

A Celebration of the Eighteenth-Century Awakening:

William Romaine of Blackfriars

Sir Marcus Loane wrote of William Romaine's ministry in London:

For many long years William Romaine was the only beneficed clergyman of Evangelical character in the city north of the Thames. ... It is not a little striking to think of this solitary preacher who rose up like John the Baptist in the moral wilderness of London, and told out the vital call to repent and believe for thirty years almost alone. ... he was grave and scholarly in habit, quiet and retiring in spirit, and as inflexible as a pillar of iron in the Temple of Truth.¹

William Romaine's grandfather (Robert) and father (William) came from France to Hartlepool in 1682, when the father was about ten. The grandfather established a business as a corn merchant in Hartlepool. The father married there, and he and his wife had nine children; William Romaine, the subject of this paper, was the second child, born on September 25th, 1714. The father was a godly man, and William was brought up strictly in a Christian home. When he was approaching his seventieth birthday, Romaine wrote in a letter:

Mr. Whitfield [*sic*] used often to put me in mind, how singularly favoured I was – he had none of his family converted; and my father, and mother, and three sisters, were like those blessed people – “And Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus;” and, as they loved him again, so do we.²

The Hon. and Rev. William Bromley Cadogan, Rector of St. Luke, Chelsea, and Vicar of St. Giles, Reading, preached a funeral sermon at Blackfriars on the Sunday after Romaine's death, and in the following year (1796) published a biography. Cadogan, who was converted in 1780, had known Romaine for “from fifteen to twenty years”³ – from the time of his conversion, or a little earlier. In the following year, Thomas Haweis, Rector of Aldwincle in Northamptonshire, published a second biography. Haweis, a somewhat older man, had known Romaine for more than forty years,⁴ – from 1755, when Haweis matriculated at Christ Church. He felt that Cadogan's biography had some faults of commission and omission.

There is very little information on Romaine's early life. At the age of ten he was sent to the grammar school at Houghton-le-Spring, some twenty miles away from Hartlepool, also in County Durham. From there he went to the University of Oxford, matriculating as a member of Hart Hall on April 10th, 1731, when he was sixteen and a half years old. He soon migrated to Christ Church. He was a servitor – an undergraduate who was excused lecture fees and enjoyed certain other financial concessions in return for performing various tasks of a servant for some wealthier undergraduates. He was admitted B.A. in February 1734, when he was nineteen and a half. It is clear that Romaine was an able and diligent student. Haweis remarks:

His progress in literary attainments ... bore a proportion to his naturally strong parts, and the unwearied diligence he employed in mental improvements, so that notwithstanding the inferiority of his station in College, he soon acquired the respect, and attracted the notice of his superiors; and was admitted into the acquaintance of some of the ablest scholars of the University.⁵

¹ M.L. Loane, *Oxford and the Evangelical Succession* (1950), 212–213

² William Romaine, *Works* (1796), VII, 129, & VIII, 18; letter of 30/7/1784

³ W.B. Cadogan, *Funeral Sermon of the Rev. W. Romaine* (1795), 20

⁴ T. Haweis, *The Life of William Romaine* (1797), 75 & 141

⁵ Haweis, 17

One of Romaine's great loves throughout his life was the Hebrew language. The Hebrew psalter was his constant companion at breakfast.⁶ At Oxford he became to some degree attached to a group who were called Hutchinsonians; they followed the teaching of John Hutchinson (1674 – 1737), who believed that the Hebrew language represented perfection and that its etymologies were full of divine meanings; he denied the Newtonian theory of gravitation. His followers were men of high moral standards and were strict high churchmen, who therefore eschewed anything that smacked of Methodism. It is difficult to know the extent of Romaine's attachment to this group: John Reynolds, the historian of Oxford Evangelicals, wrote that "it may be doubted whether he long entertained their tenets".⁷ According to Haweis, William Romaine knew of the group of serious men, named methodists, then meeting in Oxford, but made sure not to associate with them.⁸

Romaine was made deacon on October 17th., 1736, when he was aged twenty-two, by the bishop of Hereford, his title being the curacy of Lewtrenchard, near Okehampton in Devon, where he remained for only a few months. He was ordained priest by the bishop of Winchester on December 15th., 1738. It appears that he was for some ten years curate of Banstead in Surrey, before moving to London, probably in the later 1740s. He had been admitted M.A. on October 15th., 1737.

Senior members of the University of Oxford were invited from time to time to preach before the university, and William Romaine was called to this office in March 1739. He chose to deal with the teaching of William Warburton; Warburton had published in 1737 the first volume of his work, *The Divine Legation of Moses*. In this curious work Warburton sought to uphold the divine origin of the Mosaic Law by the singular argument that it contained no doctrine of eternal life. Romaine characterised Warburton's argument as "absurd, and destructive of all Revelation".⁹ A warm public correspondence ensued, initiated by Warburton. The second volume of Warburton's work was published in 1741, and on December 12th. of that year Romaine again occupied the university pulpit. He returned to the attack and preached a second sermon, in which "Future Rewards and Punishments [were] proved to be the Sanctions of the Mosaic Dispensation".¹⁰

Sir Daniel Lambert, a City merchant, lived at Banstead, where Romaine was curate, and had a high regard for him. When Sir Daniel was elected Lord Mayor for part of the year 1741,¹¹ he appointed Romaine as his chaplain. In this capacity William Romaine preached before the Lord Mayor, Aldermen, and Citizens of London at St. Paul's Cathedral, on September 2nd., 1741, when he was twenty-six years of age. His sermon was entitled "No Justification by the law of nature", proved from an exposition of Romans 2: 14-15. Though this address was a theological argument rather than a sermon, it focussed on a fundamental subject, and one about which there was considerable confusion.

