

## *The Spread of Antislavery Sentiment through Proslavery Tracts in the Transatlantic Evangelical Community, 1740s–1770s*

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IN the history of the Atlantic antislavery movement, two events were of great importance: the Great Awakening and the American Revolution. In the 1730s and 1740s, many evangelicals stimulated by the religious revival, travelled to the opposite side of the Atlantic, preached the gospel, and published a number of books that contained their evangelical faith and ideals. Through these activities many evangelicals in Anglo-American communities shared common interests, faith, and ideology, and some found a channel of transatlantic communication in which they were able to debate the slavery issue.<sup>1</sup> The American Revolution also contributed to creating an atmosphere of tension in the 1770s, in which antislavery sentiment became transformed into moral conviction. The development of this ideology can be explained by the spread of antipathy toward slavery in the Atlantic world before the Revolution. This essay focuses on the change in the evangelical mindset between these two religio-political events, asking: how did the antislavery sentiment spread through the transatlantic evangelical network from the 1740s into the 1770s?

Until now, antislavery sentiment between the 1740s and 1760s has not been the subject of intense investigation. A number of historians have dealt with this aspect of slavery, but have not attempted to trace the development of antislavery ideals, mainly for two key reasons. First, there was no public

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<sup>1</sup>For the transatlantic evangelical network, see Susan [Durden] O'Brien, "A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735–1755," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 4 (October 1998): 811–832; Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters from the Foundation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978): 394–406; Frank Lambert, "'Pedlar in Divinity': George Whitefield and the Great Awakening, 1737–1745," *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 3 (December 1990): 812–837; Lambert, "The First Great Awakening: Whose Interpretive Fiction?," *The New England Quarterly* 68, no. 4 (December 1995): 650–659.

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self-identifying antislavery movement, even in religious communities. We can find an exception in the expulsion of slaveholders from Quaker Societies of Friends, but this movement did not influence the rise of antislavery sentiment in the evangelical community until the 1770s. Second, few voices in opposition to slavery were heard in this period. With the exception of Samuel Sewall, an American Puritan who published the antislavery tract, *Selling of Joseph* in 1700, and several Quaker moralists, including William Edmundson and John Woolman, who asserted a conflict between slavery and their fundamental principles in the late 1750s, most Christians in the early eighteenth century seemed to accept slavery as a fact of life.

Therefore, many scholars have not dealt with this period in their research on the antislavery movement. For example, in *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition*, Roger Anstey starts his accounts of British abolition from historical events in the 1760s and David Brion Davis only deals with the years from 1770 onward in *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*.<sup>2</sup> Christopher Leslie Brown explains the history of early antislavery activities but he too leaves out the years between the case of the George Trusts in the 1730s and the early Quaker antislavery movement in the late 1750s.<sup>3</sup> Seymour Drescher's *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery*, a comparative study on slavery in Britain, North American colonies, Franco-American colonies and Latin America, only focuses on the period after the 1770s and does not show the transformative process in the evangelical mind toward an antislavery position in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> In *Bury the Chains*, Adam Hochschild attempts to create an imaginative bridge between political activities for the abolition of the slave trade and modern human rights campaigns.<sup>5</sup> In line with this, his engrossing narrative of the British antislavery movement mainly focuses on historical events after the British abolitionist movement started in the late eighteenth century.

There are a number of researchers who treat this period as part of the history of proslavery ideas in the eighteenth century. In *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America*, Larry E. Tise traces the origins of proslavery ideas in America to this era.<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Robert Young published an anthology

<sup>2</sup>Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (London: Macmillan, 1975); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770–1823* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975).

<sup>3</sup>Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundation of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2006), chapter 1, particularly 84–90.

<sup>4</sup>Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup>Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: The British Struggle to Abolish Slavery* (London: Macmillan, 2005), 128.

<sup>6</sup>Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701–1840* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 12–40.

of proslavery texts that showed the development of proslavery thought in the colonial and early national South. Although he deals with tracts, lectures, sermons, and petitions relevant to the slavery issue in the 1740s and 1750s, Young, as shown in his introduction, analyzes these proslavery discourses in line with the development of proslavery perspectives only.<sup>7</sup> Charles F. Irons' recent monograph on proslavery Christianity persuasively explains the contribution of free and enslaved Africans' conversion to the justification of the institution of slavery.<sup>8</sup> It may be a riveting narrative as a historiography of proslavery thoughts, but it downplays fledgling antislavery sentiment that appeared below the surface of proslavery discourse. In this way, the above-mentioned researchers do not show an interest in this period or depict it as "proslavery" dominant years. In these studies, the process how the British abolitionist movement developed from sentiments that had accumulated in the Atlantic world before the 1770s was not clearly shown. To understand how attitudes toward slavery altered in the evangelical network during the years between the Great Awakening and the American Revolution, a comprehensive reassessment which links these two important events to each other is required.

Before analyzing proslavery literatures, the term "proslavery" needs to be defined. In this study, "proslavery" evangelicals in the mid-eighteenth century were different from proslavery ideologists in the Antebellum America, like Nehemiah Adams (1806–1876), a pastor in Boston, John Henry Hopkins (1792–1868), Episcopal bishop of Vermont, Moses Stuart (1780–1852) American biblical scholar at Andover Seminary, Massachusetts, Rufus William Bailey (1793–1863) in South Carolina and Theodore Clapp (1792–1866), a Congregational, in New Orleans.<sup>9</sup> "Proslavery" evangelicals in this period lived in a society where slavery was taken for granted but this does not mean that they became active supporters of the institution either. In contrast, antebellum Americans actively defended the institution with proslavery writings in response to growing Northern abolitionism after the United States acted to abolish its African slave trade in 1807. In this essay, "pro"-slavery evangelicals means those who passively accepted slavery as a fact of life but admitted the necessity of amelioration of hardships in plantation system. Within these evangelicals, a wide spectrum of views on

<sup>7</sup>Jeffrey Robert Young, ed., *Proslavery and Sectional Thought in the Early South, 1740–1829* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006), 30–41.

<sup>8</sup>Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>9</sup>For origin of proslavery thoughts, see Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity*, 1–22. For the emergence of proslavery ideology in the United States in the early nineteenth century, see, Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Tise, *Proslavery*, 261–322.

slavery existed; while some emphasized the preservation of the institution, others placed a higher importance on “amelioration” of slavery.

In order to understand the transformation of evangelical attitudes toward slavery, proslavery literature needs to be analyzed. A close scrutiny of proslavery articles makes it possible to trace changes in the attitudes of evangelicals toward slavery during the years between the Great Awakening and the American Revolution. For many evangelicals these tracts, sermons, and epistles were the main ways to express their opinions on slavery. Furthermore, the analysis of proslavery discourses offers a new perspective on the rise of the antislavery movement. Recent studies, particularly Brown’s *Moral Capital*, emphasize the seemingly sudden appearance of the abolitionist movement in the 1780s.<sup>10</sup> This approach depicts earlier internal conflict in the evangelical network over slavery as less important and overemphasizes the role of the Revolution. Yet a fuller examination of proslavery tracts helps to correct this view and gives due importance to the antislavery development of the pre-revolutionary era; common antislavery elements were found in articles in the pre- and post-revolutionary years suggesting that the antislavery development of the post-revolutionary era was, at least in part, caused by changes in the evangelical community before the Revolution.

This essay proceeds in four sections. First, it provides an overview of the increase in antislavery opinion within “proslavery” society. Second, it examines whether there were antislavery factors inherent in evangelicalism. Third, it explains how antislavery sentiment spread before the American Revolution within the evangelical network. Fourth, it presents evidence of the transformation of evangelical attitudes toward an antislavery stance.

### I. INCREASE OF “LOW LEVEL” ANTISLAVERY OPINION IN PROSLAVERY SOCIETY

In the 1740s and the 1760s, proslavery discourse seemed to be prospering, but below the surface a number of evangelicals made recommendations toward alleviating slaves’ suffering in the plantation system. Although many of them did not realize the effect of their humanitarian remarks, the process of undermining the institution of slavery had begun. These two conflicting processes can be identified in the puritan network even before the eighteenth century. A few religious people perceived a potential conflict between their religious principles and the inhumanity inherent in slavery. This uncomfortable feeling developed in the form of the view of the plantation

<sup>10</sup>Brown, *Moral Capital*, 19, 337.

society as an organic whole. Many Anglican ministers at the time had an ideal vision of the plantation system in which planters treated their bondservants as their brothers and sisters, while slaves obeyed their masters as they did their Lord in heaven. Although the puritan community failed to speak with univocal voice on slavery, the “organic Master-Slave relationship” led those who shared this view to raise doubts as to whether the institution could be justified.

