

## The Nationwide Festival of Light

The Nationwide Festival of Light was a short-lived grassroots movement formed by British Christians concerned about the rise of the permissive society and social changes in English society by the late 1960s.

The movement was opposed to what they saw as the growing trends in the mass media for the explicit depiction of sexual and violent themes. Its culmination was a pair of mass rallies in Trafalgar Square and Hyde Park, London in September 1971.

The organisation's genesis was in November 1970, when a young couple, Peter and Janet Hill, returned to England after four years as evangelical Baptist missionaries in India. The Hills experienced a sense of culture shock when they discovered that sexually explicit content was more prevalent in the mass media, in mid-July 1971 the NFOL was founded to oppose "pornography and moral pollution".

The movement was opposed to what they saw as the growing trends in the mass media for the explicit depiction of sexual and violent themes and for the restoration of conservative Christian morality in the UK. The British pop star Cliff Richard and actress Dora Bryan were key supporters of the NFOL from its onset.

Peter Hill imagined tens of thousands of young people marching on London to take a stand for Christian moral principles. The idea took root when he heard of 10,000 men engaged in a March of Witness through Blackburn calling for Christian moral standards to be restored to the nation.

Soon, Peter Hill was in contact with a wide network of people, who shared his concern, and offered their encouragement. Among these were Malcolm Muggeridge, Mary Whitehouse, Lord Longford, Bishop Trevor Huddleston and Cliff Richard. Grassroots support came from Anglicans, Baptists, Plymouth Brethren and Pentecostal church denominations.

A working committee was established by Hill with Colonel Orde Dobbie (a Social Services administrator), Eddie Stride (a former shop steward and trade unionist, later the Rector of Christ Church, Spitalfields), Gordon Landreth (general secretary of the Evangelical Alliance), Rev. Jean Darnall (Pentecostal evangelist), Nigel Goodwin (a professional Christian actor) and Steve Stevens (a missionary aviator). Additional input was received from a larger Council of Reference which included well-known politicians, lawyers, doctors, trades unionists, bishops, ministers, and other public figures such as Dora Bryan and David Kossoff from the acting profession. The name "Festival of Light" was suggested by Malcolm Muggeridge, [and Prince Charles sent "every good wish for the success of the Festival".

The movement had two expressed aims: to protest against "sexploitation" in the media and the arts, and to offer the teaching of Christ as the key to recovering moral stability in the nation. Some supporters naturally emphasized the first, and others the second. Plans were made for major public events, including the lighting of beacons on hilltops throughout the United Kingdom, and culminating in a massed march to a public rally in Trafalgar Square and an open-air concert of Christian music in Hyde Park.

The administrative task of enlisting the support of Christian churches and denominations throughout the UK was a colossal one, as indeed was the necessity for public relations with the press and the general public. The committee and many local volunteers were occupied with this throughout the first half of 1971. Then on 9 September, an initial rally was held in Westminster Central Hall, where the exploitation of sex and violence in the entertainment industry was denounced; the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) invaded this meeting in drag, releasing mice, sounding horns, and turning off all the lights.

Around the country more than seventy regional rallies followed. In Bristol the cathedral was filled to capacity, largely in reaction to the opening of a "sex supermarket" in the city. A "nationwide day of prayer" was observed on 19 September. Then on the night of 23 September bonfires and torches were lit on hilltops throughout Britain. In Sheffield a calor gas flare was lit by Cliff Richard. Local authorities were generally co-operative, and individual opposition muted. There were probably about 300 such beacons, and one estimate claimed that 100,000 people took part in local events.

On 25 September, approximately 45,000 of the 100,000 predicted people assembled in Trafalgar Square for the NFOL rally.<sup>[5]</sup> A platform and amplification equipment had been set up, and more than a dozen speakers took the microphone, among them Malcolm Muggeridge, Bill Davidson of the Salvation Army, and Mary Whitehouse.

A number of statements and proclamations were read out and received with applause by the crowd. Some called for a halt to the commercial exploitation of sex and violence. They warned that the "positive values" of love and respect for the individual and the family were under serious threat, and that once these were overthrown a safe and stable society could not long survive. They challenged the nation to recover "the pure idealism of Christ, the Light of world, who taught that real love always wants what is best for others and defends the weak against exploitation by the corrupt". The speakers were of mixed ages, from many different walks of life. Some of the crowd heckled, but most cheered enthusiastically. Two thirds of those present were said to be aged under twenty-five.

At the conclusion of the speeches, the crowd began to wind through the streets to Hyde Park, singing Christian songs as they went. In Hyde Park they joined those unable to get into Trafalgar Square. The Hyde Park rally started at 4pm, where a number of Christian music groups proclaimed the same message. Among the performers were Cliff Richard, Dana and Graham Kendrick. Rev. Jean Darnall led the rally. The main speaker in the park was Hollywood street evangelist Arthur Blessitt, famous for having travelled all over the globe carrying a 12-foot wooden cross. He said it was only by having "a personal relationship with Jesus" that the desire for "immoral entertainment and illicit behaviour" would be eliminated. He invited the crowd to kneel in Hyde Park and make a personal acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, and the vast majority did so.

Source – Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationwide\\_Festival\\_of\\_Light](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationwide_Festival_of_Light)