Romaine's love of Hebrew and his scholarly abilities led him to propose in 1745 a new edition of the concordance and lexicon of the Hebrew scriptures, a work by Mario di Calasio (1550 – 1620), first published in 1622. This occupied a great deal of his time for several years: the first two volumes were published in 1747, the third in 1748, and the fourth in 1749. It is likely that he moved to London at this period to be able to supervise the work of publication. It appears that he hoped that his move to London might furnish opportunities: in Haweis' words, he came

little doubting that his occasional sermons would pave his way to further notice, and his abilities, which self-love had not depreciated, procure him more rapid advancement in the great City, where superior talents could hardly fail to engage attention¹²

If this was his hope, he was disappointed.¹³

⁶ *Works*, 89

⁷ J.S. Reynolds, *The Evangelicals at Oxford, 1735 – 1871* (1953), 25 n. 7

⁸ Haweis, 18

⁹ *Works*, VI, 3

¹⁰ *Works*, VI, 59

¹¹ V. Hope, *My Lord Mayor* (1989), 114, 187

¹² Haweis, 23-24

¹³ Haweis, 24

He could not but be abundantly mortified to find himself neglected, unnoticed, and left a prey to the bitterness of disappointment, if not to the apprehensions of distress. Without a protector, without a church, or the most distant prospect of attaining any one of the objects he had in view.¹⁴

So Romaine decided in 1748 to abandon London and return to the north. At this point, God in his sovereign providence interposed. In Haweis' words, Romaine

was on the pavement passing to the water-side, in order to embark for his distant native country, when he was accosted by a gentleman whom he did not know, who asked, if his name was Romaine. On his replying in the affirmative, he apologized for the abruptness of his address, informed him, that having known his father for some years before, the striking resemblance he bore to him, had led him to put the question. Enquiries for his family having brought on a conversation, which led to his present views, and past disappointment of procuring employment in London, – the gentleman informed him, the lectureship of the parish in which he resided, St. George's, Botolph lane, was then vacant, and he promised to exert his utmost influence to procure his election, if he would stay and await the event. Mr. Romaine was startled, he consented, his trunk was disembarked, he returned to his lodging, and his unknown friend secured his election, and fixed the future scene of his ministrations in the city, on which he was that very moment turning his back for ever.¹⁵

This crucial event occurred when he was thirty-four years old.

There is little evidence as to the date or the circumstances of Romaine's conversion. Haweis wrote, referring to those events of 1748,

all this happened, when as yet Mr. Romaine seems not to have enjoyed those evangelical views of gospel truth, of which he was afterwards so zealous a defender. I cannot exactly ascertain when he became settled and grounded in the faith, but, probably, like most others he grew clearer by degrees, through the word, prayer, and experience.¹⁶

It would appear that William Romaine, like many of the leaders of the evangelical revival, came to an understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ after his ordination. It does not appear that any human intermediary was involved, and, as is often the case, particularly in those circumstances, he came gradually to an understanding of the truth as it is in Jesus. He described his conversion in a letter written in 1766, in which he stated of himself:

He was a very, very vain, proud young man, knew almost every thing but himself, and therefore was mighty fond of himself. He met with many disappointments to his pride, which only made him prouder, till the Lord was pleased to let him see and feel the plague of his own heart. ... In his despair of all things else, he betook himself to Jesus, and he was most kindly received.¹⁷

William Romaine "betook himself to Jesus" at some point in the later 1740s, possibly as early as 1745, but probably in 1748 or immediately thereafter. Haweis summarised the situation: "From the time he began his ministry in London to his settlement at St. Dunstan's, his own views of evangelical truth eminently improved."¹⁸

Romaine's appointment to the lectureship at St. George's, Botolph Lane, in November 1748 began a period of seventeen years, during which he held several such appointments. Lectureships derived from earlier times, and had often allowed Puritan ministers to exercise a preaching ministry. Parishioners or wealthy patrons created endowments, which financed regular sermons in parish churches, in addition to

¹⁴ Haweis, 24

¹⁵ Haweis, 25–26

¹⁶ Haweis, 27

¹⁷ Haweis, 29; cf. T. Shenton, *An Iron Pillar* (2004), 57. The allusion to his having 'seen his folly two and twenty years ago' (*Works*, VII, 392–393; 1767) referred to his reading and did not explicitly or necessarily refer to his conversion.

¹⁸ Haweis, 146

the regular sermons preached by the incumbent or his curate. The lectureships involved no responsibility beyond preaching the sermon or sermons required; there was no cure of souls. They were not usually well paid. They furnished opportunities for evangelical ministers in the eighteenth century.

In the following year, 1749, Romaine was elected lecturer at St. Dunstan in the West, in Fleet Street.¹⁹ He held this lectureship for the rest of his life – for forty-six years. This involved a weekly sermon on Sunday and Thursday evenings for eight months of the year (during the Law Terms). When a new vicar, Alexander Jacob, was appointed in 1758, a period of difficulty for Romaine began. Romaine had been preaching throughout the year, but it was discovered that the endowment of the lectureship was only for the period while the courts were in session; Romaine was told that he could not preach during the vacations, and that the lecture would have to be at seven o'clock in the evening. A court case arose that was decided in favour of the churchwardens.

The churchwardens refused to admit the large congregation until the exact hour of the lecture, and would not light the church in winter, so that Romaine had to hold a candle as he preached, and his hearers were in darkness. In the providence of God it happened, probably after some years, that these difficulties came to the notice of the bishop of London, Richard Terrick, who gave instructions that the harassment should cease.²⁰ After this, Romaine met no more opposition at St. Dunstan's. Many of his published series of sermons were first delivered there.