As early as the 1660s, puritan minister Richard Baxter in England blamed British slaveholders for maltreatment of their slaves, expounding “paternalistic” proslavery principles, whereby masters played the role of parents while slaves figured as childlike dependants.<sup>11</sup> In his view, slavery did not entitle slaveholders to abuse their slaves but rather required them to look after slaves’ spiritual welfare. Morgan Godwyn, an Anglican minister who served in both Virginia and Barbados, also assumed a certain role for the slaveholders, saying that sincere Christians were asked to lead their bondservants to the Lord. Here an organic view of the plantation system was found again: “we must then fall to consider of the People amongst whom we are to take our lot, and thereto to have an especial regard: As, whether they be *Slaves*, subject to the *English*, such as most of the *Negro’s* there are; or *free People* living of themselves, either amongst, or distant from the *English*; such as most of the *Indians* on the Continent (in *Virginia*, & *c.*) are.”<sup>12</sup> Godwyn, however, still thought that the scripture supported the authority of masters, over slaves, “requiring service with singleness of heart, as unto the Lord, and not unto Men.”<sup>13</sup> In this sense, he touched on the ambiguous Christian morality of the institution.

The Moravians also undermine the assumption about near-universal approval for slavery in the mid-eighteenth century. The Moravians, one of “the most open and inclusive” Protestant denominations originating from Bohemia and Moravia, pursued the establishment of Christian fellowship beyond the barriers of gender, age and race, and they initiated the discourse on Christian instruction to slaves as part of efforts to prove their beliefs.<sup>14</sup> The first Moravian missionaries were a potter, Leonard Dober, and a

<sup>11</sup>Young, *Proslavery and Sectional Thought in the Early South*, 19–20; Baxter cited Romans 8:28: “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who we are the called according to his purpose and his opinion.”

<sup>12</sup>Morgan Godwyn, *A Supplement to the Negro’s & Indian’s Advocate: or, Some Further Considerations and Proposals for the Effectual and Speedy Carrying on of the Negro’s Christianity in Our Plantations* (London: J. D., 1681), 6.

<sup>13</sup>Morgan Godwyn, *The Negro’s & Indian’s Advocate: Suing for their Admission into the Church* (London: J. D., 1680), 112; cited in Young, *Proslavery and Sectional Thought*, 21.

<sup>14</sup>Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 84.

carpenter, David Nitschmann, who arrived in the West Indies in 1732. Moravians distinguished themselves from other established ministers by including slaves in multiracial communities as equals in the West Indies and on the North American mainland. Even interracial marriage was accepted in their community, as shown in the case of the Moravian missionary Matthaues Freundlich and Rebecca, a mulatto woman.<sup>15</sup> The Moravian message of universal fellowship had a “compelling power” to weaken racial prejudice against the enslaved Africans.<sup>16</sup> They had an ideal of Christian fellowship “in love united,” in spite of “differences of intellect and intelligence, of thought, opinion, taste and outlook”; this fellowship meant “not only a bridging of theological differences but also of social differences.”<sup>17</sup> They attempted to prove their belief through practical actions of benevolence, like “visiting slaves in their cabins and sharing their food and clothing,” and “greeting them with a warm handshake . . . as if they were equals.”<sup>18</sup>

For the Moravians, Christian instruction to slaves was a natural consequence of their religious principles; they tried to propagate Christianity to slave “brothers and sisters” in their community. They developed a unique system for the Christian education of slaves. Most slaves were illiterate and there were language barriers between masters, missionaries, and slaves. Because of these difficulties, the first Moravian missionaries were largely dependent on freed slaves who understood Creole and spoke missionaries’ language. In 1738, Moravians organized “national helpers” from different ethnic groups. This form of organization usually consisted of groups of four men and one woman who were charged with the religious instruction of small groups of five to ten persons according to gender.<sup>19</sup> The success of the system even occasionally created a situation where slave converts were appointed as church officials. For example, Abraham, an African convert, who was an eloquent speaker in Creole and had a broad knowledge of the “superstitions,

<sup>15</sup>For Rebecca’s story see: Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005). The story of Rebecca Protten, a mulatto woman, showed how deeply rooted slavery was in the evangelical mind in the early eighteenth century. She was purchased from Antigua and sent to a plantation on St. Thomas in the Danish West Indies. Her master taught her Protestant Christianity and when she was twelve the family who owned her freed her. In 1732 Moravian missionaries arrived on St. Thomas and Rebecca helped them convert African slaves. In 1742, Rebecca travelled from St. Thomas with Moravian missionaries to the main Moravian settlement in Hermhut, Saxony. She met a white Moravian missionary there and they married in 1746. They went to Christiansborg, a Danish port on the Gold Coast to start a school but their efforts failed. From 1763, they spent the rest of their lives teaching African children in Christiansborg.

<sup>16</sup>Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 83.

<sup>17</sup>Clarence H. Shawe, *The Spirit of Moravian Church* (London: Moravian Book Room, 1977), 21–22.

<sup>18</sup>Frey and Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion*, 84.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 85.

customs, and practices of his fellow Blacks,” played a significant role in Moravian missionary works. Black preachers were particularly conducive to increasing the number of African converts in these areas.<sup>20</sup> Many evangelicals in the 1730s, particularly Methodists, learned the importance of religious instruction for enslaved Africans from the Moravian case. These Moravian actions were wholly different to common practice at the time.

These Moravian activities were raising a question about the institution simultaneously. Slaveholders were nervous about the possibility of a slave rebellion, and some of them already perceived that it would be hard to ignore the issue of spiritual equality when blacks were included in their church community. Thus, in the mid-eighteenth century, attempts to Christianize enslaved people frequently met with slaveholders’ hostility and suspicion.<sup>21</sup> Many religious people who had puritan or Moravian backgrounds, supported Christian instruction to slaves and their correspondence enhanced it to a certain extent. However, these challenges to convention did not exhibit a coherent antislavery position at this time. Their interchange was neither a “transatlantic” nor an “interdenominational” one, and thus claims for the religious education of enslaved Africans were simply just potential threats to planters.

However, as the religious revival in the 1730s stimulated transatlantic exchanges of evangelicals beyond regional and denominational barriers, planters felt increasingly threatened. The Great Awakening influenced the development of antislavery ideas in the period for two main reasons. First, it enhanced the religiosity of religious people in the Atlantic world, and thus people were much more likely to recognize the inconsistency between evangelical doctrines and slavery. Second, as a result, it increased conflicts among evangelicals over slaves’ humanity, equality of souls, and the necessity of Christian instruction. The cases of John Wesley and George Whitefield reflect the changed atmosphere in the Atlantic world after the Great Awakening. Under the influence of Wesley and Whitefield, antislavery enthusiasm spread further into the Atlantic world.

The Moravians affected Wesley’s early antislavery sentiment in many respects. In particular they inspired him to think seriously about the propagation of the gospel among slaves. Wesley first encountered Moravians en route to North America in 1735, when he was deeply impressed by their peaceful outlook during a storm. In 1738, he visited Herrnhut, the Moravian headquarters in Germany, to study their religious principles. Wesleyan

<sup>20</sup>Johann Jakob Bossard, *C. G. A. Oldendorp’s History of the Evangelical Brethren on the Caribbean Islands of St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Karoma Publishers, 1987), 317, 319, 328, 333, 353, 360–61, 375, 394, 418.

<sup>21</sup>Young, *Proslavery and Sectional Thought*, 21.

Methodism was clearly influenced by Moravian Pietism during this time. In the process, more importantly, Wesley adopted Moravian views on slavery. Wesley and his followers adopted the Moravian method of proselytizing slaves and accepted their concept of the equality of souls across racial divides.<sup>22</sup> Long before the publication of his first antislavery tract, *Thoughts upon Slavery*, in 1774, Wesley's antislavery ideology was formed under Moravian influence.<sup>23</sup> In April 1736, shortly after arriving in the colonies, Wesley organized a Savannah Society along Moravian lines. As part of the society's missionary activities, Wesley regularly visited small settlements preaching not only to white colonials but also to enslaved Africans in South Carolina.<sup>24</sup>

George Whitefield stimulated the development of the antislavery cause into an Atlantic debate. Through Whitefield's missionary activities, the criticism of planters and doubts about the legitimacy of slavery became important themes of a debate on a transatlantic scale. After a request from John Wesley, Whitefield began to travel to North America and from 1738 to 1770, making journeys to the colonies seven times. His visits stimulated the Great Awakening, as well as the transatlantic debate on slavery. As one of the leading evangelicals of his period, Whitefield was eager to make Africans into professing Christians, believing that the inferiority of African souls was not supported by biblical principles. Whitefield thought that slaves had the same "sinful nature" as white men; if both were born and grew up in the same condition, then they were both "naturally capable of the same Improvement,"<sup>25</sup> so Christian instruction would be effective for both of them. If the slaveholders' argument that Christianity made slaves rebellious and proud was true, he wondered, "why are [slaveholders] generally desirous of having [their] children taught?"<sup>26</sup> In the orphanage in Georgia managed by Whitefield, young African boys were baptized and taught to read many divinity books including Phillip Doddridge's *The Rise and Progress*, Bishop Hall's *Contemplations*, and Jonathan Edwards' sermons.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup>For the difference between Wesley and the Moravians, see John Wesley, *A Short View of the Difference between the Moravian Brethren, Lately in England, And the Reverend Mr. John and Charles Wesley. Extracted Chiefly from a Late Journal* (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1748).

