity in the Eighteenth Century,” in *Quand religions et confessions se regardent*, ed. Christiane d’Haussy (Paris, 1998), 61–70.

20. For Burnet’s *Exposition* and its reception, see Michael Greig, “Heresy Hunt: Gilbert Burnet and the Convocation Controversy of 1701,” *Historical Journal* 37 (1994): 569–92. For antissubscription, see G. M. Ditchfield, “The Subscription Issue in British Parliamentary Politics, 1772–79,” *Parliamentary History* 7 (1988): 45–80; and Martin Fitzpatrick, “Latitudinarianism at the Parting of the Ways: A Suggestion,” in *The Church of England c. 1689–c. 1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism*, ed. John Walsh, Colin Haydon, and Stephen Taylor (Cambridge, 1993), 209–27.

solifidian teachings with the seemingly antinomian excesses of the Interregnum. The passing of the Act of Uniformity (1662), which made use of the Book of Common Prayer mandatory in church services, resulted in the ejection of approximately 2,000 ministers from their parishes. While virtually all divines who refused to comply with this legislation were of a Reformed-Puritan persuasion, an adherence to Reformed doctrines did not always go hand in hand with antiritualism.²¹ As Stephen Hampton has shown, the Reformed tradition enjoyed a reasonably healthy existence in the post-Restoration Church through the works of several divines, including Bishop Beveridge and the stridently Calvinist John Edwards (1637–1716) of Cambridge. Yet Hampton acknowledges that these Reformed Anglicans were a dwindling crowd. Thus, by 1714, any divergence from moralistic Arminianism was viewed as unorthodox in the Church of England.²² Works by post-Restoration Anglican Reformers were subsequently embraced by Calvinist Dissenters, such as Charles Owen and Jonathan Warne.²³ It was through his reading of Warne that Whitefield first encountered Edwards's writings. As did Edwards, Whitefield often claimed that, by teaching "popish" moralistic doctrines and rejecting the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, most Anglican divines had abandoned the Church's Reformed roots.²⁴ This argument, as will be seen, was echoed by Mason.

Unsurprisingly, Whitefield's sentiments angered many of his peers. By the 1730s, most Anglican divines advanced the argument—commonly associated with George Bull's *Harmonia Apostolica* (1669)—that sinners were justified by a faith that encompassed works.²⁵ These soteriological differences were at the heart of Whitefield's early skirmish with the bishop of London, Edmund Gibson, who

21. For the "Great Ejection" of 1662, see David Appleby, *Black Bartholomew's Day: Preaching, Polemic and Restoration Nonconformity* (Manchester, 2007); and *The Great Ejection of 1662: Its Antecedents, Aftermath, and Ecumenical Significance*, ed. Alan P. F. Sell (Eugene, Ore., 2012).

22. Stephen Hampton, *Anti-Arminians: The Anglican Reformed Tradition from Charles II to George I* (Oxford, 2008). Edwards is also explored in Dewey D. Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660–1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation* (New York, 2011), chap. 6.

23. Charles Owen, *Plain-Dealing: Or, Separation Without Schism, and Schism Without Separation. Exemplify'd in the Case of Protestant-Dissenters and Church-Men* (London, 1715), 30. Jonathan Warne cited Edwards throughout most of his works, including *The Church of England Turn'd Dissenter at Last: Or, the Generality of Her Clergy Have Forsaken the Most Material Doctrines of the Common-Prayer* (London, 1737); and *Arminianism, the Back-Door to Popery; Humbly Offered to the Consideration of the Arch-Bishops, Bishops, with the Rest of the English Clergy; and the Students in Both Universities* (London, 1738).

24. George Whitefield, *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield's Journal, from His Embarking After the Embargo, to His Arrival at Savannah in Georgia* (London, 1740), 19.

25. For more on Bull's soteriology, see Hampton, *Anti-Arminians*, chap. 2. Bull's work was often cited by anti-Methodist authors. See Simon Lewis, "Early Anti-Methodism as an Aspect of Theological Controversy in England, c.1738–c.1770" (DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 2017), chap. 2.

implicitly charged him with antinomianism in his *Pastoral Letter* (1739).²⁶ Whitefield's theological adversaries were, of course, diverse, and they included individuals whom anti-evangelical authors such as Gibson associated with his camp. For much of his ministry, Whitefield was locked in fierce theological rivalry with John Wesley. In *Free Grace* (1740), for example, Wesley argued that the Calvinist doctrine of predestination rendered "all preaching vain" because it was "needless to them that are Elected."²⁷ Whitefield responded that preaching served as the preordained "means" by which the Elect encountered Christ and surrendered themselves to him. Since only God had the power to discern "who are elect and who [are] reprobate," ministers needed to "preach promiscuously to all." If such preaching proved to be "useless to the Reprobate," this was "no more than what GOD designed to permit." The notion "that GOD intends only to give a certain Number saving Grace, thro' JESUS CHRIST; and that the rest of Mankind are left to perish under the Imputation of Adam's Guilt" was, according to Whitefield, the "established Doctrine of Scripture, and of the XVIIth Article of the Church of England."²⁸ Like Whitefield, Wesley was a firm proponent of mandatory subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles. He denied that his Arminian teachings contradicted their contents. In 1756, Wesley informed the Calvinist Anglican divine (and former Oxford Methodist) James Hervey that article 17 "barely" defined predestination. Article 31, on the other hand, "overthrows and razes" the Calvinist doctrine of predestination by teaching that "Christ, by his death alone . . . fully satisfied for the sins of the whole world." Thus, the Reformers, Wesley argued, could not have intended article 17 to be used as an endorsement of "absolute predestination."²⁹

Calvinist evangelicals also viewed the doctrinal concept of original sin as incompatible with Wesleyan Arminianism. To Whitefield, Wesley's acceptance of "GOD's Justice in imputing Adam's Sin to his Posterity" conflicted with his denial of the justice of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination.³⁰ Wesley, as an Arminian, believed that prevenient grace enabled sinners to seek the gift of salvation.³¹

26. Edmund Gibson, *The Bishop of London's Pastoral Letter to the People of His Diocese; Especially Those of the Two Great Cities of London and Westminster: By Way of Caution, Against Lukewarmness on One Hand, and Enthusiasm on the Other* (London, 1739); George Whitefield, *The Bishop of London's Pastoral Letter Answer'd by the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield* (London, 1739).

27. John Wesley, *Free Grace. A Sermon Preach'd at Bristol* (London, 1740), 8.

28. George Whitefield, *A Letter from the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield, to the Reverend Mr. John Wesley, in Answer to His Sermon, Entitled Free Grace* (Boston, 1740), 11–12.

29. "Mr Wesley's Letter to the Rev. Mr. James Hervey, 15 October 1756," in James Hervey, *Aspasio Vindicated, and the Scripture Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness Defended, Against the Objections and Animadversions of the Rev. Mr John Wesley* (Edinburgh, 1764), 26–27. Article 31, entitled "Of the One Oblation of Christ Finished upon the Cross," taught that "the offering of Christ once made is the perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world." See Burnet, *Exposition*, 350.

30. Whitefield, *Letter from . . . Whitefield, to . . . Wesley*, 23.

31. Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville, Tenn., 2007), 70–74.