We shall not trace all the lectureships and similar appointments which Romaine held between 1748 and 1765 in conjunction with the continuing lectureship at St. Dunstan's. One, however, is particularly worthy of note: for five years, from 1750 to 1755,²¹ William Romaine was morning preacher at St. George's, Hanover Square, then, as now, a very fashionable church. Here his preaching drew large numbers, with the consequence that there were complaints by parishioners about the number and the quality of those filling the church, and the Rector terminated the arrangement. One peer (the Earl of Northampton) commented on the situation: "he was not a little surprised to hear those murmur, that the House of God was so frequented, who could bear the greater crowd of the Play-House, and never complain!"²²

It was while he was morning preacher at St. George's, Hanover Square, that Romaine first made the acquaintance of the Countess of Huntingdon. For many years he assisted her work, preaching in her chapels, particularly in the long summer vacation. Romaine was a convinced minister and member of the Church of England. Because of this he would not preach in a dissenting chapel, which would have been an offence against the church order of the Church of England, and he did not preach in the open air. He was willing to preach in private premises. At that time Lady Huntingdon believed that she was entitled to appoint as many clergymen as she wished to be her chaplains, and that they were entitled to read the service and preach in any building which was designated as her chapel. Romaine was glad to assist, preaching at her house and in her chapels; in January 1761 he was appointed one of her chaplains. He continued to assist each year until the Spa Fields judgement in 1779. In this judgement an ecclesiastical court prohibited the Countess's chaplains from officiating in the building in Islington which had been let to her, known as Spa Fields Chapel; she then registered her chapels as dissenting places of worship. After this Romaine, and several other clergy, felt unable to assist in her chapels, though relations between him and the Countess remained cordial.

In 1753 the Whig administration brought the Jew Naturalization Bill (colloquially called the Jew Bill) before Parliament, which provided that Jews might "be naturalized by Parliament, without receiving the Lord's Supper". This raised an issue on which there were strong feelings in the country. The City was strongly opposed to the Bill. The Tories declared that it marked the abandonment of Christianity. During the year Romaine issued two booklets on the subject: first, when the matter had been approved by

¹⁹ The church still stands today. It was rebuilt in the early 1830s, and suffered bomb damage in the Second World War. It is now a Guild Church. Shenton states that it was demolished in 1830: cf. Shenton, 99

²⁰ Haweis, 57–58; Richard Terrick was Bishop of London from 1764 to 1777.

²¹ 1/4/1750 – 28/9/1755

²² Haweis, 48

Parliament but had not received the Royal Assent, *A modest apology against naturalising the Jews*, and later, after it had been enacted, *An Answer to the Considerations of the Jew Bill* – a reply to a pamphlet that supported the change. For Romaine the Jew Bill had two great faults: it appeared to be seeking to overturn the position allotted to the Jews in Scripture for their rejection of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah; and it would break the Protestant Christian consensus which the Constitution presupposed. Thomas Haweis felt that Romaine was wrong: “he acted, I am persuaded, conscientiously, supposing it, opposition to the revealed will of God, and an attempt to defeat the fulfilment of the prophecies.”²³ Cadogan, however, thought that Romaine was right:

By his opposition ..., both in preaching and print, he rose and increased in favour with God and man. His reasonings upon this subject, and answers to every thing that was attempted in vindication of a project so contrary to the decrees and declarations of heaven, and so injurious to the religious, civil, and commercial interests of this country, were collected by himself in a pamphlet, which was reprinted by the citizens of London in the year 1753, and it is a masterly performance, which will bear printing again.²⁴

There was great objection to the Act throughout the country. Some six months after it had received the Royal Assent, it was repealed.²⁵

On February 11th., 1755, William Romaine, aged forty, married Miss Mary Price. There were three children of the marriage. The eldest was William, baptised in June 1756. In due course he was ordained into the Church of England; he survived his father.²⁶ Of the daughter nothing is known: she may have died young. A second son, Adam, was born about 1758. He chose the army for his career, but died at Trincomalee in Sri Lanka from dysentery early in June 1782, at the age of twenty-four. This was a sore trial for his parents.

When I first saw the letter which brought us the account, I knew the general’s seal to it, and fearing the contents, I looked up for the presence, and for the support of my good Master, and my old Friend; and he answered me in the words of a great Believer, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.” He has a right to do what he will with his own. Then he enabled me to reply, “Blessed be the name of the Lord,” and I do praise him for giving me some of Job’s resignation, that I could use his words with the same spirit.²⁷

Romaine preached before the University, for what proved to be the final occasion, on March 20th., 1757. As usual there was a sermon in the morning and in the afternoon on the same text. The title of the sermons was “The Lord our Righteousness”; they were an exposition of Isaiah 45: 8 – “Drop down ye heavens from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together. I the Lord have created it.”²⁸ These were important sermons and fine examples of his preaching.

In the first sermon Romaine sought to open ‘the true sense and meaning of the words’. He dealt with the awful consequences of disobedience to God and his law:

He gave us an holy, just, and good law, to which he required uninterrupted obedience of every faculty of soul and body. ... But if we pay it not, then we are unjust; and the law for the first offence pronounces its curses upon us. ... If we continue not in all things, if we fail but in one point, then we rob God of his due.²⁹

He challenged his hearers:

²³ Haweis, 58–59

²⁴ *Works*, VII, 35

²⁵ B. Williams, *The Whig Supremacy 1714 – 1760* (1939), 318

²⁶ The Rev. William Romaine (1756–1826), M.A., D.D., of Trinity College, Oxford; he died at Reading.

