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**A Crown and a Cross: The Origins, Development and Decline of  
the Methodist Class Meeting in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England  
Volume I**

**This thesis is my own work and has not been submitted previously in  
support of any qualification or course.**

**April 2007**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
University of Sheffield at Cliff College.**

With thanks to the Rev John Munsey Turner, the Rev Dr Henry Rack,  
and the Rev Dr Martyn Atkins for their support, patience and encouragement.

## Abstract

This thesis concerns the origins, development and decline of the Class Meeting. Section one contains an overview of religious and societal change from the sixteenth century onwards. The heritage of John and Charles Wesley is studied within this milieu, and the inheritance which John Wesley drew from that examined. The consideration of the Unitary Societies and Fetter Lane is both chronological and analytical, charting the methods adopted to accommodate a desire for association, and reviewing the distinctive purposes of each societal model. The study of English religious association has not been previously brought together in the manner of this thesis, and is vital to a full understanding of the following sections. The material collated for section two, the Class Meeting as the *crown* of Methodism is original, and draws on testimony, diary and journal records. Wesley's class was a successful conflation of disparate doctrines, and modelled growth in grace and holiness, which promoted a vital affective journey. An analysis of the primary aims of the class, which gave the Methodist people their distinct characteristics, is followed by a study of the social identity and group processes that occurred when prospective members considered joining the Methodists. Section three considers the Class Meeting's decline prior to Wesley's death in 1791. Using the work of Weber (routinisation), Durkheim (totemism) and Troeltsch (primary/secondary religion) as themes, the section evaluates reasons why the class became a *cross*. Journal, diary and testimonial material supports the Methodists' declining interest in the class which led to its irrelevance to a people seeking respectability. This thesis adds to the body of knowledge in relation to the Class Meeting by investigating the origins, rise and decline of the class in Wesley's lifetime, particularly through the use of social sciences to examine reasons for success and decline of the class.

(299 words)

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## Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the class meeting. In 1742, Captain Foy, a member of the Bristol Methodist Society suggested that grouping members together into classes and appointing a leader over them to collect one penny per week would assist defraying the debt on the recently built Meeting House in the Horsefair. The class quickly developed from a method of collecting money house to house, into an opportunity for the class leader to enquire about the spiritual condition of the society members in his or her class, and thereafter into a weekly meeting for mutually accountable conversation, support and fellowship.

The class meeting is considered by many, including exponents of Cell Church theories<sup>1</sup> the high point of Wesley's organisation. Some argue today that the class would revitalise the Church if it could be 'rediscovered' and used within churches as a point of entry. It has been romanticised and credited with the force to convert millions. D. Michael Henderson makes this bold assertion when he writes:

Wesley left nothing to chance. He made sure that those who were serious about leading a new life were channelled into small groups for growth in discipleship. These little meetings were later called "classes" and formed the backbone of the Methodist reformation for the next century. The "class meeting" turned out to be the primary means of bringing millions of England's most desperate people into the liberating discipline of Christian faith.<sup>2</sup>

This rather sweeping statement requires contextualisation and evidence will be adduced to show that the 'millions of England's most desperate people' suggested by Henderson simply did not exist in the eighteenth, nor indeed the nineteenth century. David Lowes Watson quite properly evinces the reality,

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<sup>1</sup> For a definition of Cell Church see, S. Croft, J. Leach, & T. Bradley, 'A Future for Housegroups' in *Grove Pastoral Series 66* (ed. P. Simmonds; Cambridge: Grove Books Ltd. 1996) p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> D.M. Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee: Evangel Publishing House. 1997) p. 28.



Methodist membership seems ... to have comprised artisans or tradespeople, persons who were in possession of at least a rudimentary education and who, whilst living in the midst of social unrest, were usually not among those hardest hit by the changes.<sup>3</sup>

Even pre-Wesleyan Societies reached the semi-skilled and skilled trades, rather than the illiterate lowest classes. Portus, in *Caritas Anglicana* notes that membership of the early Unitary (Anglican) Societies was generally confined to skilled manual trades: occupations such as 'Buttonseller, Milliner, Tailor, Salesman, Perfumer, Goldsmith, Confectioner, Perukemaker'<sup>4</sup>. Amongst the founders of the Fetter Lane Band was a bookseller, a brazier, a barber, a poulterer, a clog maker, a wine-cooper, a barber, a retired Attorney.<sup>5</sup>

In his 1932 MA dissertation, W.A. Goss evidenced the earliest Bristol Methodists were primarily artisan; John Deschamps was a stuff maker, John Alldin and James Kelson cordwainers, John Tripp was a gunsmith.<sup>6</sup> There was one gentleman, John Dyer,<sup>7</sup> and one freeholder, Thomas Gough.<sup>8</sup>

Clive Field has shown in his comprehensive article, *The Social Composition of English Methodism to 1830: A Membership Analysis*,<sup>9</sup> the social, marital and gender make up of Methodism in its earliest years using extant membership

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<sup>3</sup> D.L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources. 1985) p. 131. See also Appendix G on p207, which shows a list of the Society Members, divided into Classes of the Bingley Society in 1763. The trades and status of the membership is recorded.

<sup>4</sup> G.V. Portus, *Caritas Anglicana. Or An Historical Inquiry into those Religious Societies and Philanthropical Societies that Flourished in England Between the Years 1678 and 1740* (London: A.R. Mowbray & Co. Ltd. 1912) p.21. Portus is quoting from a manuscript *Sunday Nights Society meeting at Mr. Bradshaws in Denmarke Street against Tom's Coffee House near Exeter Change in the Strand*. (Rawl. MS. D. 1312, fo.2.) Portus also refers to a document in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, *The Names, Places of abode, Employmts., and Occupacions of the several Societys in and about the Cities of London and Westminster Belonging to the Church of England*, 1694 (Bodleian, MS. Rawl. D. 1312)

<sup>5</sup> W.M. Trousdale, 'The Moravian Society. Fetter lane – London', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XVII, part II, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> W.A. Goss, *Early Methodism in Bristol, with Special Reference to John Wesley's Visits to the City, 1739-90, and Their Impression on the People*, (Unpublished MA dissertation. 1932) p. 65. A copy of this dissertation is held in the archive of The New Room, Bristol

<sup>7</sup> W.A. Goss, *Early Methodism in Bristol*, p. 54.

<sup>8</sup> W.A. Goss, *Early Methodism in Bristol*, p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> C.D. Field, 'The Social Composition of English Methodism to 1830: A Membership Analysis' in *The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*. Volume 76 (ed. D. Clayton; Manchester: John Rylands University of Manchester. 1994) pp. 153-169.

records. His study of the occupations of the Methodists evidences that the occupations of the male membership reflected the major 'artisan' economy of a locality. In the article, Field notes an issue I highlight in the third section of the thesis, that of rising social aspirations; 'By the end of the eighteenth century there was mounting concern amongst many of the leading Methodist preachers about the growing respectability of the movement as evidenced by 'the steady rise of many of its members in the social scale'.<sup>10</sup>

As to numbers, in 1742 the Membership of the London United Societies stood at around eleven hundred.<sup>11</sup> The returns of members for 1790, the year prior to Wesley's death on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1791, indicate that out of a population of 8,216,096 in England and Wales, only 1 percent identified themselves as Methodist, making 53,691 Methodists.<sup>12</sup> By 1901, the Wesleyan Methodists stood at 454,982 members, just 1.2 percent of the population.<sup>13</sup> None of these figures allows for the 'millions' suggested by Henderson.

From the Cell Church perspective, Wesley is credited with having rediscovered 'a New Testament pattern to the church of his day.'<sup>14</sup> Howard Snyder, a Free Methodist, is quoted thus by William Beckham: '(the) class meeting was the cornerstone of the whole edifice. The classes were in effect house churches

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<sup>10</sup> C.D. Field, 'The Social Composition of English Methodism to 1830: A Membership Analysis' in *The Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*. Volume 76, p. 167.

<sup>11</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19 p. 250.

<sup>12</sup> See D.L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting* p. 131. See also J.M. Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation Studies in Methodism and Ecumenism in England. 1740-1982* (London: Epworth Press. 1985) pp. 63-65. Although Turner dates Wesley's death to 1792 (rather than the correct year of 1791) he clearly shows the increase of population and membership from 1792 to the mid nineteenth century.

<sup>13</sup> H.D. Rack, 'Wesleyan Methodism 1849-1902', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*. Volume 3 (ed's. R. Davies, A.R. George, & G. Rupp, London: Epworth Press. 1983) p. 123. The figures quoted represent the population of Great Britain, excluding Ireland.

<sup>14</sup> W.A. Beckham, *The Second Reformation Reshaping the Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Houston: Touch Publications. 1995) p. 119.



(not classes for instruction, as the term might suggest), meeting in the various neighborhoods where people lived'.<sup>15</sup>

In one respect, Snyder's sweeping statement is true: the class was indeed the 'cornerstone' to Wesley's organisation from 1742; however, there is no evidence to support the claim that the class was a 'house church'.

This thesis will show that Wesley's ecclesiology relied on Methodism being held in tension with the Anglican Church. This created a particular *partial* ecclesiology of being church. By this I mean that every need of Christian life could be met within the society, except the sacraments and the Occasional Offices, (baptism, marriage and death).<sup>16</sup> This was a discipline of belonging to the Wesleyans, certainly in the earliest years, and was held to be important by Wesley to his death.

A number of Church Methodists survived after Wesley's death. Kent holds that those who did remain 'melted back into the Establishment, because they wanted to receive Holy Communion from an Anglican parson, not from the itinerants'.<sup>17</sup> This view is not shared by Goldhawk, who pointed out the number of arrangements made for Methodists in relation to the administration of Communion over a period of thirty years from the 1795 Plan of Pacification to

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<sup>15</sup> W.A. Beckham, *The Second Reformation*, p.119. (Word in brackets mine) the original quotation can be found in H.A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock. 1980) p.54.

<sup>16</sup> It is correct to state that London was an exception to the sacramental rule, as the leasing of West Street Chapel, and other episcopally blessed meeting houses, mean that the Wesley's or their ordained assistants could provide a sacramental ministry, away from the parish church.

<sup>17</sup> J. Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans Religion in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2002) p. 205.

support Itinerants, and Societies who desired the sacrament from Anglican, rather than Methodist hands.<sup>18</sup>

Baker<sup>19</sup> and Bowmer,<sup>20</sup> in their discussions on Sacraments in Methodism asserted that the issue of Church as against Society administration had been on Conference and Circuit agendas for some years prior to Wesley's death. In 1773, Thomas Taylor discovered to his cost that suggesting the possibility of Methodist administration in future years was unpopular; 'The very intimation of any such thing was as bad as high treason, and I soon found myself in hot water.'<sup>21</sup> Taylor noticed that many of his society did not attend the parish Church or receive the sacrament. Taylor felt the Methodists of the society were unaware of the dominical command.<sup>22</sup> His comment however, foreshadowed a later decision. Once Wesley died, the discussion continued as Methodism sought its way without the leader who had held the argument in tension.

There was no period of respectful mourning for John Wesley before dispute arose regarding separation from the Church of England, with the Hull Declaration of the 4<sup>th</sup> May 1791 urging the Wesleyans to remain loyal to the Church and her sacraments, followed by a strong rebuff from Wesleyans in Birmingham and Hull. Conference did little to help resolve the matter, adopting a decision by lot in 1792 not to administer the sacraments, nor ordain without

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<sup>18</sup> N.P. Goldhawk, 'Early Victorian Age: Spirituality and Worship', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*. Volume 2 (eds. R. Davies, A.R. George, & G. Rupp; London: Epworth Press. 1978) pp. 134-137.

<sup>19</sup> F. Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (London: Epworth Press. 1970) pp. 288-303.

<sup>20</sup> J.C. Bowmer, *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism* (London: Dacre Press. 1951) pp. 187-205.

<sup>21</sup> T. Taylor, 'The Life of Thomas Taylor', in *Preachers*, Vol. V, p. 62.