To Whitefield—who adhered to the Calvinist doctrine of total depravity—Wesley’s apparent optimism in humanity’s *natural* abilities seemed legalistic.³² Whitefieldian evangelicals also claimed that original sin—despite being stipulated in article 9—was not something of which “polite” clergymen spoke often.³³ Some anti-Trinitarian divines, such as William Whiston, rejected original sin. Such heterodoxy, however, was relatively rare in the eighteenth-century Church. As the clergy were aware, any denial of original sin undermined the sacrament of (infant) baptism, which was stipulated in article 27.³⁴ Furthermore, “orthodox” divines, such as Daniel Waterland, master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, were quick to defend original sin when it was attacked by freethinkers, such as Matthew Tindal.³⁵ It is therefore plausible to assume that, while few eighteenth-century Anglican clergymen rejected original sin explicitly, most avoided discussing a pessimistic topic that contradicted their lessons on virtue. Thus, the Church in which William Mason was born and raised was an establishment that placed morality at its core.³⁶

☞ A “Church of England Methodist”

The son of a clockmaker, William Mason was born in Rotherhithe, London, in 1719. Following a grammar school education, which taught him “the rudiments of the Latin language,” Mason entered his father’s clockmaking business as an apprentice. Shortly before the completion of his apprenticeship, Mason’s father died, leaving him responsible for his mother and younger siblings. At the age of twenty-two, he married Mary Cox. While Mason “constantly attended his parish church, and was seldom absent from the sacrament,” he often experienced feelings of unworthiness. He attempted to tackle these feelings by “agonizing in prayer,” secluding “himself from the world,” and performing ascetic works of “the flesh” (*EM*, 4). Such a regimen was reminiscent of the earlier “holy living” asceticism of the Oxford Methodists.³⁷ Thus, not only does an examination of Mason’s early life illuminate the persistence of this holy living tradition within the Church of England, it also provides us with a example

32. Whitefield, *Letter from . . . Whitefield, to . . . Wesley*, 23.

33. See George Whitefield, *A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield’s Journal, During the Time He was Detained in England by the Embargo* (London, 1739), 17–19; *Gentleman’s Magazine* 9 (1739): 415; *A Letter to the Right Reverend the Lord Bishop of London, Occasion’d by His Lordship’s Late Pastoral Letter, and the Revd Mr. Whitefield’s Answer* (London, 1739).

34. Simon Lewis, “‘Diversity of Passions and Humours’: Early Anti-Methodist Literature as a Disguise for Heterodoxy,” *Literature & History* 26 (2017): 3–23 at 14.

35. See Daniel Waterland, *Scripture Vindicated; In Answer to a Book Intituled, Christianity as Old as the Creation. Part I* (London, 1730), 21–22.

36. For more on this shift toward a “moralistic” soteriology within the eighteenth-century Church of England, see Mark Smith, “The Hanoverian Parish: Towards a New Agenda,” *Past & Present*, no. 216 (2012): 79–105.

37. For the Oxford Methodists, see Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London, 1989), chap. 2; Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, Tenn., 2013), 37–64; and Geordan Hammond, *John Wesley in America: Restoring Primitive Christianity* (Oxford, 2014), chap. 1.

of such ascetic teachings transcending the cloistered confines of the universities to reach the grassroots. Mason's ascetic regimen was not to last. By the late 1740s, he had become convinced that "no exertions of his own would produce that happiness which his mind was ardently set upon." Such a conclusion also led Mason to abandon the "Heathenish morality, which he had been accustomed to hear at his parish church" (*EM*, 4).

For most of his life, Mason's parish church was St. Mary Magdalen, Bermondsey (*EM*, 10). Yet, we know from his first publication that, on March 19, 1749, Mason attended a different church. *Morality Not Christianity* was completed on April 27, 1749, and published a little over a month later.³⁸ Mason wrote it anonymously in response to a sermon preached at St. George's, Southwark, on March 19, 1749, by the curate Thomas Wingfield. Mason claimed that he and the rest of the congregation had witnessed Wingfield ridicule a sermon—preached at St. George's on March 5, 1749, by the former Jamaican missionary Martin De La Garde—which described the worthlessness of works undertaken by the unregenerate. Mason defended De La Garde by arguing that his teachings were endorsed in both the Homilies and the Thirty-Nine Articles. According to Mason, Wingfield had likened De La Garde's "Mechanical" teachings to those of "the maddest heterodox Sett of People . . . called *Methodists*." Mason stressed his impartiality "to that Sect" and claimed that he had never been "attached to their Principles, any farther than they coincide and agree with the established Church."³⁹

By August 7, 1749, however, Mason had started attending Wesley's Foundery in Moorfields. In his diary entry for that day, Mason reported that one Anglican divine had accused him of being "melancholy mad" because he had joined one of Wesley's London societies. That such evangelical views were unpopular is evidenced further by the fact that Mason's membership of this society—in which he was eventually appointed class leader—caused him to lose some of his long-standing business acquaintances (*EM*, 4). Mason's time as a Wesleyan evangelical was recounted by his friend, the Calvinist Dissenting minister William Shrubsole, in *The Christian Memoirs* (1776). In this Bunyanesque allegory, Shrubsole described the journey of some pilgrims to the "Celestial City." The narrative featured numerous characters who were based on contemporary evangelicals. One protagonist is the godly itinerant preacher George Fervidus (Whitefield). His rival is the well-meaning but misguided "perfectionist" John Duplex (Wesley). Toward the end of the narrative, the pilgrims encounter Dr. Knowself (Mason), an ally of Fervidus and former follower of Duplex, who is

38. [William Mason], *Morality Not Christianity: Or, Remarks on a Very Extraordinary Sermon, Preached at St. George's, Southwark, on Sunday, March 19, 1748–9. By the Reverend Mr. Wingfield, Curate of the Said Parish Church* (London, 1749), 26. For the original advertisement, see *General Advertiser*, May 30, 1749. Attributed to Mason in *EM*, 6.

39. [Mason], *Morality Not Christianity*, 8. Clergy of the Church of England Database, s.v. "De La Garde, Martin (1742–1750)," CCEd Person ID 56182, accessed May 20, 2019, <http://db.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/search/index.jsp>.

commended for his book *A Spiritual Treasury*. Knowself informs the pilgrims that, when he was about thirty years old, a meeting with one of Duplex's followers triggered a spiritual transformation, in which his heart "overflowed" with "extatic joy."⁴⁰

Mason's association with Wesleyan evangelicals declined as he became increasingly depressed by the notion that one could be "high in the favour of God" on one day and "an object of the divine vengeance" on another. His despair was alleviated by his reflection on the passage "If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God, by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled we shall be saved by his life" (Romans 5:10). Mason sought advice from Calvinist evangelicals, resulting in his ejection from Wesley's society (*EM*, 5). His theological transition was subsequently allegorized by Shrubsole. When Knowself recounts his journey to the pilgrims, he describes the despair he experienced when he found that the "main beam" of his house was broken. In this flashback, Knowself is informed by his mentor Duplex that his "house" is in a state of decay because he has "neglected the terms and conditions" by which he was bound upon entering it. Duplex instructs Knowself to "repair" the house himself. Shortly afterward, Knowself encounters a man from "Church Street" who informs him that—contrary to what Duplex claims—he does not need to repair the house himself. Rather, it will be repaired by the "landlord." Through the character of Duplex, Shrubsole was clearly portraying Wesley's soteriology as legalistic.⁴¹ Mason's transition to Calvinism generated friendships with Whitefield, the Countess of Huntingdon, and the London incumbents Thomas Jones and William Romaine (*EM*, 5). Mason made his first reference to "the ingenious *Romaine*" and "the zealous and laborious *Jones*" in *Methodism Displayed, and Enthusiasm Detected* (1756). This work, which marked Mason's debut as a Calvinist polemicist, was one of his most influential publications.⁴²

☞ "Pretended Protestant Teachers"

"How must we account for the many delusive Tenets and destructive Errors, which are industriously propagated by a Sett of *modern Teachers*, and readily embraced, by so many Professors of Christianity?" Mason posed this question to readers of *Methodism Displayed*, which was priced competitively at sixpence. In this thirty-six-page polemic, Mason claimed that Christianity was under threat from two dangerous adversaries. On the one hand, Christians faced the "self-presuming, God-resisting *Infidel*," who totally rejected "every Article of the Christian Faith." On the other hand, the godly were threatened by "the credulous, unscriptural, unmeaning

40. Shrubsole, *Christian Memoirs*, 318, 348.

41. Shrubsole, *Christian Memoirs*, 348–49.

42. [William Mason], *Methodism Displayed, and Enthusiasm Detected; Intended as an Antidote Against, and a Preservative from the Delusive Principles and Unscriptural Doctrines of a Modern Sett of Seducing Preachers; And as a Defence of Our Regular and Orthodox Clergy, from Their Unjust Reflections* (London, 1756), 25–26. Hereafter cited as *MD*. Attributed to Mason in *EM*, 6–7.

