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Thomas Jones of Southwark

by A. Skevington Wood

Dr. Skevington Wood here adds a chapter, one might say, to his account of The Inextinguishable Blaze, dealing with another phase of the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century, this time within the regular structure of the Church of England.

THE history of Anglican Evangelicalism is at last beginning to receive some of the attention it deserves. G. R. Balleine's *History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* remains a standard account and Canon L. E. Elliott-Binns has surveyed the eighteenth-century field in *The Early Evangelicals*. Several sectional studies have also appeared, but as yet no attempt has been made to trace the rise of the movement in the strategic London area. It was in the prosecution of such research that the present writer was confronted by the figure of Thomas Jones of Southwark and convinced of his considerable importance.

London Evangelicalism grew out of very small beginnings. Whereas the followers of John Wesley and George Whitefield possessed several places of worship¹ the Anglican Evangelicals as such were without a single church at their regular disposal until William Romaine was appointed to the afternoon Lectureship at St. Dunstan's in 1749. In the following year Martin Madan became Chaplain of the Lock Hospital and for three years these two faithful men alone held the Evangelical fort in London. In 1753 they were joined across the river by Thomas Jones, and Dr. Elliott-Binns rightly observes that "a much-needed reinforcement to the Evangelical cause",² came with his appointment. His brief ministry of nine years was significant out of all proportion to its duration. We shall seek to touch upon its salient features in this article, which does not pretend to be exhaustive, but simply represents a preliminary outline.

¹ Wesley acquired the Foundery in 1739, West Street and Snowsfields Chapels in 1743, and Spitalfields in 1750 (J. Henry Martin, *John Wesley's London Chapels* [1946], pp. 20, 47, 50, 53). Whitefield had the Tabernacle in Moorfields from 1741. Until the erection of a brick building in 1753, however, it was no more than a large temporary shed intended merely to shelter the open-air crowds from the cold and rain (Luke Tyerman, *The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield* [2nd edn., 1890], Vol. II, pp. 484-5). G. R. Balleine mentions Whitefield's Chapel in Tottenham Court Road which was not opened until 1756 (*A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* [3rd edn., 1951], p. 41).

² Leonard E. Elliott-Binns, *The Early Evangelicals: A Religious and Social Study* (1953), p. 239.

Of Jones' parentage we know nothing. Neither the day nor the place of his birth have been traced. The monumental tablet erected to his memory in Southwark Cathedral gives his age as thirty-three at the time of his death in 1762, and this is corroborated in *The Life and Remains of the Rev. Robert Housman* which asserts that Jones was born in 1729.³ His boyhood is a complete blank. We next meet him at King's College, Cambridge, where he matriculated on 22nd March, 1746.⁴ Thomas Stephens, who preached his funeral sermon, was a fellow undergraduate. Jones graduated B.A. in 1751 and M.A. in 1754.⁵ We infer that his family was of humble status from the fact that, like George Whitefield at Pembroke College, Oxford, Jones was a sizar, or poor scholar.

"It was the custom of each of the four Senior Fellows," writes Austin Leigh, the historian of King's College, "to keep a servitor, who waited on him and was fed on the remains of the Hall dinner".⁶ Nichols, in his celebrated *Literary Anecdotes*, tells us that the Fellow whom Jones served was one Ashton and adds that a sizar was "then called a Hound".⁷

In this period Jones was a stranger to the experience of saving grace and, like so many of his contemporaries, passed a gay, worldly and thoughtless existence. He had evidently found friends of a similar feather to flock with him, for his *Exposition of the Catechism* is dedicated to John Lloyd in order, he says, "to allure some of the companions of my former mirth and gaiety to give it the reading." Then he goes on, addressing Lloyd: "I know no way so likely as by prefixing the name of one of whom they all entertain the highest opinion, and to whose judgment they pay the greatest deference."⁸

On 1st March, 1753, Jones was appointed Junior Chaplain of the Collegiate Church of St. Saviour, Southwark⁹. His senior was John Smith, who had been instituted in 1730. The Chaplaincies dated back to the year 1611, when James I granted the rectory (i.e. the great tithes) of this church and all its endowments to the

³ Robert F. Housman, *The Life and Remains of the Rev. Robert Housman . . . Incumbent of St. Anne's, Lancaster* (1841), p. 1.

⁴ *Alumni Cantabrigienses . . . Part I. Earliest Times . . . to 1751* (1922-4), ed. John and J. A. Venn, Vol. II, p. 488. His College is wrongly given as Queens' on the monument and Dr. Elliott-Binns was misled by it (op. cit., p. 239).