<sup>22</sup> T. Taylor, 'The Life of Thomas Taylor', in *Preachers*, Vol. V, p. 62.



permission of Conference. Prevarication continued until the Plan of Pacification was agreed in 1795.<sup>23</sup>

From Wesley's death, pamphlets and books written by leading Methodists urged Class Leaders and members to continue meeting in class, and offered catechetical material for use within the class. Other publications added to the debate surrounding continuing compulsory class attendance. A literature search of the Methodist Archive at the John Rylands Library produced thirty-one separate documents published from 1797 onwards.<sup>24</sup>

The word 'organisation' will be used to distinguish Wesleyanism post 1749, when the circuit system was fully established as a contrast to the word 'movement' prior to 1749, when Wesleyanism was developing. It is accepted that the ordination of preachers<sup>25</sup> for the itinerant work took place after this date, but to all intents and purposes Wesleyan Methodism had emerged by 1749.

*The Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'organisation' as the 'condition of being organized; the mode in which something is organized; co-ordination of parts or elements in an organic whole; systematic arrangement for a definite purpose.'<sup>26</sup>

This contrasts with 'movement' which can be properly used in the earliest years of Wesleyanism, when structures were still being created. The fluidity of early Wesleyanism can be seen from the definition of 'movement' as a 'course or

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<sup>23</sup> See G. Smith, *History of Wesleyan Methodism*. Volume II, *The Middle Age* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts. 1858) pp. 12-34. See also J.M. Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation*, pp. 66-78.

<sup>24</sup> The earliest document at the John Rylands on this subject is *An Address to the Heads of Families on the Necessity of Family Religion: Also an Interesting Discourse on Weekly Class Meetings* (Leeds: A. Newsom. 1797) The author is simply described as 'Author of the last Century' MAW Pa 1797.3.

<sup>25</sup> Wesley ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey as Elders, and Thomas Coke (already an Anglican Minister) as Superintendent for the work in America in 1784, he ordained John Pawson, Joseph Taylor and Thomas Hanby for Scotland in 1785, and Alexander Mather as an elder for the English work in 1788, following this in 1789 with Thomas Rankin and Henry Moore.

<sup>26</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, Volume X. p. 923. The definition quoted above is found at section 2b.

series of actions and endeavours on the part of a body of persons, moving or tending more or less continuously towards some special end.<sup>27</sup>

The thesis is separated into three sections. In section one I examine the antecedents to the class meeting in the context of an associational age. The changing religious context is set alongside social developments. In the main, the religious milieu under examination is English. The development and purpose of the Religious Society has not been considered in detail since Portus' *Caritas Anglicana* and Bullock's *Voluntary Religious Societies 1520 – 1799*. Most recently Clark primarily reviewed secular associations in *British Clubs and Societies 1580 – 1800: The Origins of an Associational Age*, but did not address the development of the Unitary Societies. In *The Moravian Church in England 1728 – 1760*, Podmore deals specifically with the founding of the Fetter Lane Society, and does not review the earlier associations from which the English founders had come. The approach I have taken in reviewing the distinct associations of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century encompasses elements from all these authors, and draws a broad picture of the setting into which John and Charles Wesley were born, educated and worked.

The distinctive aspects of Unitary and Fetter Lane's communal life are drawn out in this section. These distinctives illustrate how the priorities of societal life developed from 1678. Each model of societal life added new distinctive features from its own milieu into the larger societal 'picture'. These were then subsumed into the societal model which followed. This original approach enables section two to show how the class drew upon these established patterns and expectations and furthered them further in the early years of class life.

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<sup>27</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, Volume X, p. 35. The definition above is from section 6a of the definition of 'movement' which begins on p. 34.



I will argue that the class meeting, as every aspect of Wesleyan organisation, owes much to others. The Wesleyan movement owed everything of its life and vigour, not to the originality of Wesley, but to his ability to assimilate the doctrine, spirituality, teaching and structures of others into a single schema, which became Wesleyanism.

The resulting model of Wesleyanism consisted of practical or social piety, inherited from Halle and the Holy Club of Oxford; Tory Anglicanism in the insistence of the place of the established Church in the life of the Christian; non-juring Anglicanism through the emphasis of ancient or primitive Christianity; Moravianism through the adoption of the Moravian model of religious organisation; Puritanism with its teaching on degrees of faith, which led to the rigorous keeping of spiritual journals, and later the inclusion of reason as a tool to assist in the life of faith; Roman Catholicism, in the model of class adopted by the Marquis de Renty, and the importance of perfection as a goal of the Christian life (this goal was also found in the mystics and the Puritan tradition).

In the second section of the thesis, I will show how the class meeting was the vital centre of early Methodism. The section is reliant on the preceding section. An understanding of the eighteenth century social and religious milieu adds depth to the sophistication of the class's purpose as a body of individuals meeting for a mutual purpose. The originality of the approach I have used is shown in the sub divisions of the chapter, highlighting specific elements of the purpose of the class. Within the chapter, I refer back to section one to emphasise how Wesley's previous experience, and his theology drew upon antecedents which he had personally experienced, or had read of.

Wesley scholars contend that the class was the primary sub division of the Society. Henry Rack for example states:

Each society contained smaller groups. All full members were placed in 'classes' of about a dozen members under a leader which met weekly for spiritual conversation and guidance. Membership of the Connexion was defined by membership of a class.<sup>28</sup>

J.S. Simon asserted that Wesley, after meeting the leaders of the London societies, agreed to 'divide the Society into classes like those at Bristol, and place them under the supervision of leaders in whom Wesley could most confide.'<sup>29</sup> Heitzenrater also makes this distinction, 'The whole Society was divided into **classes** (from the Latin *classis*, or "division"), neighborhood subdivisions of about twelve persons, each having an assigned leader.'<sup>30</sup>

Earlier sub divisions were the band, the select band and the penitential band. These were the means by which men, women and children experienced at first hand the closest accountability of Wesleyan discipleship. The oldest subdivision was the band, carried into Wesleyanism from the Fetter Lane Society. Heitzenrater suggests that not every Wesleyan belonged to a Band prior to the introduction of the class meeting, 'one gap in the society structure was that persons who were not in a band had no small group in which to seek encouragement and guidance.'<sup>31</sup> This may not be so. In Bristol from 1739, Wesley, at the suggestion of George Whitefield<sup>32</sup> did place Society Members into bands. The same process occurred in London from 1740.

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<sup>28</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press. 1989) pp. 238-239.

<sup>29</sup> J.S. Simon, *John Wesley and the Methodist Societies* (London: Epworth Press. 1923) p. 64.

<sup>30</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodist* (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1995), p. 118. See also S.R. Howdle, 'Class Meeting', in *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (ed. J.A. Vickers, Peterborough: Epworth Press. 2000) pp. 69-70.

<sup>31</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodist*, p. 118.

<sup>32</sup> J. Wesley *Works [BE,]* Vol. 25, pp. 611-612. In a letter to John Wesley dated March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1738/39, Whitefield invited Wesley to continue his work in Bristol. In the letter he suggests that 'many are ripe for bands.'



After 1742 the emphasis of the Band Meeting changed as Wesley used the class as the entry point into the society. Previously, the period 'on trial' was spent within the larger society, and Band membership was granted once an individual was a member of the Society. Band membership was also predicated on segregation by age, sex or marital status. The class meeting was not segregated.

I will assert that the band, select band and penitential band were sub divisions of the class meeting from 1742, but that the class meeting was not a subdivision of the society, rather the classes were the society meeting in small groups, and the society was the classes meeting together. Effectively an 'organic' union existed between class meetings and society meetings. This can be seen from the distinction between the preaching service, which was open to all, and the society meeting, at which only class members were admitted.

The account of Thomas Olivers makes this distinction between class members (by default society members) and hearers clear:

As to the people of God in this place (Bradford Upon Avon), I loved them as dearly as those I had left in Bristol; and longed to be united with them in Christian fellowship, but knew not how. When the public preaching was over on a Sunday evening, and I, along with the multitude, was shut out from the Society, I used to go into the field at the back of the preaching-house, and listen while they sang the praises of God. I would then weep bitterly at the thought, that God's people were there, praising his name together, while I, a poor and wretched fugitive, was not permitted to be among them.<sup>33</sup>

From 1742, the smaller group meetings, band, select band and penitential band became subservient to the class meeting, as they were subdivisions of the class rather than the society. Any class member might become a member of a more intimate group, but it was not possible for a member of a smaller group to

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<sup>33</sup> T. Olivers, 'The Life of Thomas Olivers', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. II, p. 85. (Words in brackets mine)

belong to the society without belonging first to a class. Thomas Rankin describes a further small meeting, the body band, in his autobiography. This is mentioned nowhere else as a Methodist group, but Rankin suggested this was part of the Methodist pattern,

I now saw the whole economy of Methodism in the most favourable light, - the class and band meetings, meeting of the society, body-bands, lovefeasts &c.<sup>34</sup>

If, as Rack suggests, the ticket of membership was given to class members, and this ticket admitted the individual to connexional membership,<sup>35</sup> the ticket brought admission to membership of the local society too, and to gain entry to the society meeting, the ticket had to be produced. When classes met as a society, it was not that the small groups of the society were meeting, but that the classes were meeting as the society. This contention will be expanded in the thesis.

The reasons for holding this view of the close relationship of class to society can be summed up briefly thus: One, the close accountability of the class meeting offering a communal, deep, mutual trust and honesty was not possible in the society meeting; two, every society after 1742 began life as a class, and the growth of a society was as a group of classes; three, in the class it was easier to be aware of an individual's Christian life, and disciplinary issues might be more easily dealt with (on the model of Matthew 18);<sup>36</sup> four, the class allowed Wesleyans living in a locality to recognise and know each other; five, the class could also be used as a place for instruction and catechism. Heitzenrater is therefore correct in his statement relating the class to 'neighborhood' meetings.

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<sup>34</sup> T. Rankin, 'The Life of Mr Thomas Rankin', in *Preachers*, Vol V, p.159.

<sup>35</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 239.

<sup>36</sup> See Appendix 9, *J. Wesley Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 73. Rule 7 of the *General Rules of the United Societies* appears to have as a base the warrant from Matthew 18 regarding private and public admonishing of individuals. The discipline of Wesleyans was for salvific purposes.



The success of the class meeting rested upon class members undergoing a similar, if not identical process of awakening, justification and sanctification. The process of conversion and discipleship, which these three separate elements might be said to represent, required a highly experiential and sometimes dramatic course. Fits and fainting, visions and dreams are frequently recounted in personal testimonies.

A note of caution has to be inserted in relation to the extant records of class (and band) meetings; there are very few surviving accounts of class proceedings. Within Methodism today an archaic phrase 'in band' exists to distinguish a discussion that is to be secret. This little used term highlights the nature of band and class meetings; that any open conversation was held as a confidence by fellow members to enable a spirit of openness and honesty to be engendered. This confidential trust was vital to the initial success of the class. Any records or references to both class and band conversation are therefore rare. They provide lively and vital interest to the class both as the crown, and as a cross to Methodism. The testimonial, diary and journal material I have gathered in this thesis has not previously been brought together with the purpose of illustrating how the class meeting functioned experientially, yet also failed as the desire for experience waned.

In each class meeting there was pressure for each member to conform to a stereotypical awakening/justifying experience. This occurred because Wesleyans who had undergone that experience, recounted the same to newer members, and having no other reference point for conversion *per se* they believed that this was the mode for becoming a Christian in the Wesleyan manner. This could then be recounted to the next generation of Wesleyans.

However, the experience cannot be recreated. A single generation alone feels the full experiential nature of the class and later Methodists did not identify with this.

A brief examination of the place of Charles Wesley's spiritual poetry, frequently turned into hymns, will also feature as one of the elements of success within the class meeting. Testimonies will show how important the hymn was in Wesleyanism as a tool for awakening, justification and sanctification. Charles Wesley's hymnody was a unique feature of Wesleyanism.

Within classes of around twelve people, the whole of Wesley's doctrine and teaching could be found. This small group, more than any other Methodist meeting, embodied everything that Wesley had discovered during his lifetime and allowed men and women (and children) to discover for themselves; a distinctive amalgamation of disparate theologies and teachings.

In some respects the class was the very zenith of Methodist organisation, and when placed into the context of the other Methodist meetings and eighteenth century society, John Wesley discovered, perhaps by accident, the one meeting which gave a coherent and achievable structure of discipline and discipleship for previously un-churched or 'church-disconnected' people.