Enthusiast,” who deceived “himself and others, by his meer Pretences to Inspiration.” To Mason, the enthusiast was someone who claimed to “have received the Gifts of the Spirit” but gave “no Evidence to ascertain the Truth of it.” Moreover, while the enthusiast made “solemn Declarations of being *inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost*,” his only aim was to “make Gain” through his “Pretensions to Godliness.” In other words, the enthusiast was an impostor, who—despite “his most solemn Pretensions and Professions”—denied “any true, real, inward Motion, Operation, and Influence of the Spirit.” Elsewhere, Mason described such enthusiasts as “*Quacks*” and “*new Lights*”—derogative titles that had traditionally been hurled at Protestant groups that emphasized spiritual feelings and emotions (the latter was often used by anti-evangelical Congregationalists in New England).⁴³

Observant readers would have quickly noticed that Mason was not leveling charges of enthusiasm and imposture against Calvinist evangelicals. To Mason, these enthusiastic impostors were hypocritical clergymen who, after subscribing to the Thirty-Nine Articles—which stressed the “Necessity of Inspiration”—went on to “jeer at, and ridicule all spiritual Influences and inward Operations” (*MD*, 29). Thus, “modern *Pelagians*”—who were “Strangers to the Corruptions and Depravity of their own Hearts”—exhibited enthusiasm by claiming to possess “great Knowledge,” which contradicted article 9’s teachings on original sin (*MD*, 9). In *The Nature of Enthusiasm* (1755), John Wesley had similarly charged his “moralist” opponents with enthusiasm. Clearly, polemical devices were shared by Calvinist and Arminian evangelicals, though Wesley, of course, would have disagreed with Mason’s belief that all “*Arminian Teachers*” were enthusiasts.⁴⁴

Controversially, Mason described Roman Catholic divines as “honest upright Men” who—unlike the “modern Deceivers” and “pretended *Protestant Teachers*” in the established Church—did not claim to adhere to the “Doctrine of Justification by Faith only” (*MD*, 19). Mason predicted that, because of his sentiments, “the ignorant and prejudiced Professors of Christianity” would brand him a “*Methodist*.” He added that, if being a Methodist meant maintaining a “steady Adherence and firm Attachment to the Doctrines of the Church of *England*,” he was quite content to “live and die a Church of *England Methodist*.” To Mason, Methodist was a “simple and inoffensive Name” that carried positive connotations. One never heard of “a gaming, pleasure-taking, Playhouse-frequenting Person” being branded a “*Methodist*.” Neither did one

43. *MD*, 4, 6–7, 10, 22. See *London Evening Post*, May 1–3, 1739. For an older derogative use of “New Light,” see Roger L’Estrange, *The Dissenter’s Sayings, in Requital for L’Estrange’s Sayings*, 2nd ed. (London, 1681), 4. The most notable colonial American attack on “New Light” religion was Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England* (Boston, 1743).

44. John Wesley, *The Nature of Enthusiasm. A Sermon on Acts XXVI. 24* (London, 1755), 13, 18. For more on Wesley’s discussions of “enthusiasm,” see Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England 1660–1780*, vol. 1, *Whitchote to Wesley* (Cambridge, 1991), 242–43; *MD*, 13.

hear the title applied to those divines who subscribed to the Church's articles but preached doctrines that were "contrary to them" (*MD*, 23). Mason's definition of a Methodist was lifted directly from article 17:

He is one whom God hath chosen in Christ out of Mankind, to deliver from Curse and Damnation, and to bring by Christ to everlasting Salvation; he is called according to God's Purpose, by his Spirit working in due Season; he through Grace obeys the Calling; he is justified freely; he is made a Son of God by Adoption; he Feels in himself the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the Works of the Flesh, and his earthly Members, and drawing up his Mind to high and heavenly things; he is made like the Image of Christ, walks religiously in good Works, and at length by God's Mercy attains everlasting Felicity. (*MD*, 25)

Here, Mason was following in the footsteps of Whitefield, who had similarly invoked article 17 in his response to Wesley's *Free Grace*. Thus, *Methodism Displayed* sheds light on two significant aspects of eighteenth-century religious and print culture. First, the fact that Mason suspected that his sentiments would lead to charges of Methodism shows that—despite Whitefield's earlier claim that Wesleyans were "monopolising" the title—the public still largely perceived Calvinist evangelicals as Methodists. By the 1750s, the term *Methodist* was clearly open to definition and redefinition. Evidently, Mason was attempting to reclaim what, to him, was a pejorative title and advance his own definition of a true Methodist. By citing the seemingly Calvinistic article 17 as his key criterion for being a Methodist, Mason was arguing implicitly that Wesleyan Arminians were not worthy of this title. Second, *Methodism Displayed* highlights the fundamental, but largely neglected, role played by deception in eighteenth-century religious polemic. During this "age of disguise," it was not unusual for authors to pretend that they were attacking one group when their actual target was another—usually more influential—group. By adopting the language of Whitefield's opponents, Mason disguised his attack on "moralist" Anglicans as an anti-Methodist polemic.⁴⁵

At least one reader apparently fell for Mason's ruse. An item in a 1794 issue of the *Evangelical Magazine* claimed that "many eagerly bought it [*Methodism Displayed*], who afterwards heartily repented of their purchase." One "gentleman," apparently, was "caught by the title-page" as he passed a bookshop. Following his purchase, the gentleman handed the book to his son, who had recently started flirting with evangelicalism. To prevent him from "running after a set of enthusiastic preachers," the father advised his son to start reading the book, which he believed would provide "an antidote against that poisonous doctrine he had lately imbibed."

45. See *English Literature in the Age of Disguise*, ed. Maximillian E. Novak (Berkeley, Calif., 1977).

The son proceeded to read the book aloud. While the first couple of pages were agreeable to the father, he “soon perceived the design of the author” and begged his son to “cast it behind the fire.” The son responded: “Sir, I began to read it at your request, do suffer me to finish it” (*EM*, 7). Mason’s agenda was not lost on other contemporaries. The July 19, 1756 issue of the *Public Advertiser* included a letter attacking Wesley and Whitefield and implying that they were responsible for “the false and injurious new Pamphlet entitled *Methodism Display’d*.”⁴⁶ John Fletcher, an Anglican incumbent, ally of Wesley, and prominent evangelical, owned a copy of *Methodism Displayed*, presumably understanding, but not necessarily approving of, its message.⁴⁷

The numerous editions of *Methodism Displayed* illuminate its popularity. The second London edition (1757) was sold by Edward Dilly, a Dissenting bookseller of the Poultry who—with his younger brother Charles—introduced readers in England to works by the New England revivalist Jonathan Edwards.⁴⁸ Most of Mason’s subsequent works were sold by Dilly and Mary Lewis, a Calvinist evangelical of Paternoster Row who also published many of Whitefield’s works.⁴⁹ There was a gap of eight years between the publication of the fifth (1761) and sixth (1769) editions of *Methodism Displayed*. It is possible that the subscription controversy, which gained momentum during the late 1760s, fueled a renewed interest in *Methodism Displayed*. Indeed, prosubscriptionist evangelicals may have viewed Mason’s treatise as a timely antidote to the antiprescriptionist views advanced by Blackburne and his associates.⁵⁰ In 1773, the sixth edition was reprinted in Burlington, New Jersey, by Isaac Collins, a Quaker. Mason’s Calvinist sentiments would have appealed to many readers in New Jersey, which—as home to John Witherspoon and the College of New Jersey—was a Presbyterian stronghold during this period.