<sup>23</sup>John Wesley, *Thoughts upon Slavery* (London: R. Hawes, 1774).

<sup>24</sup>John Wesley, *An Extract of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley's Journal from His Embarking for Georgia to His Return to London* (Bristol: S. and F. Farley, 1740), 39, 67, 69.

<sup>25</sup>George Whitefield, *Three Letters from the Reverend Mr. G. Whitefield: viz Letter III, To the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South-Carolina, Concerning Their Negroes* (Philadelphia: B. Franklin, 1740), 15.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>George Whitefield, *A Select Collection of Letters of the Late Reverend George Whitefield*, 3 vols. (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1773), III:499; Phillip Doddridge, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (London: J. Waugh, 1748); Joseph Hall, *Contemplations on the History of the New Testament* (London: W. Faden, 1759).



When the first Great Awakening finished in the late 1740s, the atmosphere of the Atlantic world had greatly altered. In terms of antislavery sentiment, the evangelical claim for Christian education became stronger, stirring up resistance from evangelicals who clung to the plantation system. This situation seems different from existing narratives which emphasize the indifference of evangelicals to the slavery issue in the mid-eighteenth century. In fact, the humanity of enslaved Africans and inconsistency between slavery and evangelical principles, like justice and benevolence, became subjects of considerable debate among evangelicals.

## II. ANTISLAVERY FACTORS IN PROSLAVERY ARTICLES: THE WHITEFIELD-GARDEN DEBATE

The debate between Whitefield and Alexander Garden started over the religious controversy of the new phenomenon of religious revival in the 1730s. Garden, who was appointed as Commissary for the Carolinas by Edmund Gibson, Bishop of London, in 1728, confronted Whitefield regarding his revival theology. Garden published six letters challenging Whitefield's religious authority, calling Whitefield "wholly ignorant" about the important theological concept of the Covenant.<sup>28</sup> In his sixth letter to Whitefield, Garden criticized Whitefield's views on the plantation system as well as the religious revival. Considering Whitefield's transatlantic influence, it was hard for many evangelicals to ignore his opinion on Christian instruction to slaves and its potential threat to the institution of slavery. Thus, Garden's challenge to Whitefield's insistence seems a pre-emptive attack; after all, Whitefield had never denied the justification of slavery in the abstract. Although this debate comprised only a relatively small part of the totality of Garden's letters, the debate on slavery was important in two respects. First, it reflected an increasing awareness among those strongly in favor of slavery that antislavery sentiments were forming, even at an embryonic level, in the evangelical community. Second, and more importantly, this debate showed the existence of "low level" antislavery elements that even these evangelicals who put much emphasis on preservation of slavery could not help but acknowledge as long as they adhered to Christian principles.

Their opinions seemed to diverge on several issues concerning slavery. First of all, Garden answered negatively to the Christian instruction of

<sup>28</sup>Garden, *Six Letters to the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield*; William Knox, *Three Tracts Respecting the Conversion and Instruction of the Free Indians and Negro Slaves in the Colonies. Addressed to the Venerable Society for Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (London: n.p., 1768), 41.

slaves. The ostensible reason was theological: he was suspicious of the effect of “*Christianizing-MADE* through Christians.” Citing Corinthians 3:6, “Paul *may plant*, and Apollos *may water*, but God Alone can give the *Encrease*.” While downplaying man-made effort for the propagation of the gospel, he presented some revivalists’ claim for Christian instruction as not being based upon biblical principles. “Men may teach [slaves] *true Christianity*,” he asserted, but none can “MAKE [them] *a true Christian*” by earthly methods.<sup>29</sup> However, Garden perceived the potential threats of the embryonic antislavery factors below the surface of Whitefield’s assertion on the religious education. This was why Garden showed outrageous overreaction to discourse of those in favour of amelioration of the institution, like Whitefield who never denied the justification of slavery. Garden strongly rebutted Whitefield’s representation of inhumane treatment by slaveholders to their bondservants, insisting that Whitefield’s views on plantations were incorrect: “there must be a due *Discipline*, or Rod of Correction exercis’d among Children,” and this may be, and often was “misrepresented for Cruelty and bad Usage.”<sup>30</sup> Garden emphasized how slaveholders treated their slaves with all due humanity, “whether in respect of *Work*, of *Food*, or *Raiment*” and thus slaves’ lives in general were “more happy and more comfortable in all temporal Respects” than the lives of most hired white farming workers.<sup>31</sup> To undermine his British debater’s argument, Garden measured the circumstance of plantation to that of day labourers in the British Isles; they “not only labour harder, and fare *worse*,” but also “have moreover the Care and Concern on their Minds of how to provide for their families,” while slaves were entirely exempted from these things, as their children were all provided “for at the *Owner’s Charge*.”<sup>32</sup> In this way, Garden and other evangelicals who strongly favored the preservation of slavery, felt the necessity of defending the plantation system because of a deep sense of dissemination of antislavery sentiment through a number of “proslavery” tracts.

However, the importance of this debate lies in the similarities rather than the differences between each position. As Jeffrey Robert Young states, the irony of these tracts was that their authors were attacking a man, “who actually harboured almost identical views about Christianity and slavery.”<sup>33</sup> The layers of meaning in this similarity need to be analyzed more thoroughly. Basically, both religious men attempted to Christianize the plantation system rather than abolish it and in that sense, these religious people ultimately

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 52–3.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Young, *Proslavery and Sectional Thought*, 75.

belonged in the same proslavery category.<sup>34</sup> However, they also shared “low level” antislavery factors in their proslavery discourse; Garden seemed more supportive of slavery than Whitefield, but there were some antislavery factors which even he could not deny after the Great Awakening.

Outwardly, Whitefield insisted on better treatment for slaves while Garden opposed it. However, what Garden denied was not the humanity of slaves, but Whitefield’s claims that planters ill-treated their bondservants. While Garden stressed the necessity of discipline and correction toward their slaves, he also insisted that this should not be used in a cruel way.<sup>35</sup> Although Garden thought that Whitefield’s stance was too aggressive and immensely harmful to planters’ interests, they actually agreed on more than the tone of their debate might suggest. Their debate showed that the humanity of enslaved Africans tended to be accepted more readily after the start of the Great Awakening. Whitefield showed a resolute opinion on this, asking whether “[planters] are any way better by Nature than the poor Negroes? . . . NO, in no wise. Blacks are just as much, and no more, conceived and born in Sin, as White Men are.”<sup>36</sup> As Whitefield’s humanistic discourse appeared as part of attacks on slaveholders’ maltreatment of their bondservants, Garden chose to present supporting evidence of planters’ generous treatment of enslaved Africans rather than to deny the slaves humanity. He did not defend any case of planters’ cruelty but frequently used words such as “good Usage,” “generality,” and “all due humanity,” when he depicted the situation of plantations. These remarks were based upon a common premise that slaves *did* have humanity.

Garden also perceived clearly that the objection to Christian instruction would be an impractical demand as well. When Whitefield blamed planters for “*on Purpose*” keeping their “Negroes ignorant of Christianity,”<sup>37</sup> Garden did not reject the necessity of Christian education but made an excuse for the planters, saying “I believe the Reason of their being so kept, is the want of one certain uniform Method of teaching them, and which I hope will soon be established with Success.”<sup>38</sup> He ultimately did not oppose the propagation of Christianity itself; indeed he agreed that “the Objection to teaching them Christianity, *viz*, that it would tend to make them less governable, or worse Slaves, is wild and extravagant.”<sup>39</sup> Over the next fourteen years, Garden managed a school in Charleston which educated local slaves. In this sense, the Whitefield-Garden debate highlighted the antislavery elements at an

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Garden, *Six Letters to the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield*, 53.

<sup>36</sup>Whitefield, *Three letters from the Reverend Mr. G. Whitefield*, 15.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Garden, *Six Letters to the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield*, 53.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

embryonic level among the mid-eighteenth-century evangelicals. Their debate manifested that similar paradoxical discourse that was shared among the religious people in the 1740s: that within a framework of a near-total acceptance of the legitimacy of slavery, the seeds of antislavery were already being sown.

### III. THE CORRELATION BETWEEN BECOMING AN EVANGELICAL AND FEELING UNCOMFORTABLE WITH SLAVERY

The “low level” or fledgling antislavery element which was revealed in the debate between the two proslavery religious men in the post-revival period raises a subsequent question about the existence of innate factors in evangelicalism that made its members feel uncomfortable with slavery. In this post revival period, a large number of people in the Atlantic world were introduced to evangelical discourse and through conversion experiences many became more sensitive to their religion. If there were antislavery factors in evangelicalism, it would obviously affect evangelical attitudes toward slavery. Were there factors that reinforced antislavery sentiment in evangelical theology? Did these elements influence the process of evangelicals becoming abolitionists?