⁵ *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, Vol. II, p. 488.

⁶ A. Austin Leigh, *The History of King's College, Cambridge* (1899), p. 102.

⁷ John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* (1812-15), Vol. VIII, p. 427.

⁸ *The Works of the Rev. Thomas Jones* (1763), p. xxiv.

⁹ William Thompson, *The History and Antiquities of the Cathedral Church of St. Saviour, Southwark* (1904), p. 136; Owen Manning and William Bray, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey* (1804-14), Vol. III, p. 580; Southwark Vestry Minutes and Church Registers.

churchwardens and parishioners, on condition of providing a master and usher for the parish grammar school and two Chaplains, who would also preach in the church, at £30 per annum¹⁰. The Chaplains were nominated to the Bishop of London after popular election. This plurality of incumbents constituted St. Saviour's a "Collegiate" Church.

Jones' evangelical awakening appears to have taken place some time after his installation as Chaplain. He was brought into contact with Martin Madan and William Romaine¹¹. It was probably through the influence of the latter that he was aroused to a sense of spiritual need and led to the place of repentance and regeneration¹². It is Romaine who supplies us with the only account we possess of Jones' conversion. It occurs in the funeral sermon preached in 1762 and is worth quoting at length, since it affords a valuable insight into contemporary Evangelical doctrine:

Before the Lord was pleased to call him he was walking in the error of his ways, like others, who knew not God. Such is the condition of mankind since the fall, that there is none righteous, no not one, there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become unprofitable, there is none that doeth good, no not one; not one of them can do any good, till grace come; and when it comes, it first discovers this their guilty, helpless state, and convinces them of it, in order that they may be willing to receive their deliverance freely from the mercy of God, and to give Him all the glory of it, in time and in eternity. No wonder then that the time was when our brother walked, as other men also walk, in the vanity of his mind, having his understanding darkened, and being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that was in him, because of the blindness of his heart. Of this God made him deeply sensible and he was never ashamed to own it. His first awakening was by the gradual working of the law upon his conscience. It was not by outward means, such as hearing the Word preached, or by some afflicting providence, sickness, trouble or the like, but by the inward conviction of sin, that the Spirit of God wrought upon his conscience. He had his strongest convictions in those places and times where he had not the benefit of any outward means. The views which he had hereby of his state and danger were very deep and very distressing. While he was under this soul-concern my acquaintance first began with him. And since that time, which is about eight years ago, our great intimacy and friendship has given me a constant opportunity of being a witness of God's gracious dealings with his soul. He went mourning for a long time, bowed down under the sense of guilt and the power of unbelief. In that school of humiliation he learnt self-knowledge. Here he was taught what sin is, namely the transgression of the law . . . Here he was taught the sad effect of a ruined, spoiled nature . . . Here he was taught the damnable nature of heart-sin, which is the fountain from which all sin flows . . . He learnt these lessons with such a deep experience, that the impression lasted all his days.

¹⁰ William Maitland, *The History of London from its Foundation to the Present Time* (1739), p. 1277; Manning and Bray, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 580.

¹¹ Nichols, op. cit., Vol. IX, p. 681; Marcus L. Loane, *Oxford and the Evangelical Succession* (1950), pp. 212-13.

¹² Elliott-Binns, op. cit., p. 239.

For when God showed him great mercy, and he was enabled to believe in the Lord Jesus, yet still he found nothing of himself wherein to glory. Humble and low in his eyes, he was ready to give the honour to Whom alone honour was due. Yes, after he was greatly strengthened and established, so as to live by faith on the Son of God, still he knew that all was mercy. Mercy, free mercy had from him all the praise¹³.

"About eight years ago" says Romaine, speaking in 1762. That would take us back to 1754 as the year of Jones' conversion¹⁴. But can we not narrow down the period still further? The evidence suggests that we can. At the beginning of 1754 Jones enjoyed a growing reputation as a preacher. Although not yet graduated M.A., and only twenty-five years of age, he had already given such proof of his pulpit talent that he was invited to preach at St. Bride's, Fleet Street on St. George's Day, April 23rd, before the several associations of the Laudable Order of the Anti-Gallicans, by appointment from the Grand President, Viscount Hereford. The sermon, printed by the Order, was based on Joshua 22: 11-13 and reflected all the national patriotism of the hour. It expressed abhorrence of the artifices and stratagems of the French court, its endeavours to subvert the English constitution, to ruin the country and reduce it to a province of France. The bulk of the sermon was in that strain, but in the peroration Jones reached a loftier plane:

Before I conclude, I beg leave seriously and earnestly to recommend to you (as it is more immediately my province) the cause of our holy religion . . . As you profess yourselves jealous of the honour of your country, be jealous for the honour of the Lord your God. While you endeavour to promote the prosperity of England, do what in you lies to support the Church of England; be careful especially to adhere to the doctrines of her Articles and Homilies, which, though at present very much despised, contain many excellent and Christian truths. Prove yourselves faithful disciples of Jesus Christ; that after you have served your country here, you may by a stedfast faith in His all-prevailing and all-atoning merits be admitted into "a country not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"¹⁵.