In 1786, *Methodism Displayed* was reprinted in Dublin, where it was “Addressed to the Ministers of Bethesda Chapel, and all who frequent it.”⁵¹ Described by Dubliners as an evangelical “cathedral,” the recently opened chapel was plagued by a power struggle between its minister, Edward Smyth—an Arminian associate of Wesley and ejected Church of Ireland minister—and his Calvinist assistant, William Mann. Presumably, this Irish republication of *Methodism Displayed* occurred at the behest of

46. *Public Advertiser*, July 19, 1756.

47. *Unexamined Labours: Letters of the Revd John Fletcher to Leaders in the Evangelical Revival*, ed. Peter Forsaith (Werrington, U.K., 2008), 305.

48. Jonathan M. Yeager, *Jonathan Edwards and Transatlantic Print Culture* (New York, 2016), 120. For more on the Dilly brothers, see Rivers, *Vanity Fair*, 24–26.

49. For Lewis, see Rivers, *Vanity Fair*, 33.

50. For more on prosubscriptionist evangelicals, see Grayson M. Ditchfield, “Latitudinarian Responses to Whitefield, c.1740–90,” *Journal of Religious History, Literature and Culture* 1, no. 2 (2015): 35–54.

51. [William Mason], *Methodism Displayed, and Enthusiasm Detected; Intended as an Antidote Against, and a Preservative from the Delusive Principles and Unscriptural Doctrines of a Modern Set of Seducing Preachers: And as a Defence of Our Regular and Orthodox Clergy, from Their Unjust Reflections* (Dublin, 1786), title page.

Mann or one of his associates.⁵² In 1793, an edited version of *Methodism Displayed* was published in New York by an anonymous Episcopalian who viewed Mason's sentiments as pertinent to ongoing disputes regarding whether the Episcopal Church should adopt the Thirty-Nine Articles.⁵³ In 1813, the final edition was published in Liverpool by Henry Forshaw, who was also responsible for publishing many works by the American evangelist Lorenzo Dow. Strangely, Mason's agenda seems to have puzzled John Wesley's late nineteenth-century biographer, Luke Tyerman, who refers to *Methodism Displayed* in his discussions of anti-Methodist texts:

It is a strange fact, that the author of this pamphlet avows his firm belief in nearly all the doctrines that specially characterized Wesley's ministry; and yet, these are some of the spicy appellatives applied to Methodist preachers. It is difficult to divine the writer's object. At the beginning, he seems to belabour the poor Methodists; at the end he defends and praises them.⁵⁴

It is probably because of Tyerman's misidentification that *Methodism Displayed* has appeared in subsequent bibliographies of anti-Methodist literature.⁵⁵

Of course, Mason's overt Calvinism would have enraged Wesley. Mason subsequently launched a subtle but ruthless attack on Wesley's seemingly inconsistent views of the doctrine of imputed righteousness. In 1756, Wesley informed Hervey that he believed it was neither "scriptural" nor "necessary" to refer to "*the imputed righteousness of Christ*."⁵⁶ Confusingly, however, Wesley sometimes alluded to a belief in such a doctrine. In volumes 9 and 10 of his *Christian Library* (1749–55), Wesley included extracts from works by the Calvinist theologians John Preston (1587–1628) and Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) that described the "Imputative Righteousness of Christ."⁵⁷

52. Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Secessions from the Via Media, c. 1800–1850*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, Ore., 2015), 67.

53. A Member, *The Doctrines of the Church; or, Methodism Displayed, and Enthusiasm Detected. Recommended Particularly to the Consideration of the Members of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the City of New-York* (New York, 1793). For early Episcopalian attitudes toward the Articles, see Robert W. Prichard, *The Nature of Salvation: Theological Consensus in the Episcopal Church, 1801–73* (Urbana, Ill., 1997), 10–11.

54. Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, Founder of the Methodists*, 3rd ed., 3 vols. (London, 1876), 2:292.

55. See H. C. Decanver, *Catalogue of Works in Refutation of Methodism: From Its Origin in 1729, to the Present Time*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1868), 22–23; Richard Green, *Anti-Methodist Publications Issued during the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1902), 69; and Clive D. Field, "Anti-Methodist Publications of the Eighteenth Century: A Revised Bibliography," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library Manchester* 73, no. 2 (1991): 159–280 at 197.

56. "Mr Wesley's Letter," 16.

57. John Wesley, *A Christian Library. Consisting of Extracts from and Abridgments of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity, which Have Been Publish'd in the English Tongue*, 50 vols. (Bristol, 1749–55), 9:230–31, 10:291.

Mason exploited Wesley's apparent endorsement of Preston and Sibbes's Calvinist soteriology in *The Scripture-Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness, Asserted and Maintained by the Rev. Mr. John Wesley, M. A.* (ca. 1762). He achieved this by duplicating the relevant extracts from the *Christian Library* and portraying them as Wesley's own words. Mason's polemic "quickly ran through the [Methodist] societies in London" and "reached Ireland, where Mr. Wesley then was." Wesley, embarrassingly, was alerted to the work's existence when someone congratulated him on it (*EM*, 7). Wesley swiftly published a rebuttal, in which he stated that—unlike "*the righteousness of God*"—"the imputed righteousness of Christ" was an unscriptural phrase used by "the Antinomians" to "justify the grossest Abominations." Nowhere in Wesley's response was there any reference to his endorsement of Preston and Sibbes in the *Christian Library*.⁵⁸ His apparent refusal to admit to this inconsistency was ridiculed in the second edition of Mason's *Scripture-Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness* (1763). Clearly, this work served both polemical and devotional purposes. Indeed, Mason sought to ridicule Wesley's apparent inconsistencies while exposing his followers to the doctrine of imputed righteousness, as taught by Preston and Sibbes.⁵⁹

~ A "Dead Faith"?

Despite their theological differences, Wesley and Mason sometimes fought on the same side. In 1758, both Mason and Wesley engaged with John Free, vicar of East Coker, Somerset, and lecturer of St. Mary-at-Hill, London, and Newington, Surrey. This conflict stemmed from a polemic, completed on April 5, 1758, in which Free attempted to convince the Court of Assistants of the Worshipful Company of Salters not to vote in favor of promoting "an avowed *Methodist*" to the Tuesday lectureship at St. Dunstan-in-the-East. The "Methodist" in question was Henry Venn, a London curate. Free commenced his attack by citing article 20, "Of the Authority of the Church," which stated that it was "not lawful for the *Church* to ordain any Thing, that is contrary to God's Word *written*, neither may it so expound *one Place* of Scripture, that it be *repugnant* to *another*." According to Free, "the *Methodists*" violated this Article by teaching an interpretation of Paul's teachings on justification (Romans 3:28) that contradicted James's teachings (James 2:24) on the same subject. As George Bull had argued many decades earlier, Free stated that when Paul excluded works from justification, he was referring not to the "Works of Morality" (which James endorsed) but to "the ceremonial Part of *Jewish Law*." Free closed by inviting Wesley to respond to him but added that he would probably ignore any responses from lay "Combatants," whom he advised to "stick to their several *Trades*."⁶⁰

58. John Wesley, *Thoughts on the Imputed Righteousness of Christ* (Dublin, 1762), 9–10.

59. [Mason], *Scripture-Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness*, 11–27.

60. John Free, *Certain Articles Proposed to the Serious Consideration of the Court of Assistants of the Worshipful Company of Salters in London &c.* (London, 1758), 3–5, 22.