Roger Anstey’s magnum opus, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition*, gives important clues to this subject. He analyzes the interrelation between evangelical theology and the rise of the abolitionist movement.<sup>40</sup> Anstey argues that for those who experienced “spiritual rebirth,” the institution of slavery became problematic. Many evangelicals who underwent a sort of “redemption from sin” were also interested in liberty from social bondage and they came to have “a greater sense of the horror of evil” because they had found the enormities of the slave trade in themselves.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the assurance that “their sin was forgiven and could be overcome by the grace of God” led evangelicals to “the consequential assurance” that they could remove the sin of other men by “that same grace.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, the emphasis on “divine grace” stimulated evangelicals’ efforts to liberate enslaved Africans from physical bondage, as it was the most noticeable vice in the British Atlantic world. These enthusiastic activities to remove the physical slavery of the “captive” can also be considered as an expression of thankfulness for redemption which had been shown to them through “the atonement of Christ on the cross.” For these

<sup>40</sup> Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition*, 184–199.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

reasons, Anstey concludes that “Evangelical theology, by reason of the very elements which composed it, had to mark down slavery,” and the heightened sense of antislavery factors inherent in its theology came to be focused on the slave trade as the object of attack.<sup>43</sup>

A number of researchers have criticized this attempt to find the causes of the abolitionist movement solely in religious developments for mainly two reasons. First of all, non-religious factors should be considered as causal to the antislavery movement. Davis warns that presenting the Church’s role in abolition as a “saving event within the context of salvation history” would be an overestimation of the role of religious motivation.<sup>44</sup> Adam Hochschild emphasizes the importance of a humanistic ethos in the success of the abolition of the slave trade, rebutting the Anstey thesis: “the abolitionists placed their hope not in sacred texts, but in human empathy.”<sup>45</sup> He posits that the abolition of the slave trade was “the first flowerings” of a modern belief that “the way to stir men and women to action is not by biblical argument, but through the vivid, unforgettable description of acts of great injustice done to their fellow human beings.”<sup>46</sup> Socioeconomic historians like Selwyn Carrington and Walter Minchinton still support the “Decline Theory” highlighting contribution of the economic factors of the British Empire to the success of the abolitionist movement.<sup>47</sup> Brown highlights in *Moral Capital* that non-religious factors including the politically critical situation caused by political events, such as the Seven Years’ War, the War of American Independence, and slave rebellions in the Caribbean, were important to stimulate people’s concern about the institution and the expression of antislavery opinion toward the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, some aspects of the social background of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world seem to disprove Anstey’s argument. First of all, the difficulty of this thesis, as Brown points out, lies with “the varied reactions to slavery among Evangelicals in the Americas.”<sup>49</sup> If evangelicals’ core beliefs against slavery had been a constant, it is easy to imagine an equivalence between becoming an evangelical and an abolitionist. However, in reality, most evangelicals seemed to be indifferent to the slavery issue or supported the institution and only started activities toward abolition during

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>44</sup>Davis, “An Appreciation of Roger Anstey,” in *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform*, Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher, eds. (Folkestone, U.K.: W. Dawson, 1980), 12–13.

<sup>45</sup>Hochschild, *Bury the Chains*, 336.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Selwyn Carrington, *The Sugar Industry and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1775–1810* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002); Walter Minchinton, “Williams and Drescher,” *Slavery and Abolition* 4 (1983): 81–105.

<sup>48</sup>Brown, *Moral Capital*, chapter 6.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 336–337.

the critical moments of the Revolution; the members of the transatlantic evangelical network were not unanimously in favor of antislavery. The second, and more important point, is that theological beliefs are not sufficient to explain why evangelicals took such a long time to start an antislavery movement on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>50</sup> Anstey's explanation of evangelicals' core beliefs against slavery does not answer the question of why Anglo-American evangelicals were silent on the issue until the 1770s. For many researchers, as Brown states, indifference among British evangelicals to the enslavement of Africans was manifest during the first half century of the revival, from the 1730s into the 1770s.<sup>51</sup>

However, Anstey's whole argument does not hang on a single thread. It would be incorrect to describe the relationship between evangelical belief and the rise of the antislavery movement as "cause and effect" and due importance should be given to other non-religious factors. However, this does not mean that the religious motivation of evangelical abolitionists can be disregarded. As will be shown in the later part of this study, many evangelicals perceived the inconsistency between slavery and factors that reinforced antislavery sentiment in evangelical theology. Anstey offers partial information but points out that due attention should be given to a theme which has been under-recognized: the correlation between religion and the antislavery movement. As Davis acknowledged, many researchers on the antislavery movement "have uncritically tended to assume that anti-slavery can be understood as part of an irreversible process of secularization." This means that they "have assumed that Christianity was somehow diluted and secularized as religious men and women became preoccupied with social problems." However, Davis warns, such assumptions lead people easily to "a crude reductionism," in which explicit religious motivation of evangelical abolitionists is explained "in terms of various secular 'interests.'"<sup>52</sup> There is no reason to believe that evangelical abolitionists campaigned with a motivation that was separate from their religiosity. On the contrary, the most striking feature of the antislavery movement was that it was initiated and led by religious enthusiasm. The slave trade has been criticized by the new moral philosophers of the Enlightenment as well as religious people, but the British abolitionist movement, was led by those who were "noted for their conspicuous godliness."<sup>53</sup> Although antislavery elements inherent in

<sup>50</sup>Here I have benefited from John Coffey, "'A Spur to Incessant Activity': God, Providence, and the Abolitionists," *Christianity and History Forum Bulletin* (Spring 2007): 39.

<sup>51</sup>Brown, *Moral Capital*, 336–337.

<sup>52</sup>Davis, "An Appreciation of Roger Anstey," 12–13.

<sup>53</sup>Coffey, "'A Spur to Incessant Activity,'" 37; Here I have benefited from the idea from Professor Coffey's "'Tremble, Britannia! The Fear of God and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1758–1807,'" *English Historical Review* 127 (August 2012).

evangelical theology were not sufficient, they were necessary to raise questions about slavery and to make it a topic for transatlantic debate.

As evangelicals' diverse response to slavery in this early period suggests, becoming an evangelical did not in and of itself make that person an abolitionist. Rather, it would mean that if someone had developed antislavery sentiment, and this antipathy was intertwined with evangelical faith, they were much more *likely* to become an antislavery activist.<sup>54</sup> Why all evangelicals did not follow the antislavery principles in evangelical theology, if these factors exist in evangelicalism has been asked. However, in practice, becoming an evangelical is different from following evangelical teachings in daily life. Even after becoming an evangelical convert, appreciating the antislavery elements in evangelicalism and to do something actively for abolition are still a matter of choice. Thus, we can find diverse responses from evangelicals toward slavery; some ignored the issue; some were ambiguous; some became antislavery activists. However, those who started antislavery campaigns found a rationale for their activities in these evangelical antislavery elements. As James Stephen said, "a large proportion of those who are most zealous for the abolition of the slave trade, are men of religious feelings; and who regard this traffic as a most heinous offence, not only against man, but against God."<sup>55</sup>

Here it would be worth reinterpreting the case of John Newton, writer of the famous hymn "Amazing Grace." The existing view on him as a representative example of the evangelical indifference on the slavery issue in the pre-revolutionary era is well known. However, his case has two sides; in one sense, as many researchers insisted, he showed that a conversion experience did not necessarily lead that person to an antislavery stance. In his antislavery tract, *Thoughts on the Slave Trade*, which was published in 1788, John Newton gave answers which "may be applicable to the nation at large" to the question of why he spoke out against slavery too late, saying "the Slave Trade was always unjustifiable; inattention and interest prevented, for a time, the evil from being perceived."<sup>56</sup> Newton, in fact, served the trade as the captain of the slave ships, *Duke of Argyle* (1750) and the *African* (1752–54) for five years *after* his conversion of 1749.

However, a closer examination of Newton's narrative also indicated that his later engagement with the antislavery movement was closely intertwined with evangelical faith. Contrary to public myth, he raised doubts about the lawfulness of the slave trade as early as the 1750s, not only in the

<sup>54</sup>Here I have benefited from Dr. Mark Smith with whom I have developed this idea through email conversations.

<sup>55</sup>James Stephen, *The Dangers of the Country* (London: J. Butterworth and J. Hatchard, 1807), 179.

<sup>56</sup>John Newton, *Thoughts on the Slave Trade* (London: J. Buckland, 1788), 4, 7.

1780s.<sup>57</sup> After the third voyage in 1754, he experienced a sort of “true conversion,” a reaffirmation of evangelical theology; through communication with a “captain of a ship from London,” a recent convert, he received “an increase of knowledge” of evangelical principles and his conceptions “became clearer and more evangelical.”<sup>58</sup> In his autobiography, he traced the origin of his journey to become an abolitionist to this point, when he was more exposed to evangelical principles and decided to follow these teachings. In the 1750s, after this second conversion, he became “shocked with an employment that was perpetually conversant with chains, bolts, and shackles,” and started petitioning in his prayers, “that the Lord . . . would be pleased to fix me in a more humane calling.”<sup>59</sup> When he decided to be an abolitionist activist, he found the foundation of his abolitionism in his religious belief, like many other evangelicals. Many historians focus on the fact that Newton took thirty-four years to publish his antislavery tract *Thoughts on the Slave Trade* in 1788, and exemplify his long silence as evidence of the irrelevance of evangelical conversion. However, Newton’s case clearly shows that his antislavery sentiment developed in tandem with his enhanced evangelical conviction before then.