This first extant discourse of Thomas Jones indicates that thus early in 1754 he was inclined towards Evangelical views, but not dominated by them. He had the taste, but the fulness was not yet. His next published sermon was preached at the reopening of St.

13 William Romaine, *The Blessedness of Living and Dying in the Lord: Proved in a Sermon preached upon the Death of the Rev. Mr. Thomas Jones, Chaplain of St. Saviour's, Southwark* (1762), pp. 10-11; repeated in the Preface to *Jones' Works*, pp. vii-ix. Cf. *Works of the late Reverend William Romaine* (1796), Vol. VI, pp. 266-7.

14 The usually reliable Luke Tyerman in his *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, Founder of the Methodists* (1870-1), Vol. II, p. 324 puts Jones' conversion in 1751. He was evidently taken Romaine's "about eight years ago" as having been spoken in 1759, the year with which he is dealing in this reference.

15 Jones, *Works*, p. 278.

Botolph's, Bishopsgate, on 24th November of the same year¹⁶ and reveals Jones as an uncompromising advocate of Evangelical truth—so much so that the Rector, Dr. Thomas Ashton, whom he had served at King's College, Cambridge, took him to task for having asserted more than he could defend¹⁷. This same sermon provoked an anonymous reply charging him with nothing short of enthusiasm¹⁸. Moreover, one Philologos attacked Jones in *A Letter of Thanks* to Ashton for the publication of his own sermon on Luke 7: 5 as an antidote against the danger of prejudice in his disfavour amongst his parishioners arising from Jones' preaching. Philologos sympathized with the Rector in his situation, which had emerged, he said:

because you are not perpetually preaching about what Christ has done and suffered for them, a method now so long disused and so entirely out of fashion, that it would be the highest mark of enthusiastic madness in any man to attempt the revival of it¹⁹.

It is abundantly clear that between the Anti-Gallican sermon of April, 1754 and this of November, Thomas Jones had crossed the Evangelical Rubicon. It would seem reasonable, therefore, to date his conversion somewhere between these months. Are we not justified in assuming that Romaine was one of Jones' auditors on that St. George's Day in St. Bride's and that, struck by the preacher's obvious gifts and by the tone of his concluding words, he was led to cultivate an intimacy which eventually paved the way for his spiritual enlightenment?

It was at this time also that Jones was introduced to the Countess of Huntingdon, whose advice and conversation, we are told, contributed to his awakening²⁰. He joined Wesley, Whitefield and Romaine in preaching weekly in the drawing-room of her house in Park Street to what Seymour describes as "a very polite circle"²¹. For several years Thomas Jones was the only beneficed Evangelical clergyman in the entire London area. Martin Madan held the chaplaincy of the Lock Hospital from a committee of benefactors and Romaine was not instituted to St. Anne's, Blackfriars, until 1764.

Jones was now a burning and a shining light in the city. His services were more and more in demand. Even his critics were compelled to acknowledge his success. "Mr. Jones is somehow

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 371-392.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 371; cf. Nichols, *op. cit.*, Vol. VIII, p. 427.

¹⁸ *A Letter to Thomas Jones, in Answer to a Sermon at St. Bartholomew* (1755).

¹⁹ *A Letter of Thanks to the Rev. Thomas Ashton, by Philologos* (1755), p. 5.

²⁰ A. C. H. Seymour, *The Life and Times of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon* (1840), Vol. I, p. 325.