In the class, personal and spiritual life could be discussed, problems shared, sin and temptation made plain to a sympathetic and understanding group, and admonition or congratulation offered by the Class Leader. This took place during the course of a meeting that prayed, sang, and shared open testimonial conversation.



However, much more than that was taking place within the class meeting. Meeting in a class meant far more than living an introverted spirituality. As a simple example, the Methodist people were called to live their lives amongst their community and practise within it acts of piety, giving money for the poor or visiting the sick. These same Methodists were encouraged to see their adherence to the Methodist movement *within* the parish system, so the Parish Church became a focus for sacramental life and worship.

Perhaps it is right to say that in the class system Wesley discovered the Primitive Christianity he had left England to discover in 1735. In this small group members spoke openly and experienced their faith together, learning and growing in the Christian faith as the earliest Christians did. That which Wesley had sought to rediscover or recreate in the New World amongst the settlers and Native Americans was before him amongst the class members who sought to join his movement.

In the third section, I use themes from the social sciences to examine reasons for the class's decline within a relatively short period of time. This approach is original in that each strand of social science: totemism, routinisation and mystical/sect model of church, when taken together adds weight to the argument I pose that the decline of the class meeting was inexorable, and beyond the control of Wesley, who as I will show, was concerned once he was unable personally to oversee the local societies that class attendance was maintained.

I use *totem* as a theme in the same way as Emile Durkheim who coined this word in his *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Durkheim separated that which is accorded a sacred status (the totem) from that which is profane, or

worldly. Durkheim studied primitive Aboriginal Australian belief. Totemism,<sup>37</sup> or the use of symbol in Aboriginal society imbues the object, painted or crafted with a sacred significance, separating it from the worldly. The totem 'is sacred; it cannot be approached, it is held in respect.'<sup>38</sup> But it is more than mere symbol because it is recognised by the society and reflects 'that group in the religion it creates.'<sup>39</sup>

In some way then the class meeting has been instilled with a religious significance that it was never originally intended to have, and amongst Methodists and Cell Church teachers and writers, is afforded a reverence which calcifies the class meeting in its eighteenth century context and yet suggests that a rediscovery or reintroduction of the class meeting would act as a panacea for all ills within the organised Church in terms of a point of entry into Church, a means of personal regulation in a supportive community, and as a method, or model for Church growth.

Another reason for the decline of the class as an effective element of Wesleyan organisation is the place, purpose and role of the class itself once Wesleyanism became carefully structured and organised. When organisation replaced movement, *routinisation of charisma* occurred as outlined and developed by Max Weber. Weber was a leading early exponent of the sociology of religion and with 'his friends Ernst Troeltsch and Werner Sombart, actually created the discipline of the sociology of religion.'<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of the significance of totem see A. Giddens, *Durkheim* (London: Fontana. 1978) pp. 88-95.

<sup>38</sup> W.S.F. Pickering, *Durkheim on Religion* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1975) p. 178.

<sup>39</sup> R. Bierstedt, *Émile Durkheim* (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson. 1966) p. 201.

<sup>40</sup> The above quotation is from the translator's preface to M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd. 1965) p. x.



The nature of Wesleyanism changed after Wesley admitted itinerant Preachers and created circuits. Increasingly, towards the end of John Wesley's life, the leaders of Wesleyanism wrangled fiercely over whether or not to separate from the Church of England entirely, an act which in many respects had taken place *de facto*, with ordination, and assistants baptising and administering the sacraments. Wesleyanism had changed from the revivalist group that emerged from Fetter Lane and was spreading its ecclesiastical wings as a fledgling Church.

The class meeting lost its organic association with the society which was vital to its effectiveness as Preaching Houses were registered as Dissenting places of worship, and Wesleyan Societies came to be seen as 'churches' in their own right. The collegial, pastoral and disciplinary roles that class members held in common were subsumed into the itinerant Preacher's role. I will show how the tacit removal of collegial responsibility, (not only pastoral and disciplinary responsibility, but also the collegial sacramental responsibility of attendance at the parish church) to the itinerant Preacher, meant the class meeting's primary functions were removed.

I will also discuss the class meeting's life as 'one generational'. By this I mean that the class had a short effective life in the manner which Wesley envisaged it; a small group for close mutual accountability, sacramental observance and discipline. Second or later generations of class members desired respectability, routine and the opportunities of leadership rather than the experiential and accountable fellowship of the class's early period.

In summary this thesis traces the developments in religious understanding that gave rise to the class meeting. Whilst these are primarily studied from an

English background, continental Pietism is considered. I will show the desire to associate in religious meetings that grew out of a pietist understanding of faith and life, and how this, together with other influences on Wesley, led to the creation of the class meeting.

The thesis will also indicate that the class was a unique development of itself, moving the nature of pietist association to an experiential, mutually accountable, disciplinary and discipling meeting. This second section, which considers the class as the 'crown' of Methodism has detailed original material brought together for this purpose.

Through the writings of three social scientists, I will show that the class meeting became a 'cross' to the Methodist people. I contend that the class declined during Wesley's lifetime, as the Wesleyan organisation moved towards an independent existence away from the Church of England and the Wesleyan class became routinised, 'totemised', and a one generational meeting. In the conclusion the class meeting will be evaluated and its value and purpose appraised.

## Section One

### Introductory Comments

In this section, the antecedents of the Methodist class meeting are examined. The Unitary Societies of the Anglican Church and the Fetter Lane Society are both models of association that pre-dated Wesley's movement.

Prior to the chronological and analytical studies of these society types, I will outline the developments in religion; both continental and English, and society from the late sixteenth century. This outline is contained in chapter one. It is included to assist in the full understanding of the foundation of the Unitary Societies, which began to meet a desire for piety and association which developed after the Restoration.

Chapter two, which details the Wesleyan heritage, offers a comprehensive scrutiny of the Wesley family. This chapter highlights the important developments in John Wesley's self understanding, and his model of appropriation of doctrine. Chapter one is vital to the consideration of Wesley's dogma, which will be seen to be a hybrid of theological models.

The following chapters; three and four, chart the rise of the Unitary Societies, and Fetter Lane, and analyse the model of faith development which each type of meeting offered a seeking populace. The chronological study of each society type, followed by analysis is an original approach to the background of Wesley's Methodism. In Section Two, I will follow the same pattern when discussing the Methodist Class meeting as the 'crown' of Methodism.



## Chapter 1: Religion and Society at the turn of the Eighteenth Century

John Wesley's 'turn to seriousness' of 1725 marked the beginning of a spiritual journey that would reach a climax on the May 24<sup>th</sup> 1738. From 1725, Wesley sought a vital and engaging faith. This chapter will trace the background to Wesley's schema of faith and spirituality. I will examine Pietist and Puritan developments, together with the social developments in England and Europe, all of which came to affect Wesley's life, practice and understanding, and ultimately the Methodists themselves. Wesley's mind was ever receptive to other Christian traditions, and he synthesised the elements he found useful into the Methodist movement. No one tradition could claim Wesley for its own, least of all the Church of England.

### Context

Pietism and later 17<sup>th</sup> century religious developments grew in a milieu of paradigm shifts; that is that a new way of thinking superseded that which previously held sway. This milieu is evidenced by David Bosch,<sup>1</sup> for whom the work of Spener marks a new mode within the paradigm:

Published in 1693, Philipp Jakob Spener broke radically with the melancholic view of history that had characterised late orthodoxy...In the words of H. Frick (quoted in Gensichen 1961:16): for orthodoxy the proclamations of the gospel to all nations was , at best only a Wunschziel ("desired aim"); for Pietism it became a Willensziel ("aim of the will"). The new movement combined the joy of a personal experience of salvation with an eagerness to proclaim the gospel of redemption to all.<sup>2</sup>

This mode resulted in a desire to convert others, the need for inward struggle; an understanding that individuals rather than communities come to faith and the development of *ecclesiola in ecclesia*.

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<sup>1</sup> D.J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission; Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis. 1994)

<sup>2</sup> D.J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 252.



The enlightenment, the paradigm shift in which pietism developed, allowed a world-view to develop offering individuals expression for the first time. Of this paradigm shift, Bosch wrote that 'the *church* was gradually eliminated as a factor for validating the structure of society.'<sup>3</sup> This enlightened view allowed philosophy and science to be taken seriously as offering a reasonable rationale for the way the world was.

Progress was possible beyond the church and her structures, and individuals were considered autonomous beings. Again, Bosch provides a forceful critique of the church's position in respect of the enlightenment, 'even though the Christian faith continued to be practised after the Enlightenment, it had lost its quiet self-evidence; it became strained and tended to overemphasise itself, for it felt itself to be operating in an alien and hostile world'.<sup>4</sup> This meant that men and women not only looked to themselves, or science, rather than the institutional church for answers, but if they were people of faith, such faith was a private issue. It will be noticed from the religious developments in Europe and England outlined below that the enlightenment gave impetus to the personalised religious experience characterised by Pietism and Puritanism.

### Continental Pietism

'The Pietist movement was a call to action; a call to vigorous Christian experience out-feeling the passive acceptance of creed and conformity'.<sup>5</sup> Lewis' statement somewhat oversimplifies the growth of religious movements in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, pietism was as much a throwing off of 'old Catholicism' in former Catholic States as it was a reaction against the formalised Lutheran theology and Christian practice in Protestant European nations. Lewis does

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<sup>3</sup> D.J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 263.

<sup>4</sup> D.J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 268. See also the remainder of the second major paragraph.

<sup>5</sup> A.J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer* (London: SCM. 1962) p. 22.

capture a sense of the urgency that Pietism spread across Europe and into England.

It is generally recognised that Philip Jakob Spener was 'the man chiefly responsible for the rise of pietism'.<sup>6</sup> Whilst Ted Campbell agrees with this view, stating that through Spener 'Arndtian spirituality was combined with reformed pietism',<sup>7</sup> W.R Ward contests Spener's importance, and pietism's origins:

Pietism has constituted one of the most relentlessly contested battlefields of modern historiography, disagreement about when it began being so well balanced by its obscurity as a concept, and the whole so confused by the application of often arbitrary theological preferences or varying degrees of national self-isolation.<sup>8</sup>

Spener, a Lutheran, wanted to improve clergy training, and recover preaching. His *Pia Desideria* was primarily a reprinting of the Lutheran sermons of Johann Arndt, to which he added an introduction. The heart of Spener's teaching was the New Birth, which was 'a Pietist party badge not because it was peculiar to them, but because of the prominence they gave it.'<sup>9</sup>

Ward suggests that Luther's Preface to Romans, as a sign of conversion was as significant as the New Birth. 'He (Spener) absorbed the message of Luther's Preface to Romans, which became almost obligatory for approved conversion in the later Pietist movement.'<sup>10</sup> John Wesley's 1738 experience was 'triggered' by a reading from that volume.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> G.R. Cragg, *The Church & the Age of Reason, 1648-1789* (Middlesex: Penguin. 1960) p. 101.

<sup>7</sup> T.A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock. 2000) p. 82.

<sup>8</sup> W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> W.R. Ward, *Christianity under the Ancien Régime, 1648 – 1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1999) p. 74.

<sup>11</sup> See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, pp. 249-250.



Spener sought to relate the doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers to experience, and he did this in the *Collegia Pietatis*. In these meetings, members would 'teach, warn, convert and edify each other; in a word, they should practise the general (or spiritual) priesthood.'<sup>12</sup>

This meeting was an attempt to move away from formality, and towards a more experiential faith;

They (Spener and Francke) reacted against the official stress on formal theological correctness and merely conventional churchgoing and what they felt to be the impoverished state of spiritual life. Instead, they wished to create a more personalized and inward type of piety and stressed the importance of good works.<sup>13</sup>

Spener did not seek to divide the Church, separating those who sought 'experience' from those who held to 'form'. Wesley would later stand firm to Spener's principle, indicating Methodism was an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*. Watson states that Wesley drew on Spener's thinking; 'This concept is usually attributed to the collegia pietatis of Philipp Jakob Spener.'<sup>14</sup>

Spener's *Collegium*<sup>15</sup> were intended to renew Lutheranism. Ward writes; 'If every Christian exercised his spiritual obligation to warn and comfort his fellow believers instead of leaving everything to the clergy, church renewal would begin in earnest.'<sup>16</sup>

Spener's Frankfurt<sup>17</sup> meeting was elitist, but 'it was soon joined by artisans and servants of both sexes who surprised him with their knowledge.'<sup>18</sup> Johann

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<sup>12</sup> W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 162.