Inevitably, Wesley's and Mason's responses to Free differed theologically. On May 2, 1758, Wesley composed a short response in which he addressed Free's charges of solifidianism. Wesley denied that he—or any other “Methodists”—had ever described Paul's message as being “Faith without Virtue or Morality will produce Salvation.” In fact, Paul had described the first stage in a two-stage system: a “justifying Faith,” which stemmed from a “Divine Evidence or Conviction,” and not works. James had described the second stage, in which works became necessary as a means of ensuring that this “justifying faith” did not become a “*dead Faith*.” Clearly, when Wesley claimed to speak for all “Methodists,” he intentionally excluded Calvinist evangelicals, such as Mason.⁶¹ Mason opened his twenty-page response to Free by quoting the following passage, which was intended as a play on his antagonist's surname: “AS FREE, and not using your Liberty as a Cloak of Maliciousness” (1 Peter 2:16). Elsewhere, Mason alleged that it was “well known” that his opponent was “making *Free* with the Worshipful Company” by trying to secure the lectureship for himself. As shall be seen, Mason's tendency to resort to such insults did little to enhance his appeal as a controversialist.⁶² Mason's knowledge of the Company's internal politics not only suggests that he was—or had been—a member but also that he traveled in “polite” circles. The fact that Mason accused Free of defaming him personally before the Company implies that, at the very least, he was known to them.⁶³ As he had done in *Methodism Displayed*, Mason outlined the characteristics of “Protestant Church of England Methodists” by quoting article 17. Mason agreed with Wesley's contention that Paul and James had not taught conflicting doctrines of justification. Yet, his explanation for their apparent discrepancies would have been disagreeable to Wesley. Indeed, Mason advanced the Reformed notion that, whereas Paul had described the futility of works for one's “Justification before God,” James had described works as something that provided “certain Evidence” of one's “Justification before Men.”⁶⁴

Free published a joint response to his various detractors, entitled *Rules for the Discovery of False Prophets* (1758). Despite their acquaintance, Free refused to refer to Mason by name, implying that he did not view the layman as a worthy adversary. In what was probably intended as an implicit attack on the clockmaker Mason, Free alleged that the “Body of Artisans in the most populous trading Towns” were “mostly in the Hands” of the Methodists. The fact that Wesley's and Mason's soteriologies conflicted was not lost on Free, who observed that the “Methodists” had displayed

61. John Wesley, *A Letter to the Rev. Dr. Free* (Bristol, 1758), 6.

62. [William Mason], *Remarks and Observations on the Morality and Divinity Contained in Dr. Free's Certain Articles, Proposed to the Court of Assistants, of the Worshipful Company of Salters* (London, [1758]), title page, 6. Attributed to Mason in *EM*, 6.

63. [Mason], *Remarks*, 4.

64. [Mason], *Remarks*, 10–11.

little “Uniformity” in their responses to him.⁶⁵ Methodist infighting subsequently played into the hands of the antiscscriptionist divine Francis Blackburne, who scoffed that the doctrinal clashes between Wesley and Whitefield were enough to convince “any man of common sense and common honesty, of the inutility of subscription to our established forms.”⁶⁶ The meaning and importance of the Thirty-Nine Articles was clearly a contentious issue that divided not only Anglicans but also evangelicals within the established Church. Diverse Anglicans used the articles as a polemical tool when it suited their cause.

☞ An “Old Hackney Threadbare Charge”

A subsequent publication by Mason—in which he attacked James Rely, a Welsh lay preacher and universalist—uncharacteristically paid hardly any attention to the Articles. Both Mason and Wesley engaged with Rely, who is most noted for having influenced John Murray, the founder of the Universalist denomination in America. In 1741, at the height of the Welsh Methodist movement, Rely became a follower of Whitefield.⁶⁷ Throughout the 1740s, he worked as one of Whitefield’s missionaries in Wales and, latterly, England. By the early 1750s, however, he had split from Whitefield. While the circumstances of this breach remain sketchy, it is generally assumed that it was caused by Rely’s embracing of universalist doctrines, which he began to publicize during the late 1750s.⁶⁸ In a 1759 publication entitled *Union: Or, a Treatise of the Consanguinity and Affinity Between Christ and His Church*, Rely provided the first serious exposition of his universalism. It must be noted that he was no “enlightened” Atheist or Deist. Indeed, the atonement of Christ was something in which he believed wholeheartedly. Central to his theology was his controversial notion of humanity’s union with Christ. He derived this doctrine from such passages as “For as the Body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one Body, being many, are one Body: so also is Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12). Elsewhere, he asked his readers:

If it be granted, that there was such an *Union* between *Adam* and his *Offspring*, as render’d *his* sin *theirs*, why should it be thought a thing incredible, that the like *Union*, subsisting between *Jesus* and *his Seed*,

65. John Free, *Rules for the Discovery of False Prophets: Or the Dangerous Impositions of the People Called Methodists Detected at the Bar of Scripture, and Reason. A Sermon Preached Before the University at St. Mary’s in Oxford, on Whitsunday 1758* (London, 1758), ii, xvi.

66. Francis Blackburne, *Occasional Remarks Upon Some Late Strictures on The Confessional. Part II* (London, 1769), 123, note k. I am grateful to Grayson Ditchfield for this reference.

67. Wayne K. Clymer, “Union with Christ: The Calvinist Universalism of James Rely (1722–1778),” in *All Shall be Well: Explorations in Universal Salvation and Christian Theology, from Origen to Moltmann*, ed. Gregory MacDonald (Eugene, Ore., 2011), 118. For evangelicalism in eighteenth-century Wales, see David Ceri Jones, “A Glorious Work in the World”: *Welsh Methodism and the International Evangelical Revival, 1735–1750* (Cardiff, U.K., 2004).

68. Clymer, “Union with Christ,” 119–20.

renders *his* Condition theirs? Especially, as the Apostle hath stated the matter thus: *As by one Man's disobedience, many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one, shall many be made righteous.*⁶⁹

Predicting that he would face the charge of antinomianism, Rely asserted that he was no “enemy to *Good* works.” Nevertheless, while he believed that all humans could perform “*morally* good” works, such as respecting one another, he denied that anybody could perform “*spiritually*” good works. Under such a scheme, neither faith nor works were relevant to one’s salvation.⁷⁰ While he claimed that he was propagating neither universalism nor antinomianism, it is unsurprising that several authors, including Wesley and Mason, associated his teachings with these seemingly dangerous doctrines. To Wesley, Rely’s teachings were “*a Blow at the Root . . . of all Holiness*” because they appeared to ignore the “true, Gospel Liberty experienced by every Believer.”⁷¹ Since Wesley was an Arminian who viewed holiness as a necessary condition of salvation, it is unsurprising that he deplored Rely’s apparent dismissal of sanctification. Of course, Wesley would have viewed Rely’s soteriology as an excessive version of the Calvinistic doctrines espoused by Whitefieldian evangelicals. Wesley, according to Isabel Rivers, “designated [Whitefieldians] unjustly as antinomians” because they “slighted” morality. Yet, the extent to which Wesley stressed the importance of works depended on whether he was addressing a moralist or an antinomian adversary. Whereas Wesley “stressed faith and experience” to the moralists, he stressed “the need for works and holiness” to the alleged antinomians.⁷²

The fact that Calvinist evangelicals were sometimes forced to make similar shifts in emphasis is clear from Mason’s response to Rely’s *Union*, in which he stressed the importance of both faith *and* works. He combated Rely’s “absurd Notion of Universal Salvation” by citing numerous biblical passages that stressed the importance of faith, such as “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). Equally abhorrent to Mason was Rely’s denial that Christians needed to experience a “supernatural Change” through the “Holy Spirit” that produced “Faith unto Justification, and Holiness of Heart and Life.”⁷³ Citing James 2:22, Mason argued that “a holy precious Faith in the Hearts of God’s Elect . . . is attended with the Fruits of Righteousness, evidenced by good

69. James Rely, *Union: Or, a Treatise of the Consanguinity and Affinity Between Christ and His Church* (London, 1759), 11, 20, quoting Romans 5:19.

70. Rely, *Union*, xxv.

71. [John Wesley], *A Blow at the Root: Or, Christ Stabbed in the House of his Friends* (Bristol, 1762), 6, 8.

72. Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment*, 1:207.

73. William Mason, *Antinomian Heresy Exploded: In an Appeal to the Christian World; Against the Unscriptural Doctrines, and Licentious Tenets of Mr. James Rely: Advanced in His Treatise of Union, &c.* (London, [ca. 1760]), 3, 7–8, 19.