²¹ Ibid., p. 133.

or other become a wondrous popular preacher”, admitted the aforementioned Philologos, “and popularity makes him greatly called upon for charity sermons.”²² A number of them have been preserved in print, together with specimens of his regular discourses at St. Saviour’s. They are worthy of consideration as examples of the best type of Evangelical preaching. They brought his name into disrepute in an age that would have none of the pure milk of the Word, but Jones always maintained that his pulpit utterances contained nothing foreign to Anglican orthodoxy. He wrote to his parishioners in the preface to two of his sermons:

I have thought it my duty (as a minister of the Church of England) to preach no other doctrines among you than those of that Church. For this reason I was determined, by the grace of God, not to flatter, nor suffer you to slumber in your carnal security, but constantly set before you the misery of man in a state of nature. I have endeavoured to convince you that man is a fallen creature; that his nature is depraved and corrupt; that no works of his own can recommend him to the love and favour of God; that man must come to God *as a sinner*, and be justified by the free grace of God in Jesus Christ, applied to his soul by faith only; that he cannot take a single step in the divine life without the Almighty influence and assistance of the blessed Spirit of God. I have, moreover, informed you, that unless you are made sensible of your miserable state by nature, unless you experience the pardoning love of God upon your souls on this side the grave, i.e. unless you “are born again of the Spirit of God”, nothing can save you from the damnation of hell.

These are the doctrines I preach; and by these doctrines I have given many of you great offence: but why? Are they not the doctrines of the Gospel? Are they not the doctrines of the Church of England?²³

Jones’ firm loyalty to the Church’s standards is reflected in the fact that his longest work comprised eight sermons on the Catechism. Here he also urged compliance with the practices as well as with the doctrines of the Church. Whilst insisting that outward conformity is of no avail without a life lived by faith in the Son of God through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jones believed that where this vital condition was observed, no emphasis was too great to lay upon the means of grace. He warmly advocated the more frequent administration of Holy Communion.

The primitive Christians were scrupulously exact in the observance of this solemn rite; they seldom (never, indeed, on the Lord’s Day) held any religious meetings without partaking of the Holy Eucharist. Would to God that this practice was still observed in these our days!²⁴

In the preface quoted above in which Jones defended the content of his sermons by asking “Are they not the doctrines of the Gospel?”

²² *Letter of Thanks*, p. 5.

²³ “Repentance and Reconciliation with God Recommended and Enforced,” in Jones, *Works*, pp. 213-14.

²⁴ “An Exposition of the Church Catechism,” in Jones, *Works*, p. 189.

Are they not the doctrines of the Church of England?" he proceeded trenchantly:

Too many of our clergy know they are; and for that reason, in their disputes on these points, they very artfully evade every argument that is produced from her authority . . . I must therefore assert, and am ready to prove, that too many of our clergy, by their impious opposition to what they (I hope ignorantly) called the "new doctrine", are the avowed enemies of the Church of England. I pray God they may see their danger before it be too late, lest they find, hereafter, that they have been fighting against God²⁵.

In his sermon preached at the visitation of Archdeacon Thackeray, Jones had pressed home his pleas to his brethren in the ministry with unusual force and incisiveness. Taking as his subject "Ministerial Obligation" from Acts 20: 26, he fearlessly challenged his clerical hearers as to the nature of their vocation.

And now, my brethren, are we pure from the blood of all men? Let us lay our hands on our hearts, and ask ourselves the question; and may the eternal God, in Whose presence we are, enable us to answer aright!

Do we preach free salvation by Jesus Christ, or do we preach for doctrine the commandments of men? We have all solemnly engaged to preach free salvation by Jesus Christ, without man's merits or deservings. I would lay a greater stress upon this, because this doctrine is grown into great disrepute of late; and some men are not only content to neglect these great truths, but have the assurance to brand them enthusiasm. How they can reconcile this with their oaths and subscriptions, they are to determine; reconcile it to the Word of God they cannot²⁶.

Then he referred to the general complaint of the period—and not only of that period—that the churches were less frequented than formerly and that a widespread decline in moral standards had set in. He went on:

Now I may venture to affirm that the moral preaching, so much in vogue, is the cause of all this. In short, we have preached morality so long that we have hardly any morality left; and this moral preaching has made our people so very immoral that there are no lengths of wickedness that they are afraid of running into. And how should it be otherwise? We have forsaken the Christian doctrines, "The fountain of living waters", and have "hewed to ourselves broken cisterns which will hold no water"²⁷.

One probing query followed fast upon another in this penetrating sermon.

Do we make a conscience of our profession? Do we make it our study in everything to "approve ourselves unto God" and to save the souls committed to us? . . . Are we half so eager to hunt for souls as we are to hunt after preferment? . . . Are we not become base and contemptible before the people, by departing from the "commandment given unto us", and by running after the error of Balaam for reward? . . . If we do not preach the Gospel in sincerity, how can we appear at God's tremendous bar?

²⁵ Jones, *Works*, pp. 214-15.

²⁶ Visitation Sermon, in Jones, *Works*, p. 362.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 362-3.