Lastly, we should reconsider the existing view that evangelicals had been indifferent to the slavery issue before the 1770s. Brown persuasively explains that antislavery sentiment can be transformed into antislavery ideology courtesy of external stimuli like the Revolution in the 1770s. He also presumes that the evangelical community was silent until then.<sup>60</sup> However, Brown overlooks that “low level” antislavery factors were shared among evangelicals to some extent, although the premise of his theory was the spread of antipathy toward slavery into the Atlantic world before the Revolution. John Newton is only one example of evangelicals who adopted an antislavery stance considerably in advance of any official condemnation after the Revolution. Granville Sharp started his antislavery campaign in the courts in 1767; Arthur Lee, an American abolitionist, also published an antislavery tract based upon the inconsistency between slavery and Christianity in the 1760s;<sup>61</sup> as will be shown, even evangelicals who supported the institution did not feel comfortable due to the existence of these theological antislavery elements before the 1770s. This suggests that

<sup>57</sup> John Newton, *An Authentic Narrative of Some Remarkable and Interesting Particulars in the Life of [the Reverend John Newton] Communicated in a Series of Letters, to the Reverend Mr. Haweis, Rector of Aldwinckle, Northamptonshire, and by Him (at the Request of Friends) Now Made Public* (London: R. Hett, for J. Johnson, 1764), 192.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>60</sup> Brown, *Moral Capital*, 336.

<sup>61</sup> Arthur Lee, *Extract from an Address in the Virginia Gazette, March 18, 1767* (Philadelphia: D. Hall and W. Sellers, 1767), 3.



antislavery factors in evangelicalism made evangelicals uneasy about slavery. This process was taking place in the Atlantic world even during the seemingly “dark” years of the antislavery movement. The Revolution only created the social atmosphere in which this sentiment developed into a political campaign with an antislavery ideology.

#### IV. TRANSFORMATION OF EVANGELICAL ATTITUDES TOWARD ANTISLAVERY

Although evangelicals did not reach agreement over the issue of slavery, they found some common antislavery factors in this period. A *true* evangelical who experienced conversion within the transatlantic networks of evangelicals was more likely to respond to antislavery elements inherent in evangelicalism. Analysis of these “low level” antislavery factors in proslavery discourse will offer evidence for a transitional process of evangelical attitudes toward slavery. Several key themes reflecting inconsistency between slavery and Christian principles increasingly appeared in evangelical discourse toward the late-eighteenth century: inhumanity, benevolence, and justice. It is of importance that the raw form of these concerns was already found in proslavery literature in the period between the Great Awakening in the 1730s and the American Revolution.

A number of proslavery sermons, tracts, and epistles demonstrate that most evangelicals acknowledged slaves’ humanity in the mid-eighteenth century. Their conviction was based upon the universal characteristics of evangelicalism; few could totally exclude enslaved Africans from candidacy for evangelical redemption, and they repeatedly criticized slaveholder claims that slaves did not have souls. As shown in the Whitefield-Garden debate, the humanity of enslaved Africans tended to be accepted more readily after the start of the Great Awakening. Samuel Davies, a leading New Light who fought for the evangelical wing in the Presbyterian Church in Virginia, supported spiritual equality based on the immortality of slaves’ souls as well as those of their masters.<sup>62</sup> This was a considerable challenge to the justification of slavery, although he did not claim social equality between whites and blacks at that point. Davies believed that Christ’s atonement on the cross was “for *Africans*, as well as Britons: it was for the contemptible

<sup>62</sup>Jonathan Edwards first used the term “New Light” in *A Faithful Narrative Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, and the Neighbouring Towns and Villages of the County of Hampshire, in the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay in New-England* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1738), 44. New Lights generally referred to those who supported the revival movements in Congregationalist and Baptist churches in New England, while Old Lights opposed them.

*Negroes*, as well as White: it was for poor Slaves, as well as for their Masters."<sup>63</sup> If Christ thought it "worth his while to shed the blood of his heart" for slaves, then they, like their masters, could be candidates for heaven.<sup>64</sup> Evidently, these arguments are entirely premised on the humanity of slaves. Davies believed that there was "but *one common* Christian Religion for them *all*, by which they can please God, and obtain Salvation."<sup>65</sup> Both white masters and black slaves were equal in as much as that they belonged to the same family of Christianity.

Davies' effort to Christianize slaves evoked responses from Anglican ministers, including Thomas Bacon in Maryland. Bacon exhibited ambivalent attitudes toward slavery—while supporting the preservation of institution, he could not ignore the concept of slaves' humanity.<sup>66</sup> Following Garden's example, Bacon attempted to open a school for enslaved Africans, although his project failed to get support from Maryland residents.<sup>67</sup> In his *Four Sermons*, first published in 1743, Bacon clearly advocated the humanity of enslaved Africans, saying, "some People among us talk very idly, as if they did not believe the *Blacks* or *Negro's* to be of the same Species with themselves, or that they have human Souls."<sup>68</sup> Bacon's zeal for slave conversion led him to oppose planters' attempt "to mark the precise Criterion . . . in the Scale of Beings . . . where the human Species ends, and the Brute begins." He was afraid that a consequence of such a discourse would be the denial of the "human souls" of slaves, developing into the negation of "a possibility of Salvation."<sup>69</sup> Therefore, Bacon reached two conclusions: "That Negro's being of the human Species, have souls as well as us, and are equally capable of Salvation. Christian Charity therefore would require of us to endeavour their conversion, and labour for the Good of their Souls," and "that Negro's, being of the human Species, ought to be considered as such in all their Necessities, Labours, Chastisements, & c.—and not to be treated like Brutes, or mere Beasts of Burden."<sup>70</sup> In this sense, Bacon opened a possibility that the call for spiritual humanity; conversion,

<sup>63</sup>Samuel Davies, *The Duty of Christians to Propagate Their Religion among the Heathens, Earnestly Recommended to the Masters of Negroe Slaves in Virginia. A Sermon Preached in Hanover, January 8, 1757* (London: J. Oliver, 1758), 17–18.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>66</sup>Thomas Bacon, *Two Sermons, Preached to a Congregation of Black Slaves at the Parish Church of S. P. in the Province of Maryland* (London: John Oliver, 1749).

<sup>67</sup>These details are from Young, *Proslavery and Sectional Thought in the Early South*, 79, 97.

<sup>68</sup>Thomas Bacon, *Four Sermons: Upon the Great and Indispensible Duty of All Christian Masters and Mistresses to Bring Up Their Negro Slaves in the Knowledge and Fear of God. Preached at the Parish Church of St Peter in Talbot County, in the Province of Maryland* (London: J. Oliver, 1750), xi.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, xvi.

and religious tuition would develop into a call for social humanity like proper treatment and as part of humanity.

Like many late eighteenth century evangelicals, early evangelicals also perceived the slave trade and slaveholding to be inconsistent with “God’s Love or disinterested benevolence.”<sup>71</sup> In the late 1740s, Jonathan Edwards Sr. wrote *The Nature of True Virtue* which would be published posthumously in 1765. Here Edwards equated benevolence with God’s love; “it may signify nothing diverse from that good disposition in [God’s] nature to communicate of his own fullness in general.”<sup>72</sup> Edwards developed this into essential Christian virtue; he said, “VIRTUE . . . is placed in public affection or general benevolence”<sup>73</sup> This virtue is naturally developed into “love to [God’s] creatures,” as the divine love has the “general tendency and effect in the creature’s well-being.”<sup>74</sup> Edwards emphasized, “universal benevolence” is the same thing with “benevolence to the divine Being.”<sup>75</sup> Here, the link between this Christian virtue and general love to mankind was created. “The most beneficence that can be in men,” he said, “is doing good, not from a confined selfishness, but from a disposition to general benevolence, or love to beings in general.”<sup>76</sup> This evolved into a key evangelical principle with the efforts of Samuel Hopkins in the post-revolutionary era,<sup>77</sup> Hopkins would eventually present the institution of slavery as a representative example of a failure to honor this essential principle of evangelicalism. In line with this, he saw the necessity of taking practical action to remove this source of social vice.<sup>78</sup> Broadly speaking, evangelicals in the period between the Great Awakening and the American Revolution had similarly begun to perceive this inconsistency.

In the mid-eighteenth century, evangelical benevolence was frequently expressed with biblical terms like “mercy,” “brotherly love,” or “charity.” Evangelicals started linking this Christian virtue with the slavery issue. Anne

<sup>71</sup>Jonathan Edwards. Sr., *Two Dissertations, I. Concerning the End for Which God Created the World. II. The Nature of True Virtue by the Late Reverend, Learned and Pious Jonathan Edwards, A.M. President of the College in New-Jersey* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1765), 26.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 44, 27.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 47.