Works, and made perfect by them.”⁷⁴ Mason was clearly walking a tightrope. On the one hand, he was determined to assert his staunch Calvinism, while on the other, he stressed the importance of works. In his response, Relly argued that Mason was simply trying to deflect the “old hackney threadbare charge” of antinomianism away from himself. Relly also denied that his “doctrine of Union” was an explicit endorsement of universalism. Rather, it only taught the “method of salvation,” not the “number of its subjects.”⁷⁵ Relly was disappointed that Mason had characteristically resorted to personal insult by ridiculing his Irish-sounding surname.⁷⁶ While he did not know Mason personally, he had heard that his antagonist was “in his general character, a *methodist*.” Clearly, by this stage, Mason had attained a degree of prominence as a controversialist.⁷⁷

Mason’s combative approach seems in fact to have encouraged one acquaintance to hear his antagonist’s side: John Murray, who, until the 1760s, was also a Calvinist evangelical and follower of Whitefield. In 1760, Murray joined a religious society that met at a Dissenting meeting house on Cannon Street, London. This “society chose for their president a Mr. Mason, who, although not a clerical gentleman, was, nevertheless, of high standing in the religious world.” Mason’s “figure,” according to Murray, was “commanding, and well calculated to fill the minds of young converts with religious awe.” After one meeting, Mason asked Murray to read and comment on the manuscript of his attack on Relly’s *Union*. Mason claimed that he had chosen to attack this “soul-destroying book”—which Murray had yet to read—because no responses seemed to be forthcoming from the clergy. Murray read Mason’s manuscript as requested. As much as Murray wished to side with his mentor, he was unconvinced by Mason’s arguments. He was particularly disappointed that Mason had resorted to personal insult. Thus, Murray reluctantly found himself aligned with Relly on numerous points. His honest feedback did not please Mason, who published the piece without any amendments. Shortly afterward, Murray obtained his own copy of Relly’s *Union*, which only fueled his reluctant belief in universalism. In 1770, Murray sailed for America. Four years later, he formed the first Universalist church in America in Gloucester, Massachusetts.⁷⁸ Mason’s response to Relly was not the sole catalyst for Murray’s gradual conversion to universalism, of course. In the years preceding his encounter with Mason, Murray had expressed

74. Mason, *Antinomian Heresy Exploded*, 17.

75. James Relly, *Antichrist Resisted: In a Reply to a Pamphlet, Wrote by W. Mason, Intituled Antinomian Heresy Exploded* (London, 1761), 5, 17.

76. Relly, *Antichrist Resisted*, 14. Relly noticed that Mason had adopted a similarly “low” tactic in his conflict with Free. Mason had described Relly as an “Irish Bishop”; see *Antinomian Heresy Exploded*, 8.

77. Relly, *Antichrist Resisted*, 4.

78. John Murray, *Records of the Life of the Rev. John Murray; Late Minister of the Reconciliation, and Senior Pastor of the Universalists, Congregated in Boston* (Boston, 1816), 94–97.

private doubts regarding the eternity of hell torments.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, it is no overstatement that Mason—a largely forgotten layman of Bermondsey—assisted, albeit unintentionally, in molding “the father of Universalism in America.”⁸⁰

Devotional Writer and Loyalist

Following his clash with Relly, Mason engaged mostly in writing devotional literature. It would, of course, be naive to assume that a polemical agenda was ever absent from these devotionals, the most influential of which was undoubtedly the *Spiritual Treasury* (1765), which contained scriptural meditations for each day of the year. As with many of Mason’s works, the *Spiritual Treasury* contained a recommendatory preface by William Romaine, which would have identified it as evangelical and—more importantly—Calvinist in content. Many of the meditations advocated an explicitly Calvinist soteriology. For example, April 5th reflected on the reference to “God’s elect” in Titus 1:1. This passage, Mason claimed, showed that “if there is no election of sinners by God the Father there is no true faith.”⁸¹ By 1772, Mason had published a second volume of the *Spiritual Treasury*, which contained meditations for every evening of the year.⁸² Both volumes were subsequently sold as a compilation. New editions were still being published in England as late as 1845. In America, the *Spiritual Treasury* received its first publication in 1802, and new editions appeared as late as 1970.⁸³

Some of Mason’s other devotionals were aimed specifically at children. In 1757, Mason published anonymously *A Plain Sermon for Little Children*. It contained a “recommendatory preface” by the evangelical divine Thomas Jones, which is missing from the only surviving (third edition) copy. Presumably, Jones did not view the notion of a lay sermon as anticlerical, though, unlike the subsequent *Lay Sermons* (1817) of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Mason’s *Plain Sermon* did not draw attention to the status of its author.⁸⁴ Mason chillingly instructed his young readers that their immortal souls would eventually “appear before the great God, the Judge of all

79. Murray, *Life of the Rev. John Murray*, 91–94.

80. Andrea Greenwood and Mark W. Harris, *An Introduction to the Unitarian and Universalist Traditions* (Cambridge and New York, 2011), 63.

81. Mason, *Spiritual Treasury*, 95. For more on this work, see Rivers, *Vanity Fair*, 221–25.

82. No first edition copies of volume 2 appear to exist. We know that a second volume had been published by 1772 from an advertisement that appeared at the end of Augustus Toplady, *More Work for Mr. John Wesley: Or, a Vindication of the Decrees and Providence of God from the Defamations of a Late Printed Paper, Entitled, “The Consequence Proved”* (London, 1772).

83. In 1970, the Old Paths Gospel Press published the *Spiritual Treasury* in its original two-volume format.

84. The first edition was published by Edward Dilly and the Baptist bookseller George Keith. For the original advertisement, see *Public Advertiser*, February 5, 1757. For more on Coleridge’s *Lay Sermons*, see Simon During and Lisa O’Connell, “Coleridge and the Lay Sermon,” *English Studies* 98, no. 7 (2017): 747–57.

Men, who will . . . Judge you for all your Sins, for every idle wicked Word, and every evil, sinful Thought.” In the face of such judgment, the “wicked” unregenerate could expect no “dear Saviour” to “beg” for them.⁸⁵ Ten years later, in *The History of Jesus* (1767), Mason would say that this sermon was read and appreciated by “one gracious little girl,” who died “joyfully” in Christ. Mason—who claimed to have known the girl personally—contrasted her righteous death with the chilling tale of “Tommy Idle,” whose immoral life culminated in a “melancholy death” at the hands of his executioners. Idle “went out of the world, crying, Lord Jesus receive my soul!” His “life and death” stood as a “warning to children.” As with his earlier “sermon,” Mason’s *History of Jesus* was aimed specifically at children. It consisted mainly of a narrative of Jesus’s life and ministry, with fictional and factual stories about deceased children appended at the end. Like the *Spiritual Treasury*, this work remained available to several generations of children. Editions were still appearing in England as late as 1825. In 1839, it was published in New York for the Sunday School Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church.⁸⁶

Clearly, a morbid tone pervaded Mason’s juvenile literature, which was reminiscent of Puritan works such as James Janeway’s *A Token for Children* (1671).⁸⁷ Mason’s indebtedness to the Puritan tradition was evidenced particularly by his reissuing of several classic Puritan works. In 1770, he published a heavily condensed version of John Flavel’s *The Fountain of Life Opened* (1672), retitled *The Ax Laid to the Root of Antinomian Licentiousness*. Brought out against the backdrop of increased Arminian–Calvinist tensions, Mason’s version addressed Wesleyan allegations of antinomianism by highlighting Flavel’s descriptions of “practical holiness” stemming from the “grace of the Spirit put within us.”⁸⁸ More influential, however, was Mason’s annotated edition of John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1778), which he was “solicited to undertake.” Mason’s edition, which was republished constantly in Britain and America throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was characterized by its lengthy “explanatory notes.” Such notes, he believed, were lacking in earlier editions.⁸⁹ While numerous eighteenth-century evangelicals published edi-

85. [William Mason], *A Plain Sermon for Little Children*, 3rd ed. (New Haven, Conn., 1761), 16. The surviving copy is missing all pages before p. 8 and after p. 42. It is held by the Connecticut Historical Society and has been uploaded onto *Early American Imprints*.