²⁷ *Works*, VIII, 110 – 111; 13/12/1782

²⁸ *Works*, VI, 143 – 186

²⁹ *Works*, VI, 152

Are you then, my brethren, in the number of the righteous, or of the unrighteous? Is it not of infinite consequence to know what state you are in?³⁰

Having pressed home the teaching that all had sinned, and come short of the glory of God, he declared:

This is our condition. We are all unrighteous: And we are without strength to attain any righteousness of our own; because we are poor broken debtors, who have nothing to pay.³¹

The most important question that engages the attention of every sinner is: How can I be made righteous? What satisfaction can I make for God's broken law?³² Isaiah answers that question with glad tidings:

He sees the heavens from above dropping down righteousness, and the earth opening and receiving it. The blessing is so unmerited, so inestimable, that one would be tempted to ask – How could God be so gracious?³³

Romaine answered this last question:

Glory be to his free grace, which hath found out a righteousness for us, against which law and justice cannot make the least exception, and which hath preserved the glory of all his attributes inviolate, and that is the righteousness of the God-man Christ Jesus.³⁴

He continued: "The God-man undertakes in our nature to pay perfect satisfaction to his Father's justice. Accordingly he paid the law an infinitely perfect obedience."³⁵

He applied this truth:

This is the righteousness of God to which every sinner must submit, if he be ever discharged from condemnation. He must receive it from God as his free gift – without the least merit or deserving. And he must trust wholly to it, never presuming to add anything of his own to it, as a condition of justification. These are hard lessons to the pride of our corrupt hearts.³⁶

He continued:

Salvation is not of man. It belongeth unto the Lord. It is one of the infinitely perfect works of God: for there is no saviour besides him The Holy Ghost the comforter has now the conducting of the work of salvation.³⁷

Christ's righteousness must be imputed to sinful man:

There is no salvation without righteousness, and it is of the Lord's free grace that he is received as righteous, through the righteousness of Christ imputed to him by faith. Christ's righteousness can be made ours only by imputation.³⁸

Man cannot justify himself:

That man never saw the corruption and plague of his own heart, who dreams of working out for

³⁰ *Works*, VI, 153

³¹ *Works*, VI, 154 – 155

³² *Works*, VI, 155

³³ *Works*, VI, 156

³⁴ *Works*, VI, 157

³⁵ *Works*, VI, 157

³⁶ *Works*, VI, 158

³⁷ *Works*, VI, 160

³⁸ *Works*, VI, 161

himself a righteousness, in which he may appear faultless at the bar of justice.³⁹

In the second sermon Romaine made “some practical remarks upon” the words of the text. He dealt with *the state of man* before righteousness was poured down, proving that man is helpless and without strength to save himself, quoting from Scripture, Article IX, and the homily “On the misery of man”.⁴⁰ He reminded his audience that they had subscribed the Reformers’ teachings.⁴¹ He contrasted the scriptural doctrine with the preaching of his day.

how seldom do we hear anything from the pulpit about original sin, or about there being none righteous, no not one. Instead of this antiquated doctrine, what is more common than to hear declamations upon the sufficiency of human reason in matters of religion, upon the dignity of human nature and upon moral rectitude?⁴²

Man’s need of *a righteousness that comes from above* was no new doctrine: he quoted at length from the Homily “On the Salvation of Mankind”, and from the conclusion of the Homily “On the misery of man”.⁴³

The third practical remark dealt with *how this righteousness is attained* – by faith. He quoted Scripture, Article XIII (Of works done before the grace of Christ), Article XI (Of Justification), and the Homily to which that Article refers.⁴⁴ We must seek this righteousness in the way that God has appointed:

he always bestows it freely – not upon those who merit it, for then it would not be free – Merit and free grace are opposites, but he bestows it upon the unrighteous and ungodly.⁴⁵

It is exceedingly difficult to convince men, that this is the gospel method of salvation. Their pride will not submit to it – no not to be saved – by the righteousness of God – they will try, even after they are convinced of the necessity of God’s righteousness, to add something of their own to it.⁴⁶

The fourth, and final, practical remark showed *what are the constant fruits* of the righteousness of Christ. Righteousness will make us fruitful in good works. Romaine supported this with a substantial quotation from the Homily upon faith.⁴⁷

In his conclusion, Romaine pressed home the application of his text. The Reformation had delivered our church from the Roman doctrine of works and merit.

these principles, glory be to God’s good providence, are still in our articles, and homilies, and liturgy. But where shall we find them? Who maintains them? Who writes, who preaches in their defence?⁴⁸

He exhorted his hearers:

Oh that his good Spirit may practically convince every one who hears me this day, of his want of some better righteousness, than his own, and may he enable us to wait upon the Lord our righteousness, until the text be fulfilled in us⁴⁹

³⁹ *Works*, VI, 164

⁴⁰ *Works*, VI, 167 – 168

⁴¹ *Works*, VI, 169

⁴² *Works*, VI, 169

⁴³ *Works*, VI, 171 – 172, 175

⁴⁴ *Works*, VI, 177 – 178

⁴⁵ *Works*, VI, 179

⁴⁶ *Works*, VI, 180

⁴⁷ *Works*, VI, 181 – 182

⁴⁸ *Works*, VI, 184

⁴⁹ *Works*, VI, 185

These sermons gave great offence, and Romaine was told that he would not again be invited to take the university pulpit. Though he had not planned to publish the sermons, he did so, and left it to

The friends of our church to judge, whether there be any thing herein advanced contrary to scripture, and to the doctrines of the reformation.⁵⁰

William Romaine was a man of earnest prayer. The Seven Years' War began in 1756. In this war France was Great Britain's main enemy, but the war turned Europe into an armed camp of opposing alliances; and there was war with the French in Canada. In this time of national difficulty and continuing spiritual need, a movement of prayer began, which Romaine later described:

In the year 1756, a weekly hour of prayer was agreed upon by several religious clergy and laity, in order to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, till he should be pleased to put a stop to the calamities of that time. He did hear us, glory be to a prayer-hearing God, and he turned our supplications into praises. About that period it began to be laid very near my heart to pray earnestly and often for the prosperity of our Sion, for which I never fail to make intercession in all my addresses to the throne of grace. But once a week, on Friday, I have what I call the clergy's litany. In which, after general petitions for the out-pouring of the Spirit upon all the ministers of our church, I make mention of those my fellow-labourers, whom God has highly honoured in making them faithful and useful in the ministry.⁵¹

In 1757 Romaine published *An Earnest Invitation to the Friends of the Established Church to join ... in setting apart an hour every week*. He pointed out that, when a land sins, God will visit; but that whenever a people turned to God and confessed their sins, he turned away from his fierce anger.⁵² He set forth his invitation:

Several ministers of the established church from the consideration of our danger, and seeing no remedy more effectual than prayer and supplication, have resolved to spend part of every Lord's Day in this holy exercise. They have chosen this day, ... because they wanted to have the joint prayers of those persons, who might be hindered on other days, but who were now entirely free from worldly avocations: and they have chosen to spend from eight to nine o'clock in the evening, because it is the time that could best be spared from the duties of the day, ...⁵³

We earnestly request our brethren of the established church, and all our fellow Christians to join with us in this religious design.⁵⁴

Romaine exhorted that, at the appointed hour, the petitioners should mourn the sinfulness of their own natures and the sinfulness of their own lives, consider Britain's national wickedness and the need to humble themselves lower, and recollect that God was visiting the nation for their public sins, to turn it to him in national repentance. God had given them time to pray against the calamities. Let them pray in humiliation and repentance. He called for prayer "for the preservation of the protestant church, and all its members throughout Europe, and especially for the peace of our established church, and for all orders and degrees of its ministers".⁵⁵

May the love of God dispose us also to pray for all dissenting congregations, which love the Lord Jesus in sincerity. May he shed that love abroad in all our hearts, which alone can effectually free us from all party spirit.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ *Works*, VI, 145 – 146

⁵¹ *Works*, VII, 54

⁵² 2 Chronicles 6: 24–25

⁵³ *Works*, II, 423

⁵⁴ *Works*, II, 424

⁵⁵ *Works*, II, 433–434

⁵⁶ *Works*, II, 434

On January 16th., 1757, Romaine preached a sermon on *The Duty of Praying for Others: enforced by some arguments taken from the success of those prayers, which the church made for St. Peter's deliverance from prison.*⁵⁷ His first points were that if God intends to deliver the faithful, he puts it into their heart to pray (Romans 8: 26), and that the prayer of faith never returns without blessing (Revelation 8). "You have a key that will open any lock, let no christian lie in chains by you, either in bodily or spiritual chains."⁵⁸ He exhorted his hearers to set aside from eight o'clock to nine on the Lord's-Day evening. The call was to earnest prayer.

Oh then let us lay aside all trifling matters, and attend strictly to this. ... Let us pray more, and talk less. Let us speak more to God, and less of men. Go to the throne of grace at the appointed hour, and use your interest with him that sitteth upon the throne. Don't spend your evening in talking of other men's matters, but mind your own duty.⁵⁹

Romaine later recorded his testimony:

he humbled us at his footstool; we asked pardon for our national departure from the living God; we implored his mercy through Christ; and he heard prayer, he answered prayer, and we glorified him.⁶⁰

Romaine reissued *An Earnest Invitation to the friends of the Established Church* in two subsequent times of particular national and spiritual need, in 1779 and in 1795.

William Romaine's position as a minister of the Church of England was relatively unusual. He was a middle-aged man with no formal pastoral responsibility, no cure of souls. His lectureship at St. Dunstan in the West, and the other lectureships he also held in the period 1748 to 1765, were very important responsibilities, but they carried no duty of pastoral care for a congregation. He received many other invitations to preach; and in the law vacations he would regularly preach in the Countess of Huntingdon's chapels, as well as in other parts of the country – he went north for a period each summer to visit family in Hartlepool and would take any opportunities to preach that were offered to him. Nonetheless, he had no fixed station.

While on a preaching tour of Yorkshire in 1764 he learned from a newspaper that his name had been put forward for the living of St. Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe and St. Ann, Blackfriars, in the City of London. St. Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe acquired its unusual name, because it was near the site of a large building established by King Edward III for the storage of state robes and other effects. Both churches had been burned down in the Great Fire of 1666: the church of St. Ann was not rebuilt, but the church of St. Andrew was rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren. St. Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe suffered severe bomb damage in the Second World War, so that only the shell of the building was left standing; it has been restored, but the interior as Romaine knew it, and the memorial to Romaine, no longer exist.

Presentation to the living was in the gift of the Crown and the parishioners alternately. The Rector died in August 1764, and it was the parishioners' turn to elect a Rector. Romaine's friends, and chief among them the Countess of Huntingdon, saw this as a great opportunity to establish an outstanding preacher of the Gospel in a permanent station within the City of London.⁶¹ She encouraged John Thornton and Martin Madan to speak with the parishioners on Romaine's behalf – Romaine felt that it was inappropriate for a minister of the Gospel to canvass for votes.

As a candidate for the Rectory Romaine preached a sermon at Blackfriars on September 30th., 1764, choosing as his text 2 Corinthians 4: 5 – "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake", expounding first how these words related more immediately to

⁵⁷ *Works*, VI, 187–210

⁵⁸ *Works*, VI, 196

⁵⁹ *Works*, VI, 208, 209

⁶⁰ *Works*, II, 418

⁶¹ [A.C.H. Seymour,] *The Life and Times of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon* (1844), I, 361

ministers, and secondly how they related to their people. Romaine made clear the Gospel which he was determined to preach. During the sermon, in considering “ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” he commented:

Some have insinuated it was from pride, that I would not go about the parish from house to house canvassing for votes; but truly it was another motive. I could not see how this could promote the glory of God. How can it be for the honour of Jesus, that his ministers, who have renounced fame, and riches, and ease, should be most anxious and earnest in the pursuit of those very things which they have renounced? ... when my friends of their own accord put me up as a candidate, to whom I have to this hour made no application, directly or indirectly, I left you to yourselves. If you do choose me, I desire to be your servant for Jesus’ sake, and if you do not, the will of the Lord be done.⁶²

A public vestry was held on October 14th., 1764, to reduce the candidates from three to two. This was an improper procedure: there should have been a single contest with the three candidates. After a scrutiny the result was then: John Warner 77; William Romaine 71; James Smith 36. A second vestry was held on January 22nd., 1765. Warner contested the right of the churchwardens to reduce the number of candidates from three to two, declared that he had won the first election, and refused to stand in the second election. The result of the second election was Romaine 134; Smith 105.