<sup>14</sup> D.L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, p. 154. See note 22.

<sup>15</sup> See W.R. Ward, *Christianity under the Ancien Régime*, p. 75. According to Ward these groups became Bible Classes by 1674

<sup>16</sup> W.R. Ward, *Christianity under the Ancien Régime*, p. 75.

<sup>17</sup> Spener was a Lutheran pastor in Frankfurt

<sup>18</sup> W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, p. 57.

Schutz took Spener's idea to an extreme, separated from him and moved to Penn's Quaker group in the American colonies.

Johann Benedict Carpzov argued that pietism replaced faith for Spener and his friends, and he led the groundswell of criticism against Spener. However Carpzov encouraged the formation of 'Bible Colleges' (*Collegia Philobiblica*) in 1686 to assist poor students in their Bible knowledge. The colleges comprised groups of students under the leadership of a senior student. The success of these colleges was far greater than anyone thought possible. Ward states:

Students without any degrees began their own collegia to study Paul, and, worse again, citizens of the very unchurched city of Leipzig, where two parish churches had to suffice for a population of 20,000, joined the student exercises, and even opened conventicles. The spreading of the general priesthood to lay people was happening much faster than Spener intended or authority was prepared to tolerate.<sup>19</sup>

Spener became court chaplain to the Elector of Saxony in 1686, and in 1691 he came under the protection of Frederick III Elector of Brandenburg (Frederick I of Prussia from 1715). In 1694 the University of Halle was founded. August Herman Franke,<sup>20</sup> Spener's successor, staffed the Theology Faculty. Halle's importance to pietism cannot be overestimated and 'At the height of its fame, 1,200 students passed through its theological faculty each year.'<sup>21</sup>

The university's work was not purely academic; there was an orphanage, Bible school, and secular schools; each an integral part of the Halle Pietist movement, which 'stood for a theology less sunk in apathy and less contaminated in worldliness, a Christian fellowship more deeply conversant with

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<sup>19</sup> W.R. Ward, *Christianity under the Ancien Regime*, p. 77.

<sup>20</sup> For brief biography of Franke, and of his achievements at Halle see T.A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>21</sup> G.R. Cragg, *The Church & the Age of Reason*, p. 102.



the Bible and more actively participating in every kind of philanthropic enterprise'.<sup>22</sup>

Spener's patronage gave an unrivalled position from which to spread pietism. Ward suggests the University was the right place to draw those sympathetic to Spener to teach Pietist doctrine. 'Halle became the beacon on the hill for the pietists of the next generation.'<sup>23</sup>

The teaching of Spener and Franke, and their ideal for scriptural and practical religion, was not unique. Jean de Labadie, a French 'nobleman',<sup>24</sup> raised a group around himself, who sought to achieve the pure church. This elitist group fared badly, refusing to heed advice from local people where the 'Labadists' moved to form their settlement. By the time of the Wesleyan revival, the Labadists had died out.

Ward described Labadie as a 'rather unsympathetic character.'<sup>25</sup> In short, Labadie touched among the social elite a desire to escape from the orthodoxy offered by the church, yet he had no solution to offer. Labadie affected preaching in the Rhineland and Netherlands, with emphasis between the 'converted and unconverted, between the regenerate and unregenerate.'<sup>26</sup> This difference was clearly part of the Wesleyan revival some 60 years later, and is an emphasis within any theology of Christian perfection.

Labadism gave rise to a revival under the name of *Resurrectio* (a Jansenist name). These less elitist settlements were more successful than Labadie's.

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<sup>22</sup> G.R. Cragg, *The Church & the Age of Reason*, p. 102.

<sup>23</sup> W.R. Ward, *Christianity under the Ancien Régime*, p. 78.

<sup>24</sup> See W.R. Ward, *Christianity under the Ancien Régime*, p. 83. It was thought that Labadie was an illegitimate child of Henry IV of France

<sup>25</sup> W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, p. 205.

<sup>26</sup> W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, p. 122.



They too used class meetings, or conventicles. Zinzendorf and the Moravians were influenced by the resurrectio settlements.

A study of pietism is incomplete without reference to the Moravians whose history is bound up with Zinzendorf, an aristocrat, who owned the Herrnhut estate on which a religious community was founded, offering a safe haven during religious turmoil in Europe. The Moravians, or *Renewed Unity of the Brethren*, grew from the union of Protestant groups from Bohemia and Moravia. The earliest members of the *Unitas Fratrum* had roots in the followers of John Hus, who was executed as a heretic in 1415. Hus united diverse Protestant groups within Bohemia, which fragmented after his death. The *Unitas Fratrum* held their first synod in 1467, and continued to grow despite persecution.

The Renewed Brethren coupled the Protestantism developed from the teachings of Hus with the German pietism of Lutherans like Spener. The Brethren who settled at Herrnhut readily accepted Spener's small groups and other social aspects of pietism.

As a 'persecuted group', they attracted other disenfranchised Christians from continental Europe. However, the Moravians were not popular. According to Ward, they were the subjects of a great deal of polemical writing by the 1740's, because the nature of Moravianism as a community and ecclesiastical body, was not easily definable;

There being some solid evidence for all the views of a movement of heterogeneous origin: for the view of some, though not all, of its original adherents that it was a rebirth of the old Unity of the Brethren, a body which had succumbed to the violent pressure of the Counter-Reformation in its old heartlands of Bohemia and Moravia; for the views of its Orthodox opponents that it was either a new sect

with no right to toleration in the empire, or indifferent, i.e. denying the ultimate importance of confessional loyalty on the way to salvation.<sup>27</sup>

Although Zinzendorf is best remembered for his leadership of the Moravians, Christian David was responsible for their settling at Herrnhut. David, born in 1690 in Moravia to Catholic parents, later recalled; 'his heart burned like a stove with religious devotion.'<sup>28</sup> David was influenced by a Pietist evangelical carpentry apprentice master, and after his conversion in 1717, he became a lay preacher, meeting persecuted Christians. In 1722 David met Zinzendorf, after which David directed persecuted Christians to Herrnhut.

Zinzendorf, born in 1700, was fatherless after less than two months. After his mother remarried he was raised by his pietist grandmother. At 10, he went to Halle and was influenced by Franke. At Halle, Zinzendorf began his first movement, the 'Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed'. The group's purpose was 'a Christian fraternity committed to loving "the whole human family" and to spreading the gospel.'<sup>29</sup> Zinzendorf was reluctant to enter Court service preferring to serve the Christian Church. After purchasing from his grandmother the Berthelsdorf estate, which he renamed Herrnhut,<sup>30</sup> he opened his estate to Christian refugees.

Herrnhut's population grew rapidly, but the diversity of the new tenants caused problems. Zinzendorf moved to Herrnhut to control them, imposing a religious and village constitution. The latter included the formation of bands for the sharing of religious experience, and the creation of the office of elder.

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<sup>27</sup> W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, p. 119.

<sup>28</sup> R.A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya* (Academie: Grand Rapids. 1983) p. 74.

<sup>29</sup> R.A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, p. 70.

<sup>30</sup> Herrnhut means 'The Lord's Watch'



In 1727, a major religious revival occurred. In the early part of the year, Herrnhut was regulated as a civic and spiritual community, establishing Moravian and Lutheran communities.<sup>31</sup> The rule of the community was mutual fellowship as shown by the bands organised in July 1727.<sup>32</sup> Whilst Zinzendorf was in Silesia, he read Comenius' *Ratio Disciplinae*. Returning with these rules to Herrnhut, a relationship between the recently agreed Herrnhut rules and the 'ancient Discipline'<sup>33</sup> was noticed, leading to an expectation of God's grace being poured out. On the 13<sup>th</sup> August, following the experience of eleven-year-old Susanne Kühnel<sup>34</sup> whose mother had died, the expectation was fulfilled. After three days and nights of prayer, Susanne and two other girls were converted. Fervour spread throughout the settlement and at a Confirmation and Communion service the community sensed its own Pentecostal experience:

Several brethren prayed with great power and fervour. They prayed not only for themselves, but for their brethren still living under persecution; they prayed for those who taking the name of Christian were yet separated from one another.<sup>35</sup>

As a result doctrinal differences were set aside to concentrate upon unity and dependence upon God. Mission was the practical outworking of the experience, and Christian David became the first Moravian missionary.

As news of this night spread across Silesia, Herrnhut grew. In 1727, Herrnhut had 300 residents; by 1734 this had risen to 600. Conversation began to centre on the signs of 'old time' revival: Christian David began a men's Bible class, prayer meetings lasted all night, and there was a spirit of prayer amongst the community's children.

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<sup>31</sup> A.J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer*, p. 54. Lewis states that the 12 elders were all from the artisan classes

<sup>32</sup> A.J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer*, p. 55.

<sup>33</sup> A.J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer*, p.56.

<sup>34</sup> W.R. Ward, *Christianity under the Ancien Régime*, p.115.

<sup>35</sup> A.J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer*, p. 58.



Zinzendorf's correspondence reflects this new unity; 'Little as I desire that born Lutherans should go over to other sects, I cannot conceive that Catholics, Reformed and separatists who have united with us in love must become Lutheran.'<sup>36</sup>

Credit must be given to Zinzendorf for holding the community together in the summer of 1727, when he afforded the Moravians the status of *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*. At this time, the community members who so wished could join an inner fellowship or 'Gemeine'. It was here that the Class System was formed.

David Lowes Watson describes them

The members were divided into groups, or classes, according to age, sex and marital status, each with a director chosen by the members themselves. Within these classes there was a mutual oversight for the furtherance of spiritual growth, each member being visited daily.....Spiritual growth was to be assessed, and members identified as 'dead', 'awaked', 'ignorant', 'willing disciples' or 'disciples that have made a progress.' Similar language appears on early Methodist class papers.<sup>37</sup>

The classes were termed 'choirs' and sub divided into 'bands'.<sup>38</sup> The bands were small, numbering perhaps three people who shared a spiritual affinity. Every band was accountable to Zinzendorf personally, and he believed they were important to community life. 'I believe without such an institution, the church would never have become what it is now.'<sup>39</sup> This close religious experience and accountability seems to have enabled the community with all its tensions to live together.

Difficulties however, could not be permanently overcome, especially as Watson recounts, the bands became 'compulsory' and the community adopted the

<sup>36</sup> W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, p. 122.

<sup>37</sup> D.L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, p. 77.

<sup>38</sup> Bands first began in 1727. They were small, and members met to talk about their spiritual state openly. See A.J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer*, p. 55.

<sup>39</sup> D.L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, p. 78. Watson is citing from C.W. Towlson, *Moravian and Methodist*.

Lutheran parish system. Many of those who became Elders were aristocrats like Zinzendorf, who were over-represented amongst the community. The Moravians separated in 1735 when David Nitschmann was ordained bishop. Zinzendorf was ordained bishop in 1737. The Wesleys encountered the Moravians under David Nitschmann's leadership on board the *Simmonds*<sup>40</sup> en route for Georgia in 1735. This meeting had a lasting effect for two reasons: piety (especially in times of crisis) and church order.

Pietism spread through a Europe free from Papal authority in a weakened Holy Roman Empire. As monarchs sought religious self-determination, Christian leaders began to seek out fresh ways in which to exercise faith. Piety was one means to combine an understanding of belief with a practical application towards the poor, the sick and the uneducated.

### English Puritanism and Piety

Stoeffler comments that no reformation church was free of the experiential nature that pietism embodies, and because of this:

Whether it occurs in England, in Scotland, in Wales, in the Netherlands, in Germany, in Switzerland, in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Russia or North America, whether it is linked with a Calvinistic, Lutheran, or Arminian theology its main features are always the same.<sup>41</sup>

The English pietist tradition developed through the Puritans who aspired to remove the remnants of Catholic practice from the Church in the mid sixteenth century. This widened to include every aspect of church discipline and ultimately forced a retrenchment from established religion. Beginning during the reign of Elizabeth I<sup>42</sup> the Puritans developed a tradition of personal

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<sup>40</sup> See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, pp. 312-313.

<sup>41</sup> F.E. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill. 1971) p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> See T.A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart*, p. 45.