86. William Mason, *The History of Jesus. Drawn Up for the Instruction of Children*, 2nd ed. (London, 1775), 116–26. Only one copy of the first edition, published by Lewis and Edward Dilly in 1767, seems to have survived. It can be found in Princeton University Library.

87. Janeway’s work was republished on both sides of the Atlantic throughout the eighteenth century. For the theme of death in Puritan children’s books, see David E. Stannard, “Death and the Puritan Child,” *American Quarterly* 26 (1974): 456–76; and Seth Lerer, *Children’s Literature: A Reader’s History from Aesop to Harry Potter* (Chicago, 2008), chap. 4.

88. John Flavel, *The Ax Laid to the Root of Antinomian Licentiousness; or, Evangelical Excitements to Holiness of Life*, ed. William Mason (London, 1770), 3–4. For Flavel’s eighteenth-century afterlife, see Rivers, *Vanity Fair*, 125–26.

89. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress: From This World to That Which is to Come*, ed. William Mason (London, 1778), pt. 1, i.

tions of Bunyan's classic work, Mason's version was, according to Isabel Rivers, the "most polemical in tone," taking "plenty of opportunities to attack Arminianism and perfectionism" in his footnotes. In one note, Mason attacked an abridged version of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, published by John Wesley in 1743, which had "left out" many "precious truths," such as "imputed righteousness, God's electing love, and the final perseverance of his saints."⁹⁰ Mason's edition also appeared as segments in *The Gospel Magazine*, an aggressively Calvinist evangelical periodical that often lambasted Wesleyan Arminianism.

For two brief periods during the 1770s, Mason acted as editor for *The Gospel Magazine*. In 1774, he replaced the Baptist shorthand writer Joseph Gurney, before handing over the editorship to Augustus Toplady, a stridently Calvinist Anglican divine, in 1775. In 1776, Mason briefly succeeded Toplady as editor before he was replaced by the Anglican clergyman Erasmus Middleton.⁹¹ The magazine often reproduced extracts from works by classic Puritan authors, such as John Owen (1616–1683), and more recent Calvinist divines, such as the late Hervey. It also featured much new material, including numerous devotional items by Mason. In one series of articles, Mason sought to "scripturally improve" various "proverbial sayings." Unsurprisingly, these "improvements" displayed a less than subtle anti-Arminian agenda. In one item, for instance, he claimed that the saying "all is well that ends well" represented the Elect's power of "perseverance," which was lacking in "many professors."⁹²

A similar polemical agenda can be discerned in Mason's reflections on the life and teachings of George Whitefield, which appeared very shortly after the itinerant preacher's death on September 30, 1770. Throughout this work, Mason defended Whitefield's Calvinism and asserted the legitimacy of his Anglicanism by referring to the Thirty-Nine Articles. Mason noted that, while Whitefield's views on justification by faith and original sin may not have been "polite," they were consistent with the Church's doctrinal statements. Mason's epitaph to Whitefield stands in stark contrast to the sentiments of nineteenth-century Anglican evangelicals, who often distanced themselves from the late itinerant because of his contemporary and posthumous popularity among Dissenters, and because he was often labeled as a *Methodist* (a word which, by the early nineteenth century, denoted a Nonconformist denomination).⁹³

90. Rivers, "Pilgrim's Progress," 542–43; Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, pt. 2, 89, note d.

91. John Gadsby, *Memoirs of the Principal Hymn-Writers: & Compilers of the 17th, 18th, & 19th Centuries*, 4th ed. (London, 1870), 62; *EM*, 8.

92. William Mason, "Common Proverbial Sayings Spiritually Improved," *The Gospel Magazine, or Treasury of Divine Knowledge: Designed to Promote Experimental Religion* 3 (1776): 408–11.

93. William Mason, *The Best Improvement of the Much Lamented Death of That Eminent and Faithful Minister of the Gospel, the Revd. Mr. George Whitefield* (London, 1770), 9. For the nineteenth-century reception of Whitefield, see Isabel Rivers, "Whitefield's Reception in England, 1770–1839," in *Life, Context, and Legacy*, ed. Hammond and Jones, 261–77. See also

Mason's appeals to diverse audiences in varying genres—including pamphlet polemics, literature for children, periodical works, and biographical memoirs—is perhaps best exemplified in his pack of scriptural playing cards. Paradoxically, while evangelicals were generally opposed to card playing,⁹⁴ Mason, along with several others, endorsed scriptural playing cards—an evangelistic strategy that dated back to the early seventeenth century.⁹⁵ Among the earliest evangelicals to use this strategy was Christopher Sower, a Pietist printer of Germantown, Pennsylvania, who published a mammoth pack of 381 scriptural and poetical cards entitled *The Lottery of the Pious* (1744). Designed for Sunday afternoon devotions, the game required players to draw a card and attempt to discern its meaning.⁹⁶ Charles Wesley also produced packs of cards that contained handwritten scriptural passages and hymn verses.⁹⁷ Around 1774, Mason published *The Parlour Preacher*, a collection of fifty-four devotional cards, each of which contained a scriptural meditation.⁹⁸ As with many of Mason's other devotional works, there was a clear Calvinist agenda behind *The Parlour Preacher*. One card, for instance, derived the Calvinistic doctrine of the perseverance of saints from the passage "I have kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7).⁹⁹ This strategy, however, sometimes attracted charges of hypocrisy. In 1800, Adam Clarke, an Irish Methodist theologian, claimed that these "impiously and ominously called *Scripture Cards*" were often used for fortune telling to justify profane "enterprizes."¹⁰⁰ *The Parlour Preacher* was singled out for condemnation in an 1819 work by Edward

Andrew Atherstone, "Commemorating Whitefield in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *Life, Context, and Legacy*, ed. Hammond and Jones, 278–99.

94. In a 1775 work, Mason discussed the renunciation of sinful diversions. Like Whitefield, Mason urged all Christians to avoid "carnal pleasures" and "sensual gratifications," such as "[playing] cards, dancing, horseracing" and "frequenting the play-house." William Mason, *The Contrast Between the Life of Faith and the Life of Sense: Or, the Inexpediency, &c. of Games, Sports, and Plays, for Those Who Profess to be Followers of Christ* (London, 1775), 1. Whitefield's most notable sermon on this topic was *The Nature and Necessity of Self-Denial: A Sermon Preached at the Parish Church of St. Andrew, Holborn, on Sunday, October 9. 1737* (London, 1738). This sermon sparked the "righteous over-much" controversy, in which Joseph Trapp, an Oxford don and poet, was Whitefield's main antagonist.

95. In 1603, Andream Strobl published a pack of illustrated biblical cards in Sulzbach, entitled *Das Geistliche Deutsche Carten Spil*. See Catherine Perry Hargrave, *A History of Playing Cards and a Bibliography of Cards and Gaming* (New York, 1966), 106.

96. Hargrave, *History of Playing Cards*, 323.

97. Richard Green, "Scripture Playing Cards," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 1 (1897): 15–25; Frank Baker, "Charles Wesley's Scripture Playing Cards," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 29 (1954): 136–38. Both articles are cited in Rivers, *Vanity Fair*, 225.

98. *The Parlour Preacher* was undated. The earliest advertisement for it that I have been able to locate appeared at the end of Mason's *An Affectionate Address to Passionate Professors: Shewing the Blessedness of a Meek and Quiet Spirit: The Evil of Giving Way to Bad Tempers and Sinful Passions: And Pointing Out Some Remedies for Subduing Them* (London, 1774), 35.

99. William Mason, *The Parlour Preacher. A Pack of Cards* ([London], [ca. 1774]), 3.

100. Adam Clarke, *A Letter to a Methodist Preacher, on His Entrance into the Work of the Ministry* (London, 1800), 28. Cited in Rivers, *Vanity Fair*, 225.