<sup>77</sup>Jonathan Edwards. Sr., *Two Dissertations*, 119, 123; Samuel Hopkins, *An Inquiry into the Nature of True Holiness. With an Appendix; Containing an Answer to the Rev. Mr. William Hart’s Remarks on President Edwards’ Dissertation on the Nature of True Virtue: and Brief Remarks on Some Things the Rev. Mr. Mather Has Lately Published. Also an Answer to the Rev. Mr. Hemmenway’s Vindication, &c. by Samuel Hopkins* (Newport, R.I.: Solomon Southwick, 1773).

<sup>78</sup>David Lovejoy, “Samuel Hopkins: Religion, Slavery, and the Revolution,” *The New England Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (June 1967): 233–234.

Dutton, wife of a Baptist minister and close associate of George Whitefield, wrote a letter to recently converted slaves to explain the spiritual lives of enslaved people. In this document, while still clinging to the preservation of the institution, she welcomed enslaved Africans with a benevolent heart, emphasising universal love to “brethren” in the same religion; “[Christ] hath joined us all into *one Fold*, and himself our *one Shepherd*, is Lord over us; so that from henceforth, there is *neither few nor Greek, barbarian nor Scythian, Bond nor Free, but we are all one in Christ.*”<sup>79</sup> Davies highlighted “how awful and important a Trust, then, is the Care of a Soul,” with brotherly love, particularly, “the Soul even of a poor Negroe Slave!”<sup>80</sup> Bacon rhetorically asked those who downplayed benevolence for slaves: “can we imagine, that any Work of Mercy which was required,” by the covenant in the Old testament, “is void and cancelled” by other laws in the scripture, “whose Foundation is laid in unspeakable Mercy, and its Fabrick perfected by universal Charity and Love towards all Mankind?” He answered, presenting this undifferentiated benevolence as the essence of evangelicalism: “No, my Brethren; this is undoubtedly one Branch of that eternal Law which our Blessed Saviour *came not to destroy, but to fulfil.*”<sup>81</sup> Pre-revolutionary evangelicals already recognized that persistence of the institution weakened evangelical benevolence. In the 1760s, Jonathan Boucher, a famous Anglican preacher and loyalist, said, “I own, however, that I dislike slavery,” because, “among other reasons . . . it has pernicious effects on the social state.” In Boucher’s view, slavery violated benevolence as some planters showed “extreme, deliberate, and systematic inattention to all mental improvement” of enslaved Africans.<sup>82</sup> Many evangelicals in this period believed that, in the words of Bacon, planters had “certain Duties of Benevolence and Charity which carry no visible earthly Advantages with them, but rather the contrary; and yet are necessary for the general benefit of Society.”<sup>83</sup>

Finally, traces of evangelical consideration of the inconsistency between the Christian concept of justice and the institution of slavery were found in

<sup>79</sup>Anne Dutton, *A Letter to the Negroes Lately Converted to Christ in America. And Particularly to Those, Lately Called out of Darkness, into Gods marvellous Light, at Mr. Jonathan Bryanto Christ in lina. Or A Welcome to the Believing Negroes, into the Houshold of God. By a Friend and Servant of theirs in England* (London: J. Hart, 1743) in *Slavery in North America: From the Colonial Period to Emancipation*, 4 vols., ed. Mark M. Smith (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 1:235.

<sup>80</sup>Davies, *The Duty of Christians to Propagate their Religion Among Heathens*, 8.

<sup>81</sup>Bacon, *Four Sermons*, 42–43.

<sup>82</sup>Jonathan Boucher, *A View of the Causes and Consequences of the American Revolution; in Thirteen Discourses, Preached in North America between the Years 1763 and 1775: with an Historical Preface* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, Paternoster-Row, 1797), 187.

<sup>83</sup>Bacon, *Four Sermons*, 29.

proslavery tracts before antislavery sentiment was actually expressed in the 1770s–80s. Many evangelicals lamented that “the plain Rules of Justice and Equity are too often forgot.”<sup>84</sup> Bacon doubted that a society where “Masters have all the Authority, Servants none” matched the biblical value “to whom much is given, of him shall much be required.”<sup>85</sup> He pointed to a contradictory situation, asking “If our Servants neglect or refuse to give us *that which is just and equal*, the Law hath given us Power to correct and force them to do it,” but “if we refuse them *that which is just and equal*, where is their Remedy?”<sup>86</sup> In 1764, James Grainger, a Scottish doctor and poet, wrote the well-known poem *Sugar-Cane* based upon his service as a military surgeon in the West Indies. He doubted whether the “fierce, wanton, cruel” working conditions on sugar plantations and the wealth built upon “the lurking evil from the blood” could be justified.<sup>87</sup> Lee also asked British officials, who held “Sword of Justice” about the justification of “barbarous Deaths of unhappy Africans without Trial, or due Proof,” which occasionally happened in the West Indies. If they overlooked it, they must “account to God for the use they have made of it.”<sup>88</sup>

Such evangelicals feared that their obstruction of justice might bring “God’s wrath.” Their fear was expressed with terms like “crime,” “lawfulness,” and “justice.” In his *Authentic Narrative*, Newton had already raised a question about the “lawfulness” of the slave trade and saw it as “Providence,” which forbade his voyage to the West Indies and eventually protected him from divine judgement as shown through the calamitous consequences of that voyage.<sup>89</sup> Whitefield expressed his fear of “God’s wrath,” saying, “I think God has Quarrel with you for your Abuse of Cruelty to the poor Negroes.”<sup>90</sup> Davies warned planters, that “the supreme Judge of the Universe, with whom there is no respect of Person” would reward “our Faithfulness,” but also punish “our Negligence . . . to the Ruin of an immortal Soul.”<sup>91</sup> Grainger reminded planters of divine justice, saying “Are ye free from crimes?” and asked them to “let mercy soften the decrees of rigid justice, with her lenient hand” by letting “humanity prevail.”<sup>92</sup> “What a terrible Sight must it be,” Bacon deplored, “to see a Number of these unhappy Creatures drawn up against us in Judgement, witnessing that the Loss of

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>87</sup>James Grainger, *The Sugar-Cane: A Poem* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1764), 56, 139.

<sup>88</sup>Lee, *Extract from an Address, in the Virginia Gazette*, 28.

<sup>89</sup>Newton, *An Authentic Narrative*, 192, 194.

<sup>90</sup>Whitefield, *Three Letters from the Reverend Mr. G. Whitefield*, 13.

<sup>91</sup>Davies, *The Duty of Christians*, 8.

<sup>92</sup>Grainger, *The Sugar-Cane*, 136.

their poor Souls was owing to our Want of Care and Charity for them, calling aloud for the Justice of Heaven.”<sup>93</sup> The theme of justice was invoked not only to illustrate an obligation of humane fairness toward slaves, but also in a punitive sense: as the manifestation of God’s retribution at the inhumanity of slavery.

In this way, the rise of proslavery discourse in the eighteenth century produced two implications. First, the proslavery tracts, sermons, and letters above indicated that the first half century of the revival, from the 1730s into the 1770s, was not a “dark age” for the antislavery movement as generally accepted until now.<sup>94</sup> While proslavery discourse seemed to be the dominant opinion among evangelicals between the 1740s and the 1760s, and antislavery opinion appeared only after the 1770s, its emergence was a longer and more complicated process. Although these evangelicals still supported the institution of slavery, below the surface of proslavery opinions many evangelicals perceived the inconsistency between evangelical principles and the nature of slavery, which made the institution a controversial issue even before the American Revolution. This discomfort did not yet lead evangelicals into an actual antislavery movement, but it was enough to foster doubts about the justification of the institution of slavery.

Secondly, some proslavery writers unintentionally opened the door for the moral condemnation of slavery by antislavery writers in the late eighteenth century. We need to pay attention to the fact that “low level” antislavery sentiment was expressed through literature that still supported the preservation of the institution in this period. Although proslavery writers drew different conclusions than abolitionists, some of them were already incorporating antislavery factors into their own writing. Many proslavery evangelicals in North America used a humanistic ethos and recognition of spiritual equality to neutralize antislavery attacks, and with these tools they were able to present themselves as stewards and patrons for their bondservants, and to represent slavery as a civilizing institution.<sup>95</sup> However, these factors bridged the gap between unapologetic proslavery views that seemed predominant during this period and antislavery opinions which would be actively expressed in the late eighteenth century. Therefore, these seemingly proslavery articles in the mid-eighteenth century indicated a transformative process in an evangelical mentality, toward antislavery ideas.

<sup>93</sup>Bacon, *Four Sermons*, 54.

<sup>94</sup>Brown, *Moral Capital*, 336–337.

<sup>95</sup>*Ibid.*, 75.

## V. INDICATORS OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF EVANGELICAL ATTITUDES TO AN ANTISLAVERY STANCE

Here we can find several indicators of the transformative process of attitude toward slavery in the evangelical community. The overreaction from planters and their advocates reflected the seriousness of this threat from “low level” antislavery ideas. Appearance of religious groups which showed antislavery tendency was also the product of this transformative process of the evangelical mind. We can find the manifest antislavery tract like *Thoughts upon Slavery* by Wesley, right before the American Revolution.