'preciseness', away from quasi-political debate surrounding the nature of Puritanism itself.<sup>43</sup>

Stoeffler's statement above is partially explained by the exile of Puritans under the reign of Mary (1553-1558). The Puritans who left England travelled to Switzerland and Germany and were influenced by continental reformed teaching, returning on the accession of Elizabeth I, bringing the influence of their continental teachers, and aiming to remodel the church along continental Protestant lines.

Some Puritans were aware of continental piety before any 'mainstream' exile occurred. John Hooper spent many years in Paris, Strasbourg and Zurich, writing about Puritanism. He returned to England during the reign of Edward VI, and became Bishop of Gloucester and Worcester. He was executed in 1555. Whilst in prison, Hooper wrote on predestination to the Kentish conventiclers, in an attempt to persuade them of that doctrine. Though not perhaps strictly in the later Puritan tradition, Hooper took the need for conversion, repentance and pietistic living from his continental influences.

Moving into the period of Mary Tudor, John Bradford stood as a 'link between the continental Reformation and Pietistic Puritanism.'<sup>44</sup> Bradford held to the authority of the Word, justification by grace through faith and the doctrine of double predestination.<sup>45</sup> Piety figured in Bradford's writing, although as with Hooper this was a personal, rather than 'societal' piety.

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<sup>43</sup> F.E. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, pp. 27-28. Stoeffler has a brief but informative introduction to Puritan development.

<sup>44</sup> F.E. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>45</sup> See M. Watts, *The Dissenters From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) p. 11. The Kentish conventiclers rejected the doctrines of original sin and predestination. See also P. Marshall, & A. Ryrie, *The Beginnings of English Protestantism* (Cambridge: Cambridge



Calvinism was assimilated into Puritan piety through the return of exiles. Calvin's *Institutes* were translated into English in 1561 and his catechism was imposed by law upon the universities in 1587. William Perkins drew upon Calvin's *Institutes* and set the theory into practice in the form of piety. Again, there was emphasis upon repentance, which for Perkins meant 'the whole process through which the individual proceeds from the natural state to the state of grace.'<sup>46</sup> Such a reliance upon process emerged through his dependence on covenant theology, the covenant which humankind had to maintain. Perkins however also held that doubt was a requirement for the elect. Indeed, he believed that without perpetual doubts, an individual was damned.<sup>47</sup> William Ames, a student of Perkins, developed his teachers thinking, and worked during the period that Jakob Harmenson, or Arminius, wrote against the election theology of Calvinism.<sup>48</sup>

Perkins and Ames stressed the degrees of faith; effectively the order of salvation itself. These emphases encouraged men and women rigorously to maintain journals and diaries outlining personal journeys of faith, detailing, from conversion onwards, the Christian struggle. This affective<sup>49</sup> passage 'served as a means of making clear the affections experienced by particular women and men as they traversed the order of salvation.'<sup>50</sup> The ultimate degree was that of assurance.<sup>51</sup> Wesley turned the Puritan emphasis on assurance as the final degree on its head. For him assurance was a first step in Christian experience.

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University Press, 2002) pp. 134-137. Bradford also wrote defending predestination against his opponents 'the freewillers', many of whom were also in prison

<sup>46</sup> F.E. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, p. 56.

<sup>47</sup> M. Watts, *The Dissenters*, pp. 173-174. See also pp. 177-178. Others taught and led their congregations to follow this understanding of the Christian life, but for a pastor it posed significant problems.

<sup>48</sup> See T.A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart*, p. 46.

<sup>49</sup> Campbell defines 'affective' as 'heartfelt'. See T.A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart*, pp 2-3.

<sup>50</sup> T.A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart*, p. 48.

<sup>51</sup> T.A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart*, p. 47. See also M. Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 432.

At this time, a reliance on law began to surface, which led to:

An ethical code ...which purported to delineate through careful exposition of Scripture and logical deduction God's sovereign will for every conceivable condition of the Christian's life.<sup>52</sup>

Alongside law, reason became a tool for the Puritans. The ensuing piety became known as 'godliness', offering a life regulated by habit and practice. Richard Rogers systematised this lifestyle in his *Seven Treatises*, offering a closely organised arrangement of personal living, which would surface in a communal form through the Anglican Societies of Horneck and Woodward at the end of the seventeenth century. These Societies will be considered in chapter two.

A piety based on law and reason drove writers like Richard Sibbes and William Ames to use reason, logic and analysis in sermons and books.<sup>53</sup> The *Cambridge Platonists* developed the use and place of reason in the experience of the Christian, and sought religious toleration, a hope that was in part enshrined in the *Act of Toleration* of 1689. Campbell asserts. "Puritanism," as the hope of "purifying" the national church, was dead; but the spiritual impetus of Puritan piety was carried on by both Anglicans and Dissenters in the ensuing decades.<sup>54</sup>

The reliance of godliness on daily exercises for spiritual growth led to an increased observance of the Sabbath. For Richard Greenham, the fourth commandment required adherence so that personal works of piety might have priority over personal recreation or wastefulness. Greenham emphasised the

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<sup>52</sup> F.E. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, p. 58.

<sup>53</sup> P. Miller, & T.H. Johnson, *The Puritans* (New York: American Book Company. 1938) p. 66.

<sup>54</sup> T.A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart*, p. 65.



need for assurance based not on personal feeling, but on the work of God.

Using the analogy of a swimmer he wrote:

Though you swim in deep seas of dangerous temptation, yet are you sure and secure because Christ Jesus your head is still above all your troubles; and therefore able to draw you (his members) to the shoare of salvation without all peril of perishing.<sup>55</sup>

Greenham's piety would be adopted into the Holy Club's pattern. Whilst usually linked with the piety of Halle, it can be seen there was also an English tradition for active engagement in social effort.<sup>56</sup>

Puritan piety developed further with the pursuit of holiness as the goal of the Christian life. This meant that whereas godliness required the Christian *to do*, holiness required the Christian *to be*. In essence a change of state was envisaged by *becoming* holy. This moved from a piety 'centered in law to a piety centered in an immediate relationship to God.'<sup>57</sup> Prayer, meditation and the means of grace were important in this process, and over time, these were incorporated as holy exercises, and stood alongside the practice of piety itself.

Holiness brought the Puritan Pietist into a search for an inward awareness of God's love, Monk states, 'The love of God permeating all the interests, affections, and "tempers" of the person is regarded as inward holiness.'<sup>58</sup> Richard Sibbes and Joseph Alleine's writing on holiness urged readers to seek the image or nature of Christ within.

Because the pursuit of holiness was primarily subjective, mysticism crept into Puritan understanding. Paul Baynes and Richard Sibbes led this development, moving Puritanism towards devotion to the love of God, leading to inner peace

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<sup>55</sup> G.S. Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion* (London: Epworth Press. 1957) p. 125.

<sup>56</sup> F.E. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, p. 64.

<sup>57</sup> F.E. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, p. 79.

<sup>58</sup> R.C. Monk, *John Wesley His Puritan Heritage* (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1966) p. 154.



and union with God. Ultimately for Sibbes the 'end of a Christian's striving was communion with God, the means was prayer, the result was fervent affection for God and man.'<sup>59</sup> R.H. Coats offers a flowery but appropriate summation: 'Mysticism as a form of piety, is the passion and hunger of the soul for immediacy of access to the Father, and the all-satisfying vision of his eternal glory.'<sup>60</sup>

The bedrock of English Puritan mysticism lay in the study of earlier mystical traditions.<sup>61</sup> Joseph Hall<sup>62</sup> referred to Origen, St. Augustine and Gerson (amongst others). Francis Rous<sup>63</sup> looked towards the Eastern mystics; Dionysius the Areopagite and Clement of Alexandria, as well as mystics of the later middle ages, among them Thomas á Kempis.<sup>64</sup> Gordon Wakefield asserted that there was 'a school of English mysticism derived from Jacob Boehme.'<sup>65</sup> However, Boehme's mysticism was drawn from a German, Lutheran milieu, rather than the medieval English mystics. Boehme was rejected by the Lutherans for his views. Among the Puritans, John Pordage was best known for his study of Boehme.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> F.E. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, p. 83.

<sup>60</sup> R.H. Coats, *Types of English Piety* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark. 1912) p. 156.

<sup>61</sup> J.C. Brauer, 'Puritan Mysticism and the Development of Liberalism, in *Church History*, Volume 19, Part 5, (eds. W.S Hudson, M. Spinka, R.C. Petry, et al, Chicago: American Society of Church History. 1950) pp. 152. See also G. Mursell, *English Spirituality from the Earliest Times to 1700* (London: SPCK. 2001) pp. 356-380. Mursell, in his helpful discussion of Puritan Spirituality does not refer to the English mystics.

<sup>62</sup> See R.A. McCabe, 'Joseph Hall', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Volume 24, *Grigg-Hanboys* (eds. H.C.G. Matthew, & B. Harrison; Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2004) pp. 633-637. Hall (1574-1656) was Bishop of Exeter and Norwich. He was a Calvinist, but sought an 'ideal mean between radical Non-Conformity and Roman Catholicism.' p. 635.

<sup>63</sup> See J.M. Rigg, 'Francis Rous', *The Dictionary of National Biography*. Volume XVII, *Robinson-Sheares* (eds. L. Stephen, & S. Lee; Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1917). Rigg was an M.P. and also Provost of Eton. He was interested in a subjective piety, and wrote 'Mystical Marriage', describing the marriage of the soul to Christ. See also J.C. Brauer, 'Puritan Mysticism and the Development of Liberalism, in *Church History*, Vol. 19, Part 5, Brauer asserted that Rous was the 'first Puritan mystic', p. 152.

<sup>64</sup> See F.E. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, pp. 84-86.

<sup>65</sup> G.S. Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion* (London: Epworth Press. 1957) p. 102. See also F.L. Cross & E.A. Livingstone, 'Boehme, Jakob' in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (eds. F.L. Cross & E.A. Livingstone, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1974) pp. 182-183.

<sup>66</sup> See. M. Brod, 'A Radical Network in the English Revolution: John Pordage and His Circle, 1646-54', in *English Historical Review*, Vol. cxix, part 484 (eds. G.W. Bernard, M. Conway and A. Borg; Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2004) p. 1231.



Surprisingly, the Puritans who accepted mysticism did not look back to the English mystics, such as Margery Kempe,<sup>67</sup> Richard Rolle,<sup>68</sup> Julian of Norwich,<sup>69</sup> Walter Hilton<sup>70</sup> and *The Cloud of Unknowing*.<sup>71</sup> In email correspondence<sup>72</sup> Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch<sup>73</sup> suggested that this may have been because their work was not available to be read. Equally, mysticism was viewed with suspicion, as Boehme discovered through his own mystical writings, with the term 'Behemist'<sup>74</sup> being applied to those who sought to follow a similar path of mysticism.

As I shall show later in this thesis, Wesley drew on the Puritans whilst creating his own schema of belief. Wesley's reading and publications may offer further insight into the absence of English mysticism from the Puritans of a previous generation, and suggests that Dr MacCulloch's comment is correct. V.H.H. Green's appendix to *The Young Mr Wesley*<sup>75</sup> lists Wesley's reading between 1725 and 1734. In his reading of classics, plays, general reading and religion, there are no English mystics noted. Bullock recorded In *Evangelical Conversion in Great Britain 1516-1695*, that the *Christian Library* which Wesley began publishing in 1749 contained a wide range of spiritual biographies, and abridged

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<sup>67</sup> See F. Riddy, 'Kempe [nee Brunham], Margery', in *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 31, pp. 188-189. Kempe's autobiography, her *Book* is the earliest surviving autobiography in English. She was born in Kings Lynn, Norfolk in around 1373 and died in or after 1438.

<sup>68</sup> See J. Hughes, 'Rolle, Richard', in *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 47, pp. 619-622. Rolle was a hermit, whose main work was *Super Canticum Cantorum*. He was born in Thornton Dale, Yorkshire in 1305-10 and died in 1349.

<sup>69</sup> See S. Bhattacharji, 'Julian of Norwich', in *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 30, pp. 819-820. Julian may have taken her name from the parish church of St. Julian at Conisford, where she had her cell. She is known for *Revelations of Divine Love*, written after 16 visions of the crucified Christ. Julian was visited by Margery Kempe in 1413. She was born in 1342, and died around 1416.