Burrow, minister of Hampstead chapel of ease, who was writing in response to William Marsh, an evangelical divine of Colchester. Whereas Marsh had condemned all recreational diversions, Burrow defended the moderate enjoyment of them. Through their determination to avoid “worldly” diversions, however, Burrow argued that some zealous individuals had fallen into the sinful trap of reducing Christianity to “*Religious Amusements*.” To Burrow, Mason’s cards exemplified such “perverted sentiment.”¹⁰¹ Despite Burrow’s opposition, *The Parlour Preacher* was republished by Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper of Paternoster Row in 1828.¹⁰² In 1859, 2,000 copies were republished in Philadelphia by the Presbyterian Board of Publication.¹⁰³

Although scriptural playing cards were condemned for encouraging the mixture of the religious and the secular, one of Mason’s final works, *The Absolute and Indispensable Duty of Christians* (1775), benefited from just that intersection. In the space of one year, this work went through a remarkable thirty-three editions. Readers were left in no doubt as to Mason’s agenda—this was a Loyalist polemic. Compared to John Wesley’s relatively moderate *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies* (1775), Mason’s work was an aggressive call for all Loyalist colonists to follow St. Peter’s command: “arm yourselves” (1 Peter 4:1). Throughout this polemic, Mason cited numerous biblical passages, which, he claimed, contradicted “the rancorous seeds of rebellion” in the colonies.¹⁰⁴ These passages included the standard Loyalist line “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers” (Romans 13:1), along with others, such as “pray for Kings, and for all who are in authority” (1 Timothy 2:2) and “Honour the King” (1 Peter 2:17).¹⁰⁵ Seemingly ignorant of the Jacobite connotations that still surrounded these phrases, Mason advocated “passive obedience” and “non-resistance” to civil magistrates—even tyrannical ones.¹⁰⁶ While all subsequent editions commenced with a short note from Mason, in which he acknowledged that his use of these phrases had caused a “great outcry,” he made no apologies for including them.¹⁰⁷ From the third edition onward, this work contained a recommendatory preface by Thomas Coke, an Anglican divine and future Methodist bishop in

101. Edward J. Burrow, *A Second Letter Addressed to the Rev. William Marsh, Vicar of St. Peter’s, Colchester, Contrasting the Doctrines of the Church of England, from the Reformation to the Present Time, with Those Principles Which Have Frequently, But Improperly, Been Denominated Evangelical*, 2nd ed. (London, 1819), 41.

102. *A Catalogue of Practical and Useful Books* (London, 1828), 19.

103. *Twenty-First Annual Report of the Board of Publication of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America* (Philadelphia, 1859), 11.

104. William Mason, *The Absolute and Indispensable Duty of Christians*, in *This Critical Juncture, Considered and Enforced, in An Affectionate Address* (London, 1775), title page, 12.

105. Mason, *Duty of Christians*, 7, 12, 14.

106. Mason, *Duty of Christians*, 8, 15.

107. William Mason, *The Absolute and Indispensable Duty of Christians*, in *This Critical Juncture, Considered and Enforced, in An Affectionate Address*, 2nd ed. (London, 1775), 2.

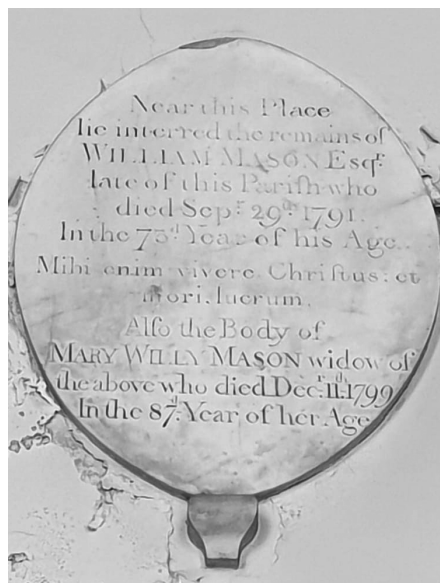


FIGURE 2. Memorial to William and Mary Mason, St. Mary Magdalen, Bermondsey. The author is grateful to Karina Salih for this photograph.

America.¹⁰⁸ Thus, Mason’s aggressive Loyalism corrects the popular assumption that Calvinists in Britain and America were either supportive of—or apathetic toward—the American Revolution.¹⁰⁹

In 1783, Mason’s social and political conformity was signified further by his decision to retire from his clockmaking business and become a magistrate. Eight years later, on September 29, 1791, Mason died after suffering multiple strokes. He was buried at St. Mary Magdalen, Bermondsey, which he had attended for over six decades. During the final twelve years of his life, Mason had attended the ministry of his son Henry Cox Mason, who served as curate, lecturer and, finally, rector of St. Mary Magdalen (*EM*, 9–10). A memorial to William Mason and his widow, Mary (who died in 1799), was installed in the “South aisle” of the church, where it remains today (fig. 2).¹¹⁰

108. For more on Coke, see John A. Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism* (London, 1969).

109. David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), 140; Ruth H. Bloch, “Religion and Ideological Change in the American Revolution,” in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980s*, ed. Mark A. Noll (New York, 1990), 44–61; Sheldon S. Cohen, *British Supporters of the American Revolution, 1775–1783: The Role of the “Middling Level Activists”* (Woodbridge, U.K., 2004), 131.

110. G. W. Phillips, *The History and Antiquities of the Parish of Bermondsey* (London, 1841), 68.

Conclusions

By providing the first thorough analysis of Mason's life and works, this essay has enhanced our understanding of the ways in which Calvinist evangelicalism benefited from an active and vocal laity, who did not necessarily need to preach for their messages to resonate with their lay brethren. Many of Mason's works were republished constantly, sometimes into the nineteenth century. Their appeal often transcended both denominational and spatial boundaries. Mason's success can be attributed partly to his literary and rhetorical strategies, which were extensive. Mason wrote predominantly for a lay readership, whom he believed were in desperate need of an education in the Church of England's Reformed tradition. By undertaking this task, he was questioning not only the effectiveness of contemporary divines but also the sincerity of their faith. We have seen that, on at least one occasion, Mason published in a devotional medium that had traditionally been the preserve of the clergy: the sermon. Nevertheless, his works were not anticlerical. Although Mason's condemnation of "moralistic" divines was often fierce, he constantly asserted his loyalty to the established Church and its clergy. Like Whitefield, Mason believed that he was more conformist than most Anglican divines, who seemed to reject the Reformed doctrines outlined in the Thirty-Nine Articles. More than once, Mason advanced his own, provocative definition of a "Church of England Methodist," which simply reiterated article 17's discussions of predestination and election. By advancing this definition, Mason was denying not only that Wesleyan evangelicals were true Methodists but also that they were true Anglicans. Most strikingly, Mason's loyalty to Church and Crown was illuminated by his aggressive Loyalism—a cause that, ironically, was supported by Wesleyans but very few Calvinists. Clearly, during this period, a given theological stance did not automatically correspond with one political stance.

While Mason's tendency to resort to ridicule only reduced the credibility of his arguments, his use of deception was far more successful. In *Methodism Displayed*, Mason deceived contemporaries—and, subsequently, historians—into thinking that his attack on moralistic clergymen was an attack on evangelical enthusiasm. The fact that Wesley adopted a similar approach in his *Nature of Enthusiasm* shows that polemical devices were shared by Calvinist and Arminian evangelicals. Evidently, the eighteenth century was an age of disguise, and scholars need to be cautious of taking any form of polemic at face value. More broadly, by exploring Mason's polemical strategies, these discussions have enhanced our understanding of the ways in which the eighteenth-century laity engaged in theological controversies. His extensive publications incorporated discussions of numerous doctrinal issues, including predestination, justification by faith, and the afterlife. As did Anne Dutton, Mason often used the medium of devotional literature as a means of spreading Calvinist doctrines. Thus, by elucidating the ways in which devotional piety and polemical divinity converged in Mason's works, these discussions have provided a model for how scholars can integrate piety and polemic in their explorations of eighteenth-century religious print culture.

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