And so he solemnly concluded:

Let us, my brethren, for God's sake, and the poor souls' sake committed to our charge, resolve, by His grace, to "preach Jesus Christ, and Him crucified".²⁸

It is not to be wondered at that hindrances were strewn in Jones' path. He was dubbed in derision a 'Methodist'—a nickname applied at this period to all who professed an Evangelical adherence, irrespective of their association with John Wesley. One by one his privileges were removed from him. There was an almshouse in the parish, endowed with a small stipend payable to the Chaplain of St. Saviour's on condition that he read morning and evening prayers in the Chapel and provided religious instruction for the inmates²⁹. For many years Jones' predecessors had not scrupled to appropriate the fee whilst neglecting the duty. He could not conscientiously continue this practice and therefore began to conduct Matins and Evensong and to expound the Scripture daily. The number of worshippers grew to considerable proportions and many were awakened to a new life in Christ. But as opposition reared its head against him, the authorities refused him the use of the Chapel, on the unusual score that the congregations were too large³⁰. After this exclusion, Jones set up a weekly lecture in his Church, so Romaine tells us, but it had not been long in existence before this, too, was prohibited³¹. Those who thus thwarted Jones' efforts were doubtless legally correct, since a voluntary week-day lecture would not be included in the episcopal licence. However, as Charles Hole observed, had there been any sympathy towards the Evangelical witness, these technicalities could easily have been adjusted.³² But where there was no will there was no way.

Jones was not to be discouraged, however, and pursued an extensive Christian literature campaign, in which he gave away many helpful books, some of which he took to every house in the parish. He catechized the children who came weekly to his house in Castle Street for that purpose and paid frequent pastoral visits amongst his parishioners, encouraging them to speak freely about their spiritual condition. By all these means he sought to fulfil what he considered to be his paramount obligation as a Christian minister—to win his people for Christ.

Meanwhile he was subject to constant vilification in a spate of controversial tracts and letters. These culminated in the attack of Dr. John Free, Headmaster of St. Olave's Grammar School,

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 366-7.

²⁹ Manning and Bray, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 580; Jones, *Works*, p. xv.

³⁰ A. Leedes Hunt, *Evangelical By-Paths* (1927), p. 26.

³¹ Romaine, *Works*, Vol. VI, p. 279.

³² Hole MSS in the archives of the Church Missionary Society.

addressed to Bishop Hoadly of Winchester, which accused Jones of having forged a missive from Samuel Hayward, a Dissenting minister in London, and subsequently reading it in St. Saviour's as received from another world³³. The charge was as ridiculous as it sounds. Hayward had, in fact, composed the letter on his deathbed and left it for a member of his flock, a Mr. Pearson, who was a linen draper in Cheapside. Hayward rather whimsically felt that it would be more impressive if it were to reach Pearson as from the mansions above, and so it was headed and worded accordingly. Jones, on being shown the letter, was struck by its novelty and, having carefully explained the circumstances, read it out from his pulpit as being likely to interest and edify his people. Although he produced affidavits signed by four reputable members of his congregation vouching for the accuracy of this version of the affair, Dr. Free persisted in his objection. One suspects, however, that the ulterior reason for Free's vituperation is revealed in his complaint that Jones' church was filled with eager worshippers whilst so many others remained empty.

All these bitter onslaughts proved a sore trial to Jones and, as Balleine remarks, "without his unflinching good temper he could not have stayed at his post"³⁴. That he did so is a tribute to his Christian fortitude and his unswerving belief in the principles he upheld. He found a more congenial sphere in the service of Lady Huntingdon, and was profoundly grateful for John Wesley's offer of friendship in 1759³⁵.

Thomas Jones was not destined, however, to be blessed with length of days. His health—never of the best—began to fail and he felt unable to cope with the magnitude of the task he had set himself. There was a possibility that a country living would be found for him through the good offices of Lady Huntingdon, but the prospect did not materialize³⁶. He died on 6th June, 1762, at the age of only thirty-three.

His significance in the early history of Anglican Evangelicalism is out of all proportion to the brevity of his career. His work and witness did much to prepare the way for the later spread and ultimate predominance of the Evangelical party within the London area. "The seraphic Mr. Jones,"³⁷ as Thomas Haweis designated him, deserves to be rescued from oblivion.

Cliff College, Calver.

³³ *Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. XXIX, p. 183.

³⁴ Balleine, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

³⁵ *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. III, p. 165; cf. Tyerman, *Life of John Wesley*, Vol. II, p. 325.

³⁶ Housman, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

³⁷ Thomas Haweis, *The Life of William Romaine* (1797), p. 52.