<sup>70</sup> See J.P.H. Clark, 'Hilton, Walter', in *Dictionary of National Biography*, Vol. 27, pp. 250-251. Hilton is best known for *Scale of Perfection*, and he joined a Priory of Augustinian Canons in Thurgarton, Nottinghamshire in around 1386. He was born in 1343, and died in 1396.

<sup>71</sup> See N. Russell, 'Cloud of Unknowing, The', in *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (ed. G. Wakefield, London: SCM Press Ltd. 1983) pp. 89-91.

<sup>72</sup> Email correspondence between the writer and Professor Diarmid MacCulloch, 11<sup>th</sup> December 2006.

<sup>73</sup> Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch is Professor of the History of the Church at St. Cross College, Oxford.

<sup>74</sup> F.L. Cross & E.A. Livingstone, 'Boehme, Jakob', in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 183. The Behemists later amalgamated with the Quakers.

<sup>75</sup> V.H.H. Green, *The Young Mr Wesley* (London: Edward Arnold (Publishing) Ltd. 1961) pp. 305-319.

writings. Among the authors published for a Methodist readership were conversion accounts of 'Bilney, Frith, Latimer, Hamilton, Straiton, Welsh, Blackerby, Bolton, Winter, Mather, Hale and Fraser'.<sup>76</sup> Wesley's abridgements contained works by 'Baxter, Bolton, Goodwin, Ambrose and Alleine, also by John Ardent, Blaise Pascal, Hugh Binning, Henry More, Bishop Edward Reynolds and Jonathan Edwards.'<sup>77</sup> Wakefield notes the omissions in *Fire of Love*. 'The omissions are important: no medieval mystics, no Carmelites, no great reformers, no St Anthony, St Augustine, St Anselm, St Bernard, St Thomas (except indirectly through the Puritans); no one indeed whom the Catholic Church has canonised.'<sup>78</sup>

Wesley's later pattern offers an insight, but not conclusive evidence as to why the English mystics may have been overlooked by the Puritans. If their Catholic heritage meant that these mystics were anathema to the Puritans, then Wesley, drawing on their reading was following a pattern set by his religious forebears. Wakefield suggested that Wesley's omission was due to 'the prejudices of the age'.<sup>79</sup> If this was so, then he was doing nothing more than the Puritans had largely done before him. Equally, if their work was not available, it is not merely an omission because of religious background, but an understandable omission, as their writings were little known.

In contrast to his contemporaries, Richard Baxter though a Puritan and Pietist maintained a broadly Arminian theology.<sup>80</sup> He sought to unite the various strands of piety. Baxter wanted to ensure that the reliance on law, i.e. God's

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<sup>76</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Evangelical Conversion*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>77</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Evangelical Conversion*, p. 111.

<sup>78</sup> G.S. Wakefield, *Fire of Love the Spirituality of John Wesley* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976) p. 20.

<sup>79</sup> G.S. Wakefield, *Fire of Love*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>80</sup> Baxter did not accept universal salvation (Arminianism), but equally would not allow the harshness of Calvin's election theory. He therefore mellowed both doctrines. See T.A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart*, pp. 65-67.



sovereign will, stood alongside the gospel, i.e. God's grace. Here he sought to bring together an understanding of God's glory, with the happiness of humankind. Baxter was at the forefront of the creation of a 'reasonable and tolerant piety.'<sup>81</sup>

Baxter began two small weekly groups, one to discuss the previous Sunday's sermon, pray and occasionally to sing a psalm, and another of younger people to pray. A third group met on a Saturday, to discuss the previous week's sermon and prepare themselves for the following day. Overtones of the later Unitary Societies are apparent, but Baxter allowed extempore and a freer style, which was forbidden in these Societies. Baxter and his assistant also met families for catechising and discussion.<sup>82</sup>

Many groups or sects sprang up in the the seventeenth century. Most were short-lived, and relied on the prophetic visions of the leader. Muggletonians, Levellers and Soul Sleepers added a new dimension to Puritan piety. In the main, these groups were 'enthusiasts' who in following their teacher often relied only marginally on the authority of Scripture and more on the teaching of their leader, with little time for the structures of church or state. It is unsurprising that the term 'enthusiast' should be so negative when applied to the Methodists in the eighteenth century. John Wesley was swift to distance himself from any charge of enthusiasm and from people he thought to be enthusiasts.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> T.A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart*, p. 69.

<sup>82</sup> F.E. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>83</sup> For example see J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol 19, p. 31. The men he 'charges' with enthusiasm are Mr Hollis and William Seward

Jeremy Taylor, (who stands outside Puritan Pietism) deserves reference. His two major works, *The Rule and Exercises for Holy Living*<sup>84</sup> and *The Rule and Exercises for Holy Dying*,<sup>85</sup> synthesised the traditional teachings of Puritan Pietists outlined above with the Arminian teaching of Lancelot Andrewes, a High Church Anglican. There was a year's gap between publications.<sup>86</sup>

Taylor's understanding of the Christian life was 'sweetness, reasonableness, and implicit trust in a good God of whom all creation speaks to the devout spirit.'<sup>87</sup> Holiness, motivated by the love of God shown through practical piety was the way towards God. Alongside this journey was the necessity of proper preparation, and in the High Church tradition, he believed the means of grace necessary to the life of the Christian. Taylor also believed the monarch's role in the order of state to be sacrosanct, acknowledging Charles II as King, by divine right during the Commonwealth. Wesley's reading of *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying* influenced his spiritual practice, as much as the teaching of more traditional Puritans.

Taylor wrote during the Commonwealth, when the Anglican Church had seemingly lost its place in English life and the need to write *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying* was urgent. His writing, according to Askey, was 'not a supplement to a church-goer's devotional literature, but ...the whole of Christian life for the

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<sup>84</sup> J. Taylor, *The Rule and Exercises for Holy Living in which are described The Meanes and Instruments of obtaining every Vertue; and the Remedies against every Vice, and Considerations serving the resisting all temptations. Together with Prayers containing the whole duty of Christians, and the parts of Devotion fitted to all occasions and furnish'd for all Neccessities* (London: R. Royston. 1650)

<sup>85</sup> J. Taylor, *The Rules and Exercises of Holy Dying, in which are described The Means and Instruments of preparing ourselves, and others respectively for a blessed death: and the remedies against the evils and temptations proper to the state of sicknesse. Together with Prayers and acts of Vertue to be used by sick and dying persons, or by others standing in their attendance. To which are added Rules for the visitation of the sick, and offices proper for that Ministry* (London: R. Royston. 1651)

<sup>86</sup> C.J. Stranks, *The Life and Writings of Jeremy Taylor* (London: SPCK. 1952) p. 104.

<sup>87</sup> F.E. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, p. 107.



unchurched English parishioner in the middle of the seventeenth century.<sup>88</sup> 39

*Holy Living* then is intended to assist daily devotional life in the absence of Anglican clergy to support the process. Living a holy life was important; Taylor had no place for deathbed conversions. The whole of life was bound up with living for God, and denial of that through life was not overcome at death.<sup>89</sup> Wesley's own early repugnance for deathbed conversions<sup>90</sup> was similar to Taylor's.

*Holy Dying*<sup>91</sup> was equally devotional, intended to aid the Christian through the process of death. As the holy life, so the holy death was found in the practice of the individual during life. If there was no priest to visit and perform an office for the dying, the book was to fill that place:

*Holy Dying* is not a handbook for the clergy. It is a self-help manual for those especially in the dismantled Church who have no priest. It is for those who need instructing about the danger they are in ...What *Holy Dying* aimed at was to convince the reader, in the absence of the Church of England and its ministry, of the divine mercy in pardoning sinners, and not to despair.<sup>92</sup>

*Holy Dying* was not to be read by the dying: it is a book for those who live; yet wish to die a 'good death'. It is intended to assist the process of death when it comes, not comfort those who are in a final illness.<sup>93</sup>

Piety was a constantly developing spirituality both in continental Europe and England throughout the sixteenth and into the seventeenth century. Developed as a means of expressing faith through life, and ranging from the completion of

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<sup>88</sup> R. Askey, *Muskets and Altars: Jeremy Taylor and the Last of the Anglicans* (London: Mowbray. 1997) p. 2.

<sup>89</sup> C.J. Stranks, *The Life and Writings of Jeremy Taylor*, p. 106.

<sup>90</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, P. 228. See the entry for the 6<sup>th</sup> March 1738. Bohler had invited Wesley to speak with a condemned prisoner called Clifford on several occasions. Wesley wrote 'I could not prevail on myself so to do, being still (as I had been many years) a zealous asserter of *the impossibility of a death-bed repentance.*'

<sup>91</sup> *The Rule and Exercises for Holy Dying* was written following the death of his wife, Phoebe. See R. Askey, *Muskets and Altars*, pp. 144-145.

<sup>92</sup> R. Askey, *Muskets and Altars*, p. 147.

<sup>93</sup> See C.J. Stranks, *The Life and Writings of Jeremy Taylor*, p. 114.



spiritual exercises to the introverted journeying of the mystics, to the communal life of the Herrnhutters or the small groups of Richard Baxter, pietism in all its forms sought to move the individual through life towards an understanding and experience of faith that was not cold, or intellectual, but *affective*<sup>94</sup> to the emotions and experience.

In Wesley both Continental and English piety can be discerned through his lifestyle, reading and organisation, and I will evidence this in later chapters. Wesleyan piety was a distillation of Pietist and Puritan attitudes and practices with which John Wesley could agree, or more importantly could say were experientially true. Chapter two's discussion of the Wesleyan inheritance will show further influences on Wesley.

### Social Developments

A.M. Allchin asserts that the 'seventeenth century both in Britain and in Europe had been a period of great religious fervour and theological creativity.'<sup>95</sup> This fervour and creativity followed the emancipation of European Catholic states, and an England gradually emerging from her own religious change. Such change was paralleled by social and political changes.

With the emergence of enlightened thought, philosophy began to view the nature of being human differently from that previously taught within the Roman Catholic Church. 'Reason' became the byword for philosophers. Science also began to surface as a means of understanding how the world functioned.

Gerald Cragg writes:

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<sup>94</sup> T.A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>95</sup> A.M. Allchin, *Participation in God: A Forgotten Strand in Anglican Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd. 1988) p. 25.

Bacon had pointed to the scientific method which would rule the future, and Descartes had unfolded *The Principles* of thought which inaugurated the new age in philosophy. Men's minds would no longer be governed by assumptions which were an inheritance from medieval and classical times.<sup>96</sup>

This placed philosophy on a collision course with the entrenched views of Catholicism. That is not to say that philosophy had no place for religion, rather it viewed the world from an alternative perspective. Cragg also asserts that travel was broadening the horizon beyond Europe and opening enquiring minds to other philosophies.<sup>97</sup> Travel led to a greater awareness of alternative thinking, behaving and understanding. Allied to the associational age which will be considered later, the flowing exchange of ideas gave rise to an age of enquiry.

Maximin Piette holds a starker view, stating that the dawn of the Age of Reason occurred with the breakdown of the authority of religion through nationalism. In the new age, reason sought to influence every area of life and each country 'made its own philosophy and followed its own masters. France looked to Descartes, England to Hobbes, Locke, Berkley and Hume. Germany went to school to Leibnitz and his follower Wolff.'<sup>98</sup> As Allchin states:

The eighteenth century emerged as an age of rationalism, moralism and scepticism, an age which saw the beginning of the modern rejection of the classical Christian tradition.<sup>99</sup>

In England Deism emerged, shunning revelation, and the surety of a knowledge of God. Deists denied original sin and praised humankind's innate goodness, doing away with any need for atonement.<sup>100</sup> Deism also influenced continental Europe.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> G.R. Cragg, *The Church & the Age of Reason*, p. 37.

<sup>97</sup> G.R. Cragg, *The Church & the Age of Reason*, p. 46.

<sup>98</sup> M. Piette, *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism* (London: Sheed & Ward 1937) p. 98.

<sup>99</sup> A.M. Allchin, *Participation in God*, p. 25.

<sup>100</sup> See H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, pp. 30-31. Rack helpfully sets out the basic viewpoint of deist thought.

<sup>101</sup> See M. Piette, *John Wesley*, pp. 99-100.