### A. THE EXCESSIVE REACTION FROM SLAVEHOLDERS

Although most evangelicals did not vociferously oppose the institution of slavery in the period between the Great Awakening and the American Revolution, their moral and spiritual conscience was enough to foster slaveholders’ resistance. This disproportionate reaction toward even proslavery literature adds weight to the idea that the germ of antislavery was to be found in these articles: if these documents were merely supportive of the institution of slavery, they would not have provoked such strong resistance from colonial plantation society. Most planters and advocates for slavery reacted in two main ways. First, they attempted to show that evangelical attacks on slaveholders for cruelty were wrong, and presented counter-evidence of their humane treatment of slaves. A large number of proslavery articles tried to show how generously slaveholders dealt with their bondservants. As explained above, this literature not only denied inhumane treatment but also presented planters as paternalistic protectors of and providers for slaves. Through this, planters were able to blunt some evangelical attacks. This indicates that even those who supported the institution were under pressure to meet humanitarian needs.

Furthermore, planters and their advocates attempted to displace responsibility for the undeniable iniquities of the slave trade by finding a “sacrificial lamb,” while continuing to support the institution. In the case of American planters, this role was attributed to the mother country. For example, the clergyman Robert Robertson tried to shift the blame to the British, and to defend the plantation system, in his three tracts published in the 1730s. Robertson argued that the British government was responsible for colonial slavery, while judging colonists only from afar. According to his explanation, tobacco and sugar plantations were at first operated mainly by white labourers in the early seventeenth century but the British government discouraged white emigration and issued licenses for the slave trade for these industries after they began “to taste the Sweets of the

*Sugar-Trade*.<sup>96</sup> It was not “the *white* Inhabitants here” but English merchants, he claimed, who “sent their Ships to *Guinea*” with promotion and protection from the British government.<sup>97</sup> Thus, it was “the English Merchants who buy [slaves], and by this Craft have their Wealth,” or “England, the grand Gainer, for protecting and encouraging a Trade, which consists in selling and buying Men and Women in one Quarter of World, and selling and buying them again in another,” who should be criticized.<sup>98</sup> However, “the whole Load of Blame and Guilt, if there is any Blame or Guilt in such Traffick, is cast on the *white* People in [the colonies], and on them alone.”<sup>99</sup> Robertson viewed colonial planters as scapegoats while the British had images of slaveholders as tyrants and plutocrats. Because of “the heavy Taxes they have to pay here, and the high duties on their Manufacture when imported [sugar] into Great-Britain,” he argued, “the Masters of the Slaves” in the American colonies, “neither are nor can be rich.”<sup>100</sup>

William Knox, one of the largest planters in Georgia, seemed to have difficulty in justifying slaveholding although he clung to the institution. He also blamed the British Parliament, asking if “purchasing a Negroe for a slave . . . [is] an *infringement of divine and human laws*, in God’s name, why is such a trade permitted? . . . Are there no lords of the council sufficiently zealous in the cause of liberty and religion to procure their repeal?”<sup>101</sup> “A few words in an act of parliament prohibiting the importation or sale of Negroes in our colonies” he asserted, “will destroy the practice in the future. And a few words more declaring the offspring of Negroes already imported to be free, will prevent slavery extending to the next generation.”<sup>102</sup> Even though he admitted that planters’ slaveholdings in North America would violate the laws of nature and humanity, he argued that it was also evident that the “American planters do not *alone* bear the weight of that iniquity, nor are they only to be called upon to remove the evil.”<sup>103</sup> This abrogation of responsibility was a popular argument: American planters were not the ones who should be responsible for the evils of slavery, as slaves brought by British traders were only left in colonists’ hands. In one respect, this reflected a kind of victim mentality in the planters: slaveholders thought that the interests of colonial planters were sacrificed by the British government in the pursuit of wealth and power. However, it also indicated

<sup>96</sup>Robert Robertson, *The Speech of Mr. John Talbot Campo-Bell, A Free Christian-Negro, to His Countrymen in the Mountains of Jamaica* (London: J. Roberts, 1736), 11–12.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>101</sup>Knox, *Three Tracts Respecting the Conversion*, 19.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.



the variety of strategies planters and slaveholders felt it necessary to use in order to defend themselves and the institution of slavery from what was a growing feeling of unease.

### B. APPEARANCE OF NEW DENOMINATIONS

The appearance of new nonconformist denominations also showed this transformative process. Even before the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians officially condemned the institution of slavery in the post-revolutionary era, “low level” antislavery sentiment was already expressed in the denominational level. Contrary to the idea of evangelical indifference to slavery in the mid-eighteenth century, and the sudden rise of the antislavery movement in the 1770s, much evidence suggests that there had been substantial progress in antislavery opinions in the Atlantic world *before* the American Revolution. The cases of Separate Baptists and Methodists during this period demonstrate this development.

Baptists, more than any other denomination, embraced enslaved Africans in their religious community. In 1740, several Baptists opposed the Regular Baptists’ negative attitudes toward Whitefield’s revival movement in Boston and seceded from the Regular Baptist Church in order to establish their own church.<sup>104</sup> As many evangelicals did in this period, these Baptists found the ground of antislavery tendency in their religious principles. This New Light group, which supported the evangelical revival in the Baptist Church, were called “Separates” and, as they believed in “redemption for all,” they emphasized that salvation was related to the religious needs of the poor and oppressed. Thus, only a general declaration of personal faith was necessary for membership. Theologically, Separate Baptists were more ready to accept the enslaved Africans into their religious community.<sup>105</sup> The Separates tried to break down the distinctions between class, gender, and race. They allowed female members to pray in public and propagated the gospel to the poor, illiterate and unrefined.<sup>106</sup> Slaves were quickly included in their churches and the number of African conversions increased. Moreover, like other radical evangelicals, the Separates had an apocalyptic view which

<sup>104</sup>Isaac Backus, *A History of New-England, with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists. Containing the First Principles and Settlements of the Country; the Rise and Increase of the Baptist Churches Therein; the Intrusion of Arbitrary Power under the Cloak of Religion; the Christian Testimonies of the Baptists and Others Against the Same, with Their Sufferings Under It, from the Beginning [sic] to the Present Time* (Boston: Edward Draper, 1777), 170–175.

<sup>105</sup>For the general redemption doctrine of Baptists churches, see Backus, *A History of New-England*, 385–397.

<sup>106</sup>Robert B. Semple, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia* (Richmond: Published by the author, 1810), 221.

highlighted the imminence of the millennium and this offered slaves a hope for liberation from their physical bondage.<sup>107</sup>

The Separate Baptists demonstrate some of the changes in evangelical attitudes toward slavery after 1740, when fledgling antislavery sentiment was more frequently expressed among the evangelical network. In 1756, Philip Mulkey and William Murphy, young Separate preachers in Virginia, began their ministry with “several white members besides a large number of blacks,” and through their labors many of “these poor slaves became bright and shining Christians.”<sup>108</sup> Their church continued to develop and by 1773 they had created 34 Separate Baptist churches in Virginia, with over 3,000 members. In the 1770s, Elhanan Winchester, a Separate convert from the Regular Baptists, attracted many slaves with his condemnation of slavery and of the slave trade. As Winchester showed, Baptist ministers had started to express antislavery sentiment beyond personal belief. While few explicitly antislavery articles were published between the 1730s and the 1770s,<sup>109</sup> the appearance of evangelical sects that were more inclusive and had a stronger belief in slaves’ rights and humanity indicates that this was a period of transition.

Changes in Methodists’ views toward slavery also reflect development toward an antislavery stance. Before the Methodist Church condemned the institution of slavery officially for the first time at the Christmas Conference in 1784, some Methodist groups embraced slaves into their community and even into their leadership. In the 1760s, Methodist meetings started in the household of Nathaniel Gilbert, an influential landlord in Antigua. Through these meetings, slaves were educated in Christian attitudes. When Gilbert visited England in 1758, John Wesley baptized two of his slaves. Wesley reported, “one of these is deeply convinced of sin, the other rejoices in God her Saviour.”<sup>110</sup> In Gilbert’s case, meetings for Christian instruction naturally developed into a sort of church where his and other planters’ slaves could attend services. By 1774 more than 200 slaves were participating in services.<sup>111</sup>

The same openness was found among mainland American Methodists as itinerant preachers travelled across the colonies. Methodist missionaries in the middle colonies welcomed slave converts into their religious community

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 97, 398.

<sup>108</sup>Semple, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia*, 222.

<sup>109</sup>From 1731 to 1760, the number of the titles concerning the antislavery issue was 6 out of 5393. Sources are from, Charles Evans, *American Bibliography: A Chronological Dictionary of All Books, Pamphlets, and Periodicals in the United States of America from the Genesis in 1639 Down to and Including the Year 1820* (Chicago: Blakely Press, 1904), vols. 2–8.

<sup>110</sup>Nehemiah Cunnoock, ed., *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.: Sometimes Fellow of Lincoln College*, vol. 4, (London: Epworth, 1938), 247–48, 292; cited in Frey and Wood, *Come shouting to Zion*, 104.