The election, however, was referred to the court of chancery. In the long period of uncertainty that followed, Romaine was at peace. Thus he wrote:

nothing is yet done at Blackfriars: but Jesus does all things well, he times all things for the best; I am sure of it; therefore I wait my Lord’s time, and blessed waiting it is.⁶³

The judgement of the Lord Chancellor, Lord Henley, was handed down on January 28th., 1766. The parishioners had no right to hold an election to reduce the number of candidates; the first election, therefore, was invalid. In the second election, the only valid one, there were only two candidates; Mr. Romaine had the majority of votes, and was therefore elected. A publican in the parish was an energetic supporter of Romaine’s candidature. Romaine called on him, therefore, after his election to thank him for his support.

“Indeed, Sir,” he replied, “I am more indebted to you, than you to me; for you have made my wife, who was one of the worst, the best woman in the world.”⁶⁴

William Romaine preached his first sermon as Rector on Sunday, March 2nd., 1766.⁶⁵ At the age of 51 he became an incumbent in the Church of England, with a cure of souls; he remained Rector for twenty-nine years – for the rest of his life. Though he continued to be out of London in the summer law vacations, and though he continued to be lecturer at St. Dunstan in the West, St. Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe was the centre of his ministry from 1766, requiring sermons on Sundays and on weekdays. Haweis stated:

His services in the pulpit at least from the time he entered on Blackfriars, were hardly ever less than four or five times a week, and frequently more, as the calls of providence, or the importunity of his friends, demanded his labours⁶⁶

There were several practical matters which required attention. He demolished the rectory, which had for some while been used as a warehouse, and built a new rectory, which he occupied from 1768. He had the high walls which surrounded the church removed, to improve light and air, and widened the

⁶² *Works*, V, 411–412

⁶³ Letter CXLII in the one-volume nineteenth-century edition of Romaine’s works, dated January 16th., 1766.

⁶⁴ *The Evangelical Magazine*, III (1795), 448

⁶⁵ Romaine was instituted to the living on Tuesday, February 25th., 1766, and inducted on Wednesday, February 26th.

⁶⁶ Haweis, 159–160

approach paths. In particular, in 1774 he erected a gallery at the west end of the church to increase the seating capacity.

When his ministry at Blackfriars began, Romaine was the only evangelical incumbent in the City of London. London then was different from what is now termed London. The statement about Romaine refers particularly to the ancient city, often called the square mile; nothing south of the Thames was deemed to be London, and a place like Islington was a pleasant and desirable rural village. It was not until John Newton came to the living of St. Mary, Woolnoth, in 1780, that there was another evangelical incumbent in the City.

Thus Romaine laboured in season and out of season. Haweis recorded that:

He is said never to have been disabled for service a single sabbath during fifty years, a felicity of a nature so singular as I never remember to have happened to any man whose life was so prolonged, and whose labours were so abundant.⁶⁷

Romaine preached what was to be his last sermon at St. Dunstan in the West on Thursday, June 4th., 1795; his final illness began on Saturday, June 6th., and, with some periods of greater strength, came to its end with his death early on Sunday, July 26th., 1795, aged 80 years. The Hon. and Rev. W.B. Cadogan preached a funeral sermon at St. Andrew-by-the-Wardrobe on Sunday, August 2nd. The funeral, conducted by the Rev. William Goode, took place on Monday, August 3rd.; his body was placed in a vault in the church.

Romaine was warmly attached to the Church of England. He wholeheartedly accepted and advocated the doctrines of its Articles and Homilies, and he loved the scriptural worship of the Book of Common Prayer. His sermons bear regular testimony to this position. Nonetheless, in his *Earnest Invitation to Friends of the Established Church*, he wrote “We earnestly request our brethren of the established church, and all our fellow Christians to join with us in this religious design”.⁶⁸ These two positions were not incompatible. It appears that in his younger days, before his conversion, his attitude towards Dissent was severe. Some anecdotes, however, may reflect not his attitude to Dissent, but his tendency to intolerance of those whom he felt were wasting his time.

Most summers, when he was in Portswood Green near Southampton, he was willing to preach in the capacious laundry of his host, Mr. William Taylor, to as many as could find admission.⁶⁹ On Sundays and on lecture evenings he was pleased to attend the dissenting meeting that Mr. Taylor attended, if he found the church doors shut against him, which they usually were. One finds regular reference to the minister of this dissenting congregation, Mr. William Kinsbury, in Romaine’s correspondence with Mr. Taylor.

Although I did not take a formal leave of Mr. Kinsbury, yet he and his are in my mind, and on my heart. May the good Lord bless him, and make him a blessing.⁷⁰

Again, in reference to prayer,

My brother Kinsbury is recommended, especially for tomorrow, HIM and HIS.⁷¹

One cannot help thinking that the anecdote of William Jay is inaccurate and mischievous:

Mr. Romaine also for many years annually visited Mr. Taylor ... ; but he would never enter the meeting at Southampton with the family, nor speak in their unconsecrated premises to the poor,

⁶⁷ Haweis, 159

⁶⁸ *Works*, II, 424

⁶⁹ Haweis, 132

⁷⁰ Haweis, 101; 31/10/1783

⁷¹ Haweis, 104; June 1790. Cf. letters, apparently to Mr. Kinsbury, *Works*, VII, 355 – 360, and references, apparently to Mr. Kinsbury, VIII, 19, 21, 61, 90, 98, 105, 107, 112, 114, 123, 132, 136

and ignorant, and perishing, who would have hung upon his lips. But high-churchism had no scruples to accept the accommodation about the house, and table, and carriage, and horses, for these were not schismatics, though their owner was.⁷²