In 1648 at the end of the Thirty Years War, nation states began to emerge across Europe from a weakened Holy Roman Empire previously gripped by the Hapsburg dynasty.<sup>102</sup> Small Electoral states, which elected the Holy Roman Emperor, had always owed allegiance to Rome. Once the power of the Holy Roman Emperor diminished as a unifying force for Rome, rulers were swayed by the force of other dogma creating confessional states. That did not mean that the new Protestant states were havens for all, but neither were the 'old' states. Catholic France enacted the Edit of Nantes in 1598, granting religious toleration to Protestant Huguenots. In 1685, after whittling at the heart of the Edict,<sup>103</sup> Louis XIV revoked it. This sanctioned the persecution of Huguenot ministers and people and led to an exodus to England, Europe and the new American colonies, taking not only skilled artisan trades, but Huguenot piety beyond its traditional boundaries.

The Treaty of Westphalia altered the nature of nationhood forever. Europe in 1648 was defined outside the Holy Roman Empire. P.K. Monod is clear that the negotiators of the Treaty of Westphalia believed that they could rationally create borders and nations; 'they defined the autonomy of new states, and confirmed the sovereignty of old ones, by recognizing the balance of military power. Their work was supposed to provide a permanent territorial settlement for the Empire.'<sup>104</sup> This treaty enshrined religious toleration.

In England, a similar situation brought about by the break from Rome under Henry VIII, and the subsequent turbulence around the faith of the monarch was

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<sup>102</sup> The Hapsburg's were Kings of Spain and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Their Catholic faith ensured European allegiance to Rome through their political power.

<sup>103</sup> G.R. Cragg, *The Church & the Age of Reason*, pp. 18-21. Cragg usefully sums up the manner in which Louis XIV gradually whittled the toleration granted under the Edict until it was revoked.

<sup>104</sup> P.K. Monod, *The Power of Kings Monarchy and Religion in Europe, 1589 – 1715* (Michigan: Yale. 1999) p. 155.



finally put to rest with the Act of Settlement in 1701. The English and Scottish<sup>105</sup> crowns were abolished in 1649 with the execution of Charles I and were only restored after Richard Cromwell, Lord Protector in succession to Oliver Cromwell, resigned in 1660. Charles II ascended the throne and reigned until 1685.

James II, Charles' brother, was deposed in the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688. This led to the invitation to William of Orange (William III) and Queen Mary II to ascend to the throne. From the accession of Charles I onwards the monarch had been Catholic. At the restoration in 1660, Charles II distanced himself from the advancement of the Catholic cause. James II however intended to return England (and Scotland) to Rome. Both William and Mary were Protestants, and with their accession, Parliament made the choice not only of monarch, but also of 'state religion'.

The Act of Settlement linked the crown to the Established Church and forbade the monarch, or heir to the throne from marrying a Catholic:

every person and persons that then were, or afterwards should be reconciled to, or shall hold communion with the see or Church of Rome, or should profess the popish religion, or marry a papist, should be excluded, and are by that Act made for ever incapable to inherit, possess, or enjoy the Crown and government of this realm, and Ireland, and the dominions thereunto.<sup>106</sup>

Parliament enacted the Protestant succession to allow 'for the happiness of the nation, and the security of our religion; and it being absolutely necessary for the safety, peace, and quiet of this realm'.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> The thrones of England and Scotland were brought under one monarch with James I, although they remained distinct nations.

<sup>106</sup> *The Act of Settlement*, 1701.

<sup>107</sup> *The Act of Settlement*, 1701.

In England (Britain after the Act of Union of 1701), the monarchy was considerably weaker than in any European country. After the death of Queen Anne in 1714, the throne was passed to the Hanoverians. George I spoke no English and showed little interest in Britain; Parliament's ascendancy was assured. Under Charles I, the Covenanters in Scotland and the 'Root and Branch' petitioners of England had been concerned to restore national fortunes by a decisive swing away from Catholicism. The king was considered 'uncounselled' in Scotland, because he relied on bishops (among others) for advice.

P.K. Monod comments that Charles' coronation in Scotland in 1633 with its 'perceived attachment to "popish" ceremony'<sup>108</sup> caused criticism. In England, the Presbyterian signatories to the 'Root and Branch' petition sought the removal of episcopacy as bishops were thought to be the cause of unrest. Monod makes plain that the movement was not merely a religious reformation, with the desire to impose a presbytery. The movement literally sought 'root and branch' to reform English society. Monod writes:

It delineated the outlines of a "government according to God's word," a godly English polity incorporating public moral regeneration along with personal discipline and just commercial values. It called for reform of everything....In the new English Israel, the holy was to be completely separated from the unholy.<sup>109</sup>

The Covenanters and 'Root and Branch' petitioners were not seeking the removal of the King. Indeed, as monarch he embodied the mystical nature of the state. They wanted the nation to amend its ways, both socially and spiritually, and many Presbyterians in parliament were looking for the King to share power with them. However, the English Civil War countenanced the unthinkable, that the King had no place in government. The Levellers who were

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<sup>108</sup> P.K. Monod, *The Power of Kings*, p. 155.

<sup>109</sup> P.K. Monod, *The Power of Kings*, p. 157.



at the forefront of this thinking, were represented in the army and looked away from Presbyterian and Anglican teaching to 'sectarian' Independent preachers, often regimental preachers. The Levellers were offered hearings by Cromwell and other generals; hearings that more moderate Presbyterians were not offered. Monod is clear these conversations were by no means the only reason for the trial and execution of the King.

These were Dissenters, and Parliament's later ascendancy ensured that only Anglicans held positions of authority, and Dissenters were disadvantaged. The Act of Uniformity,<sup>110</sup> which placed the Prayer Book as the single volume for public worship, stood beside the Test Act of 1673 which excluded non-juring priests from pulpits and laymen from holding office. The invitation to William and Mary in 1689 ushered in an age of religious toleration. Whilst disadvantage remained, the earlier hunt for Catholics ended.

At the same time, the agrarian revolution changed the settled way of life for many in a rural society. The Enclosure Acts had ended generations of tenant farming. The agrarian revolution, which would fuel by labour, the industrial revolution, meant that crops and livestock were now farmed to feed a growing population which had no dependence upon the land. The small holders who had lost their land through enclosures became waged labourers and some of them would become the personnel who would move into the developing towns, and into artisan trades. Clark asserts that amongst those joining the earliest Unitary Societies, were young male apprentices, displaced from rural communities and living in the emerging towns and cities.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> The Act of Uniformity 1559. *1 Elizabeth, Cap 2*

<sup>111</sup> P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p. 55.

By 1715, the population of Europe stood at around one hundred and eighteen million. In England there were around '5.1 million in 1701, 5.8 million in 1751 and 8.7 million in 1801'.<sup>112</sup> Population growth increased the pressure on outdated agricultural methods, and in England the new farming methods of the agrarian revolution provided sufficient food, although many were no longer working the land.

In the period to the rise of the Evangelical Revival, the religious leaders discussed earlier in this chapter were known by later generations through spiritual autobiography, and their writings on divinity. These set out Puritan Pietistic models for the conversion experience, and in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, were read, according to Hindmarsh, by Dissenters and early evangelicals alike. Perkins work particularly affected later writers and readers, 'the theology of conversion expounded by Perkins in the late sixteenth century had by the late seventeenth century spawned a whole literature, which was widely read by English Nonconformists well into the eighteenth century.'<sup>113</sup>

The resulting desire amongst the people was for the same or similar experience. This thesis will show that from the rise of the Anglican Unitary Society, into the period of Fetter Lane and Methodism, Anglicans, Dissenters and the 'un-churched' sought out spiritual purpose to their lives.

It is therefore important to note that the rising 'artisan' classes, those who were moving into the new towns, forming part of the societal change in early modern England, were not without religious or spiritual longings. The desire for seriousness, awakened by reading, was not fed by the parish system which was failing to meet growing communities, or which was unable to answer the

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<sup>112</sup> H.D. Rack. *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 1.

<sup>113</sup> D.B. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative. Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2005) p. 50.



questions raised by such reading. Hindmarsh evidences the desire for individual and communal spirituality in a study of the earliest Methodist testimonies.<sup>114</sup> This desire formed the bedrock on which Methodism grew. Added to the individuality which Methodism offered, was the new sense of community that membership of a society brought. 'For many of the Methodists who were dislocated through employment or domestic troubles, Methodism offered the family that they missed or never had. Notwithstanding the intensely individual language in these narratives, conversion was not experienced in isolation.'<sup>115</sup>

I have shown in this chapter how the creation of small groups as vehicles for faith development and ecclesiastical renewal spread across Europe and into Britain in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Bullock traced religious societies in England to around 1678. Writing of the development of religious societies from Luther onwards, Bullock states of the English scene:

This expectation (to find religious societies) is amply fulfilled from 1678 onwards, but before that date there is not much expression in England of the idea of an inner circle, loyal to the main body, but trying also to stimulate it to fresh life and quickened enthusiasm.<sup>116</sup>

The emergence of religious societies was perhaps a response to the growing number of secular societies. Clark indicates that in 1661 clubs and societies, met in both alehouses and coffee houses.<sup>117</sup> Their rise was encouraged as Commonwealth censorship had ceased, and society had pluralised. For Clark, the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century saw a marked change in societal behaviour, which had previously focussed on the home. As an instance he cites the emergence of Mothering Sunday, which began as a family meal on 'mid Lent

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<sup>114</sup> D.B. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, pp. 142-156.

<sup>115</sup> D.B. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, p. 151.

<sup>116</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies 1520-1799* (St Leonard's on Sea: Budd & Gillatt. 1963) p. 109. (Words in brackets mine)

<sup>117</sup> P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies 1580-1800* (Oxford: Clarendon Press. 2000) p. 26.

Sunday' and in the seventeenth century developed into Mothering Sunday.<sup>118</sup>

Bullock contends that there was no single catalyst for the religious societies which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, but suggests that 'the root cause was the general decay of religion and the corruption of morals.'<sup>119</sup>

Clark challenges Bullock's assumption suggesting that the rise of Catholicism, and Protestant Dissent in Britain set in process the rise of Anglican societies.

Clark accepts their primary function was religious, but indicates that there was also an element of personal advancement attached to membership:

Most of those joining were young men and apprentices for whom the attraction of the meetings was not just spiritual: according to the Scot Robert Kirk, discussions included 'advice for advancing [in] trade, getting a maintenance, [and] helping the sick of their society.'<sup>120</sup>

Young men, recently out of apprenticeship may have looked to a society such as that at the Savoy Chapel to advance their careers.<sup>121</sup>

In an interview the Rev Dr Henry Rack described the 18<sup>th</sup> Century as a period of 'clubability'.<sup>122</sup> Peter Clark offers a detailed critique of the many clubs and societies formed between 1580 and 1800. The new 'associational'<sup>123</sup> nature of society arose from individualisation, and the emergence of clubs and societies was intended to counter this, and offer a form of religion which was not as dry as organised religion, and offered more than familial piety.

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<sup>118</sup> P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p. 28.

<sup>119</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 127.

<sup>120</sup> P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p. 55.

<sup>121</sup> See Appendix 1: Rule 14

<sup>122</sup> Interview with the Rev Dr Henry Rack on the 15<sup>th</sup> June 2000

<sup>123</sup> P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*. Clark's subtitle for the book is "*The Origins of an Associational World*".



According to Clark, associations expanded because 'living standards improved among the upper and middling groups of society'.<sup>124</sup> Bullock clearly indicates that there were a large number of organisations seeking to meet felt religious needs. There were also secular clubs and coffee houses. Some clubs began to pursue political aims; the mug-house clubs,<sup>125</sup> to which Whigs brought their own mugs out of which loyal toasts were drunk, and The Cocoa Tree Coffee House<sup>126</sup> for Tories. Clubs were not always founded for political, educational or religious aims, members of the 'Ugly Face Clubs'<sup>127</sup> prided themselves on an ability to drink heavily and have facial oddness!

### Chapter Summary

In a rapidly changing social, political and economic scene which had been tested by revolution and the emergence of nation states, renewal in religion, represented by the religious leaders discussed in this chapter, was a far cry from the old order existing prior to the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, or to the death of Charles I. As theological consideration enabled religious development, men and women, liberated to think and practise religion beyond Catholicism, sought out those leaders who could assist their growth in faith.