<sup>111</sup>Coke, *History of the West Indies*, II:427.

and persuaded white Methodists to allow their slaves to attend prayer meetings. Often women and men, slaves and the free, were gathered together under the same roof. Freeborn Garretson, an influential native-born Methodist preacher in the American colonies, described a Methodist service: "I suppose about twelve whites and blacks were present. The power of the Lord came among us . . . many of the blacks were much wrought upon."<sup>112</sup> As the number of slaves was substantial, colonial Methodists had to set a date for the Quarterly Meeting, a decision-making meeting of preachers and lay men, on Saturday and Sunday. "One weighty reason for this," Jesse Lee explained in *A Short History of the Methodists*, "was, that many of the slaves could not attend these meetings, except on the Lord's day," in 1772.<sup>113</sup> White and black Methodist members shared conversion experiences and this enhanced their sense of unity in the founding period of American Methodism. The premise of these changes was the acknowledgement of humanity and liberty of slaves and equality of souls between blacks and whites, which were repeatedly appeared in "proslavery" literature in this period. In this way, the reconsideration of the growth of antislavery opinion in some denominations would be worthwhile as an exemplar of evangelical antislavery morality in pre-revolutionary era. These examples suggest that antislavery sentiment was already widely spread in the Atlantic world and reached its culmination before the American Revolution affected evangelical minds.

### C. THE CASE OF *THOUGHTS UPON SLAVERY*

*Thoughts upon Slavery*, the famed antislavery tract of the founder of Methodism John Wesley, published on the eve of the American Revolution, demonstrated that these changes in Methodists during the revolutionary period were linked to "low level" antislavery factors in proslavery literature in the pre-revolutionary era. It is suggestive that key themes shown in proslavery articles in the period between the Great Awakening and the Revolution were also used in Wesley's tract as a basis of argument. However, Wesley's tract also indicated that the evangelical reaction to antislavery elements inherent in their religious principles became stronger toward the time of the American Revolution.

Wesley's condemnation of slavery was founded once more on three central tenets of antislavery within evangelical faith, with humanity as the foremost. In *Thoughts upon Slavery*, Wesley compared blacks' natural status in their home

<sup>112</sup>Robert Drew Simpson, ed., *American Methodist Pioneer: The Life and Journals of the Reverend Francis Asbury, 1752–1827* (Rutland, Vt.: Drew University Library, 1984), 95.

<sup>113</sup>Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists, in the United States of America Beginning in 1766, and Continued till 1809 to Which Is Prefixed, a Brief Account of Their Rise in England, in the Year 1729, & c.* (Baltimore: Magill and Clime, 1810), 41–42.

countries in Africa with their current state after becoming slaves. He argued that slaves' "stupidity" and "brutality" which planters frequently mentioned could not be true: "they are reasonable and good-natured people, sincere and inoffensive, and do no injustice either to one another or to strangers. They are civil and courteous" in their home countries.<sup>114</sup> He was convinced that an "*Angolan*, had the same natural right as an *Englishman*," and any circumstances cannot "make it necessary for a man to burst in sunder all the ties of humanity."<sup>115</sup> Wesley focused his attacks on the mitigating defences offered by mid-eighteenth-century proslavery texts. He followed Whitefield's example and criticized planters for malnourishing slaves, noting that "usually yams and potatoes, are their food," and for imposing miserable labour conditions which "neither screen them from the heat of the day, nor the cold of the night their covering," "their sleep is very short, their labour continual, and frequently above their strength." In this tract, Wesley explained the high mortality of the Middle Passage with in-depth data and also described the inhumane separation of families between the "plantations of their several masters," asking "what can be more wretched than the condition they then enter upon?"<sup>116</sup> The aims of this approach were not only to attack the inhumanity of planters and the slave traders, but also to condemn the slave trade and the institution of slavery.

Like some proslavery tracts in the mid-eighteenth century, the suspicion that slavery could be against Christian benevolence was also Wesley's main thesis. Wesley argued that slavery stood against the law of love and there must be "an essential difference between . . . cruelty and mercy."<sup>117</sup> When some slaveholders defended themselves saying, "these slaves being prisoners of war, our Captains and Factors buy them, merely to save them from being put to death. And is not this Mercy?" Wesley excluded any possibility that the slave traders followed Christian benevolence because "to get money, not to save lives," was the "whole and sole spring of their Motions."<sup>118</sup> Based upon brotherly love, citing the Old Testament, "the blood of thy brother crieth against thee from the earth," Wesley appealed to slaveholders' finer feelings: "whatever it costs, put a stop to its cry before it be too late."<sup>119</sup> He concluded that it was an impossibility to reconcile the slave trade with any degree of Christian benevolence.<sup>120</sup> For Wesley, the institution of slavery seemed evil because it was against the divine love "to every man."<sup>121</sup>

<sup>114</sup>Wesley, *Thoughts upon Slavery*, 13.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 34, 38.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>119</sup>Genesis 4:10. Ibid., 55.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., 52.

Lastly, Wesley opposed the justification of the institution of slavery based upon the concept of justice. He repeatedly insisted “it clearly follows, that all slavery is as irreconcilable to Justice as to Mercy.”<sup>122</sup> “Where is the Justice of inflicting the severest evils, on those that have done us no wrong?” He accused the slave traders “of depriving those that never injured [the British] in word or deed” and “of tearing [slaves] from their native country, and depriving them of liberty itself.”<sup>123</sup> He had a conviction that slavery was against divine justice as “notwithstanding ten thousand laws, right is right, and wrong is wrong still.” “There must be still remain,” Wesley emphasized “an essential difference between Justice and Injustice”<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, Wesley’s discourse developed beyond previous antislavery elements shown in the mid-eighteenth century proslavery literature in that he feared God’s more “impending” judgement, a sentiment taken up by the later nineteenth-century evangelicals. The ignorance of the key principles of Christianity such as love, mercy, and justice would bring the wrath of God, “then the great God deal with you, as you have dealt with them, and require all their blood at your hands.”<sup>125</sup> He warned planters that “[God] has appointed a day wherein he will judge the world, will take an account of all our thoughts, words and actions,” and urged them, “O think betimes! Before you drop into eternity! . . . *He shall have judgement without mercy, that shewed no mercy.*”<sup>126</sup> Wesley declared, “I absolutely deny all slave-holding to be consistent with any degree of even natural justice.”<sup>127</sup>

Wesley’s antislavery writing represents the culmination of antislavery sentiments which were widely spread in the Atlantic world even before the American Revolution began. Wesley started collecting data and primary sources for his antislavery arguments before anyone could have anticipated the possibility of the Revolution. He developed what had been said by evangelicals during the revival period into a clear antislavery discourse; the publication of *Thoughts upon Slavery* was partly influenced by increasing doubts on the institution of slavery especially after the legislative precedents set by the Somerset case. It was also affected by Wesley’s personal relationship with Anthony Benezet, whose articles played a crucial role in the developmental process of antislavery discourses.<sup>128</sup> In this sense, the “low level” antislavery elements in proslavery tracts were more than rhetoric

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>123</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 48, 52.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 34–35.

<sup>128</sup>John Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, 4 vols. (repr., Philadelphia: Melchior Steiner, 1783), III:453.

and stimulated antislavery opinions in the evangelical mind. Methodists were mostly centralized and thus Wesley's opinions exerted the most authority. Under the influence of Wesley, many Methodists became more attuned to antislavery even before the Revolution. The rise of the antislavery campaign was not suddenly started by particular "heroes" like William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson during the revolutionary period, but closely related to these changes in the evangelical network in the period between the Great Awakening in the 1740s and the American Revolution in the 1770s.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This study has explained how fledgling antislavery ideas developed in the transatlantic evangelical network before the American Revolution. Close examination of "proslavery" literature reinvents this period into years of transformation of evangelical attitudes to slavery, far from a "dark age" of unquestioned proslavery expression. This scrutiny of proslavery discourse also attests to the importance of the antislavery elements inherent within evangelicalism. In the eighteenth century, evangelicals had qualms about the inconsistency between their religious principles and slavery and when an evangelical had developed antislavery sentiments, they were much more likely to become an antislavery activist on the basis of their religious principles. Throughout the eighteenth century, evangelicals used similar subjects in antislavery discourse, although their intensity changed with the course of time. In fact, the mid-eighteenth century was a particularly suitable time to start exposing the inconsistency between evangelicalism and slavery, as evangelical sensitivity was highly enhanced after the Great Awakening.

The rise of antislavery ideas which spread through the transatlantic evangelical network did not create a single antislavery religious community in the Atlantic world but rather enhanced a split of the evangelical network according to their opinions on slavery. This conflict divided not only the evangelical community into pro- and antislavery wings but also split the proslavery faction; there was a wide spectrum of opinions on slavery among proslavery evangelicals, according to their views on the necessity of Christian instruction, the recognition of slaves' humanity, and the legitimacy of slavery. However, the importance lies in that before the Revolution, evangelical attitudes toward slavery had already been challenged. With this background of conflict, the abolitionist movement was ready to be triggered by the relevant external stimuli: the American Revolution in the 1770s and 1780s.