Romaine would not have spoken in a dissenting meeting house; in doing that he was simply conforming to the rules of his denomination and preserving his integrity and standing in the Church of England. The rest of Jay's criticisms, however, are incorrect, and inconsistent with the spirit towards Mr. Kinsbury revealed in Romaine's correspondence. Haws summarised Romaine's position:

The excellent of the earth, without respect to their denomination, he honoured, attended, countenanced. It was not in his view a matter of the first importance, whether men assembled at church or at meeting, provided they gathered to the true Shiloh, and without that, it was no matter where they assembled⁷³

And, again:

For however he still preferred the order of the church of England, when truly administered, he no more excommunicated, unchristianized, or degraded from the sacred ministry, those who differed from him in modes and forms of administration, and acknowledged ... that there may be a true church, where there is neither surplice, steeple, or bells.⁷⁴

In his younger days, and particularly in the Warburton controversy, he had been a very vigorous controversialist. In later years he held back from controversy: he was willing to write against error, and denounce error in his preaching; but he would not indulge in controversy in the press, nor defend himself publicly against gainsayers. Though Romaine's preaching was robustly Calvinistic, he did not enter into the Calvinist / Arminian controversy. He wrote in 1772:

For more than twenty years my dear master has delivered me from a spirit of controversy, and I trust he will deliver me to the end. Let others *dispute* about salvation, I will leave them and seek to *enjoy* it. And I do – glory be to my God. I am getting in my harvest, while they are only sowing the seed.⁷⁵

Romaine had a fixed daily routine, which was a manifestation of his careful management of time. Cadogan recorded:

His hour of breakfast was six in the morning, of dinner half-past one at noon, and of supper seven in the evening. His family was assembled to prayer at nine o'clock in the morning, and at the same hour at night. From ten o'clock to one he was generally employed in visiting the sick and his friends; he retired to his study after dinner, ... After the evening service in his family, he retired again to his study, and to his bed at the hour of ten.⁷⁶

Romaine sought to enforce seemly and profitable conduct in connection with divine worship. He complained of those who were late for service, because they were only intent on hearing the sermon.⁷⁷ Idle conversation, especially after public worship was “particularly offensive to Mr. Romaine” –

He not only spoke against such conversations from the pulpit, but frequently interrupted them, when he came out, by tapping the shoulders of those who were engaged in them; and once, if not oftener, by knocking their heads together, when he found them particularly close, and whispering in their ears, that they had forgot the “parable of the sower”. He himself studiously avoided every

⁷² William Jay, *Autobiography* (1854), 274

⁷³ Haws, 104–105

⁷⁴ Haws, 134

⁷⁵ Haws, 98

⁷⁶ *Works*, VII, 89–90

⁷⁷ *Works*, VII, 79

thing of the kind, being always in church some time before service began, and retiring from it to his own house as soon as the service was over, without ever speaking a word ...⁷⁸

William Jay, a young man of nineteen years on his first visit to London in 1788, contrasted his experience of the gentle and fatherly advice of John Newton with the austere rebuff of Romaine:

one of his very attached followers ... wished to introduce me to Mr. Romaine. ... one Tuesday morning, after the service in Blackfriars Church, he took me into the vestry, and, with a few words, mentioned my name. But Mr. Romaine noticed me in no other way than, as immediately leaving the room, he said very audibly, “There *was* a Sir Harry Trelawney.” I inferred that some faithful caution was intended, but, a mere youth from the country, and little acquainted with the religious world, I had never heard of the person by whose errors or fall I was to be warned, ...⁷⁹

It may be regrettable that Romaine did not unbend from his rigid pattern to give fatherly encouragement to this young man intent on the ministry; one cannot help thinking that Romaine’s friend was singularly foolish in introducing the young man at a time when Romaine was known not to converse.

Haweis stated that Romaine was subject to “a multitude of visitants”, and commented:

The frequent interruptions of this kind to which he was exposed often broke in upon his time unpleasantly. And his temper was not always proof against impatience on these occasions, and subjected him to the imputation of rudeness. And perhaps his conduct was sometimes blameable in this respect; though many grains of allowance should be made for the refusal of absurd requests, or impertinent intrusions, to which he could not sacrifice hours destined to better employments.⁸⁰

Cadogan identified the same tenacious sense of purpose, which was often misunderstood.

He was a man naturally close and reserved, irritable to a certain degree, short and quick in his replies, but frequently mistaken as being rude and morose, where he meant nothing of the kind.⁸¹

Romaine’s behaviour in public reflected his concern to husband his time to the best use. He often would not speak with others whom he met in the street, and if he said anything it was terse in the extreme:

He was seldom in the street, but upon business; and being intent upon his engagement, and as frugal of his time as he was prodigal of his labour, he seldom saluted any man by the way, neither was it his custom to fall out by the way.⁸²

It seems that, as he got older, his disposition mellowed.⁸³ Cadogan summarised the situation at the end of his Preface to his *Life of Romaine*:

Let Mr. Romaine be considered as having been a man of like passions with others, liable to mistakes, and compassed with infirmity. But let God be glorified in him through Jesus Christ⁸⁴

Some of Romaine’s publications, linked to events or dates important in the chronology of his life, have already been noted. Some other works require at least a brief mention. In the first half of the 1750s Romaine preached a sermon, entitled “A Discourse on the Self-Existence of Jesus Christ”, on John 8: 24 – “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not, that I AM, ye shall die in your sins”. He quoted the proper preface for Trinity Sunday:

⁷⁸ *Works*, VII, 80

⁷⁹ Jay, 269. On Sir Henry Trelawney (1756 – 1834), cf. Reynolds, 49 – 51, and 53; and Seymour, II, 418 – 421.

⁸⁰ Haweis, 77

⁸¹ *Works*, VII, 87

⁸² *Works*, VII, 41

⁸³ Cf. Haweis, 169–170

⁸⁴ *Works*, VII, viii

For that which we believe of the glory of the Father, the same we believe of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, without any DIFFERENCE or INEQUALITY.⁸⁵

The two propositions from the text, on which his sermon was based, were: (1) Jesus Christ is the self-existent God; (2) If ye believe it not, ye shall die in your sins.

In 1759 or 1760 William Romaine preached a series of *Twelve Discourses upon the Law and the Gospel* at St. Dunstan in the West. J.C. Ryle regarded it “as the best and most valuable work he ever sent to the press”.⁸⁶ Romaine sought to deal with misunderstandings about the role of the law:

Some suppose they are to be accepted of God for their works, and that they can be justified by the law in the sight of God. Others make their keeping of the law the condition of their receiving the blessings of the gospel, as if these were to be the purchase and reward of their partial obedience. Some are persuaded they must do all they can, and keep the law with all their might, and wherein they come short of the perfect demands of the law, Christ will, out of his merits, atone for their failings. And others think that Christ has abated the rigour of the law, and the gospel is nothing more than a new law dispensation, in which the Lord has been pleased to declare that he will accept of sincere obedience instead of perfect.⁸⁷

In his introduction Romaine sketched “the rich plan of grace and mercy, which is contained in the gospel”.

Romaine’s *An Essay on Psalmody*, was published in 1775. In the Preface he stated:

In the service of the church of England there is great use made of the psalms. They are read in every day’s service, both at morning and evening prayer, and are constantly sung in public worship. It is much to be wished that they were better understood. Very few, it is to be feared, received the profit from them, which as an ordinance they were intended to administer.⁸⁸

He sought to demonstrate that the subject of the Book of Psalms was Christ.

Though Romaine would sometimes quote hymns when speaking or writing, he wished only psalms to be sung in church, and indeed only the version of Sternhold and Hopkins. He complained that “Human compositions are preferred to divine”;⁸⁹ rejected the assessment that Sternhold and Hopkins was “poor flat stuff”;⁹⁰ and referred to “Dr. Watts’s flights of fancy”.⁹¹ Romaine did not effectively answer the objections to Sternhold and Hopkins; nor did he demonstrate why singing must be restricted to the psalms.

In 1789 Romaine published a series of twelve sermons which he had preached at St. Dunstan in the West – *Discourses upon Solomon’s Song*. This is one of two works, of which Ryle stated that they “are not so well known as they ought to be”.⁹² In the Preface Romaine discussed criticisms of this Old Testament book.

A deaf man is as good a judge of a fine piece of music, as a man who has not real heart-love for

⁸⁵ *Works*, VI, 300

⁸⁶ J.C. Ryle, *Christian Leaders of the Last Century* (1868), 177. Dr. Samuel discussed some of these sermons in his paper at the 1990 Conference, later published as *A Winnowing Ministry*.

⁸⁷ *Works*, III, v–vi

⁸⁸ *Works*, VIII, 375

⁸⁹ *Works*, VIII, 464

⁹⁰ *Works*, VIII, 464–465

⁹¹ *Works*, VIII, 466

⁹² Ryle, 178

God is of a treatise upon the love of God: for as he has no knowledge of the subject, how can he understand it?⁹³

He concluded his Preface, by writing:

Much has been written and spoken against these sermons, as if I had therein made too much of Christ. I think it impossible. His person is above all blessing and praise. His salvation is infinitely perfect, and contains an eternal fulness of all graces and glories.⁹⁴

Romaine published *The Life of Faith* in 1764, *The Walk of Faith* in 1771, and *The Triumph of Faith* in 1795. These three works have frequently been republished. In the Preface to the first he wrote:

The design of this little treatise is to display the glory and all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to encourage weak believers to glorify him more, by depending and living more upon his all-sufficiency. Faith is the gift of God. And he alone who gives it, can increase it.⁹⁵

Similarly, in the Preface to *The Walk of Faith*, which is the largest of the three works, he stated:

My design is to bring the great and leading doctrines of our religion into use and practice, and to show how necessary the doctrines of grace are for the well governing of the Christian walk. Every thing needful is promised, and by faith is received, which can make it even and regular, holy and happy.⁹⁶

In *The Triumph of Faith* Romaine wrote:

It has pleased God to give us in the scriptures many encouragements for the growth of faith, which are in the following treatise set before the reader; that we may honor his word, and trust in it at all times; especially when appearances make against their being fulfilled. God only in such trials can be a safe refuge, and a sure defence, and faith looking at what he has engaged to give, secures the promised help to the glory of God.⁹⁷

William Romaine was a man who knew, revered, and loved the Scriptures. Each year, when his course of lectures at St. Dunstan's ceased for the summer, he read through the entire Bible.⁹⁸ He was a man of prayer, as his *Earnest Invitation* reveals. Above all, he honoured and loved the Lord Jesus Christ. In the words of J.C. Ryle, Romaine

had not all the popular gifts of some of his contemporaries. He had not the genial attractive characteristics of many in his day. But take him for all in all, he was a great man, and a mighty instrument in God's hand for good. He stood in a most prominent position in London for forty-five years, testifying the gospel of the grace of God, and never flinching for a day. He stood alone, with almost no backers, supporters, or fellow-labourers. He stood in the same place, constantly preaching to the same hearers, and not able, like Whitefield, Wesley, Grimshaw, and other itinerant brethren, to preach old sermons. He stood there witnessing to truths which were most unpopular, and brought down on him opposition, persecution, and scorn. He stood in a most public post, continually watched, observed, and noticed by unfriendly eyes, ready to detect faults in a moment if he committed them. Yet, in all these forty-five years, he maintained a blameless character, firmly upheld his first principles to the last, and died at length a good soldier at his post, full of days and honour.⁹⁹

⁹³ *Works*, V, xv

⁹⁴ *Works*, V, xxiii

⁹⁵ *Works*, I, v-vi

⁹⁶ *Works*, I, clxvii-clxviii

⁹⁷ *Works*, II, cxcvii-cxcviii

⁹⁸ *Works*, VII, 121, & 241 – 2

⁹⁹ J.C. Ryle, 179