This overview was necessary to place John and Charles Wesley into their religious, cultural and social milieu, and their background and heritage will be reviewed in the following chapter. In the subsequent chapters of this section the emergence of Unitary Societies and Fetter Lane will be charted against the backdrop of this chapter.

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<sup>124</sup> P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>125</sup> P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p. 73.

<sup>126</sup> P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p. 73.

<sup>127</sup> P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p. 71.

In the Evangelical Revolution of the eighteenth century, the associational desires of men and women were met by those religious leaders influenced by the developments of the past, who looked away from the Catholic Church towards the warm hearted, socially engaging religion of Protestantism. The Wesleyan mission evolved from this milieu, and met the needs of those who were seeking an associational life beyond their home, work and social life.



## Chapter 2: The Heritage of John and Charles Wesley

### Context

This chapter will review the life of John, and less extensively Charles Wesley, to May 1738, evaluating their inheritance within the broader framework outlined in chapter one and offering insight into the Wesleys' life detailed in the following chapters.

As might be expected John Wesley's family were affected by religious fractiousness in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. At Oxford University, John Wesley turned towards living a serious life. In his 1738 retrospective, Wesley accounts of the period from 1725,

I executed a resolution which I was before convinced was of the utmost importance, shaking off at once all my trifling acquaintance. I began to see more and more the value of time. I applied myself closer to study. I watched more carefully against actual sins; I advised others to be religious, according to that scheme of religion by which I modelled my own life.<sup>1</sup>

Wesley's personal life was marked by exactitude, his reading centred on authors with whom he could only partially agree, and who did not bring him a sense of peace. The more he read and searched, the more he longed for the unattainable: Primitive Christianity. In part, this search took him to America, yet was to prove futile. Primitive Christianity was not found among the settlers of Georgia, or among the Native Americans. Finally, returning home a fugitive, he searched out Peter Böhler, became active in the fledgling Fetter Lane Society, and preached in several Unitary Societies. On the 24<sup>th</sup> May 1738 in the heated surroundings of Aldersgate Street, Wesley received a sense of assurance, whilst listening to Luther's Preface to Romans, which W.R. Ward asserts

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<sup>1</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 244.

'became almost obligatory for approved conversion in the later Pietist movement.'<sup>2</sup>

In what sense this was Wesley 'coming home' from a long journey of 18 years cannot be assessed without an understanding of the journey to 1738.

### The Family Home Life

Samuel and Susanna Wesley, in their adult lives Anglican high Tories, came from Dissenting families. Samuel's father, the Reverend John Westley<sup>3</sup> had been ejected from his living in 1662 as he refused to accept the Act of Uniformity. He died in 1670 whilst minister 'of a "gathered church" in Poole'.<sup>4</sup> Susanna's father, Samuel Annesley was a Presbyterian minister in Spitalfields London until his death in 1696. Robert Monk states Dr Annesley was, 'one of the most eminent of the later Puritan Nonconformists.'<sup>5</sup>

Samuel Wesley was educated in two Dissenting Academies, although he later wrote a scathing attack on them in his *Letter from a Country Divine* in 1703. He received the living of Epworth (a Crown living) through the offices of his patron, the Marquis of Normanby, later the Duke of Buckingham. This patronage would exist until his death in 1735 as the Dowager Duchess of Buckingham appointed Samuel her chaplain in 1721.<sup>6</sup> This previously unknown appointment was discovered at the Lambeth Palace Archives. For Samuel Wesley patronage did

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<sup>2</sup> W.R. Ward, *Christianity under the Ancien Régime 1648-1789*, p. 74

<sup>3</sup> See S. Lee, (ed.), 'John Westley', in *Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume LX, *Watson-Whewell* (London: Smith, Elder & Co. 1899) pp. 314-317.

<sup>4</sup> R.C. Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Inheritance*, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> R.C. Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Inheritance*, p. 20. For a fuller account of Dr Annesley's life and ministry see pp20-21. See also L. Stephen, (ed.), 'Samuel Annesley' in *Dictionary of National Biography*, Volume II, *Annesley-Baird* (London: Smith, Elder & Co. 1885) pp. 7-9.

<sup>6</sup> Lambeth Palace Library. *Noblemen's Chaplain's*. Catharine, Dowager Duchess was the third wife of the Duke who died in 1721.



not bring further advancement,<sup>7</sup> neither did it prevent near penury in the Wesley Rectory.<sup>8</sup>

This Puritan heritage offered to these converts to high Tory Anglicanism a background of pietist teaching and influence. Monk and Ward, whilst cautious of this influence, accept that to be educated within a Dissenting Academy, or to be raised in a Puritan household, will leave certain 'marks'. Rack cites that Susanna's piety in particular was significant for the upbringing of her children, and that Samuel Wesley's dying words as to the 'inward witness' are signs of that heritage breaking through.

Samuel and Susanna raised between seventeen and nineteen children, of whom Samuel jr, was the eldest (10<sup>th</sup> February 1690) John was the second (17<sup>th</sup> June 1703),<sup>9</sup> and Charles (18<sup>th</sup> December 1707)<sup>10</sup> the third surviving sons.<sup>11</sup> It is almost folklore that John Wesley was born as the result of a reunion between Samuel and Susanna Wesley following the death of William III and accession of Queen Anne.<sup>12</sup> The cause of the Wesleys' separation was the refusal of Susanna to say 'amen' after the prayer for the King, William III of the House of Orange.

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<sup>7</sup> He had been suggested to the Archbishop of Canterbury for an Irish bishopric in 1694, but this was not furthered.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Wesley was jailed for debt in 1705 See H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 46. See also p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> Old style

<sup>10</sup> Old style. See F. Baker, 'The Birth of Charles Wesley', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XXXI, pp. 25-26. Baker's article put to rest any question about the date of Charles' birth. However, Charles' birth continues to be reported as a mystery: See F.C. Gill, *Charles Wesley The First Methodist*, (London: Lutterworth Press. 1964) p. 17. See also F.L. Wiseman, *Charles Wesley Evangelist and Poet*, (London: Epworth Press. 1933) p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> See S. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley. The Complete Writings* (ed. C. Wallace Jr; New York: Oxford University Press. 1997) p. 8. Wallace reproduces a table of the Wesley family completed by Frank Baker.

<sup>12</sup> See H.D.Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, pp. 48-49.

Susanna took responsibility for the family's education, and her thoughts upon raising children are contained in a letter written to John in 1732. Charles Wallace comments:

Dealing with the household regimen and the early education of her ten children who survived infancy, it has become something of a classic statement of evangelical child-rearing practices.<sup>13</sup>

Wallace notes that Susanna, like many Puritan and Anglican parents educated her children. What are perhaps extraordinary are the clear references and 'resonances'<sup>14</sup> through her writings to the works of the philosopher John Locke.<sup>15</sup> Wallace concludes that this mixture of ideas and ideals led to 'the remarkable children of the Epworth rectory and that illustrates the zeal with which Susanna Wesley pursued an educational vocation within the bounds of contemporary social constraints.'<sup>16</sup> The hallmarks of Susanna's educational style might be summed up as: fearing the rod and crying softly; regular and disciplined hours; conquering the will; learning the Lord's Prayer and other catechisms; learning to read from five years; beatings only when required.<sup>17</sup>

Three major events stood out in the Wesleys' upbringing, the Epworth religious society discussed in the next chapter; the fire in the rectory in 1709, and the Evening Prayers Controversy.

Susanna Wesley's account of the Epworth fire states that the reason for it was unknown, although John Wesley attributed the cause to wicked parishioners. Samuel escaped the fire through the front of the rectory, Susanna through the back. John was in the house in an upstairs bedroom. As fire swept through the

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<sup>13</sup> S. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley*, p. 367. Introductory comments to 'On Educating my Family'.

<sup>14</sup> S. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley*, p. 368. Introductory comments to 'On Educating my Family'.

<sup>15</sup> Locke wrote *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*

<sup>16</sup> S. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley*, p. 368. Introductory comments to 'On Educating my Family'.

<sup>17</sup> S. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley*, pp. 369-373. Susanna sets out what might be termed a rigorous, yet comprehensive education system for all her children.



house, Samuel began to pray, as there seemed no escape for his son.

Villagers rescued John from the window just before the roof fell in.<sup>18</sup> The family lost all their possessions.<sup>19</sup>

John's parents considered his rescue providential, and Susanna noted she would be 'more particularly careful of the soul of this child that thou hast so mercifully provided for, than I have ever been, that I may do my endeavours to instil into his mind the disciplines of thy religion and virtue'.<sup>20</sup>

Rack<sup>21</sup> and Heitzenrater<sup>22</sup> assert that around 1737 Wesley took for himself the term 'a brand plucked from the burning', resonant of the providence of God in his life. He certainly used phrases reminiscent of this term, if not exact in wording.<sup>23</sup> The exact phrase was used by Wesley in his epitaph, published following an illness in 1753.<sup>24</sup> Others used this same term of their salvation, as I will show in other parts of this study.<sup>25</sup> Henry Rack believes this was used to effect by John Wesley in his *Journal* and other writings:

Like many evangelicals he could see the finger of God acting in apparent accidents to preserve them to the day of conversion, though this is not the same as a sense of calling to a particular work.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>18</sup> S. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley*, pp. 65-66. Susanna recounted the events of the night to Samuel, her eldest son at school in Westminster. Letter dated 14<sup>th</sup> February 1708/09. See also the letter to the Reverend Joseph Hoole, vicar of Haxey pp. 66-68. Letter dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 1709.

<sup>19</sup> S. Wallace, *Susanna Wesley*, pp. 11-12. See Charles Wallace's 'Introduction' to the volume.

<sup>20</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 57. Rack is quoting an entry from a meditation written by Susanna Wesley in 1711

<sup>21</sup> See H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 57.

<sup>22</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1993) p. 44.

<sup>23</sup> See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 482. 'So I was once more "snatched as a brand out of the fire".' (Entry for 7<sup>th</sup> March 1737). See also J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol 18, p. 213. 'May I praise him who hath snatched me out of this fire likewise, by warning all others that is set on fire of hell.' (Entry for Jan 25<sup>th</sup> 1738).

<sup>24</sup> See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 20, p. 482. 'Here lieth the Body of John Wesley. A Brand Plucked out of the burning'. (Entry for 26<sup>th</sup> November 1753).

<sup>25</sup> Margaret Austin, in *Early Methodist Volume*, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1740, p. 1. Catherine Gilbert, in *Early Methodist Volume*, 1740, p. 6. See also T. Olivers, 'The Life of Thomas Olivers', in *Preachers*, Vol. II, pp. 55-56. Olivers was converted after hearing George Whitefield preach on the text 'Is this not a brand plucked out of the fire?' p. 55. See also J. Valton, 'The Life of John Valton, in *Preachers*, Vol. VI, p. 30. This entry dated the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1765 is a review of his spiritual life over the previous twelve months.

<sup>26</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 57.

Richard Heitzenrater has a stronger opinion of the effect of the fire on John Wesley. In *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, Heitzenrater reproduces a 1742 engraving of Wesley containing a vignette drawing of the Epworth fire. The notes to the engraving are telling, 'The embellishments on this 1742 engraving ...include a vignette ...an image that became fixed in Wesley's self-consciousness.'<sup>27</sup>

During Samuel Wesley's absence at Convocation in London, in the winter of 1711-1712, Susanna began a Sunday meeting, immortalised as 'The Evening Prayers Controversy'. Whilst Samuel was away, a curate, the Rev Mr Inman was employed to take the parish services. Inman was unpopular, evidenced by poor Church attendance. Susanna wrote to Samuel, 'We used not to have above twenty or twenty five at evening service'.<sup>28</sup> Susanna's meeting attracted substantially more, 'we have between two and three hundred, which is more than ever came to hear Inman in the morning.'<sup>29</sup>

The reading of family prayers on Sunday evenings, supplemented the time Susanna spent with each of her children during the week. Wallace comments, 'Such a practice, which involved reading prayers and a sermon and discussing devotional topics, would not have been exceptional had it remained within the family.'<sup>30</sup> When these evening prayers became popular amongst Epworth residents, Inman wrote to Samuel Wesley, and Samuel to Susanna.

Initially Susanna deals with Samuel's concerns that she is creating a 'particular' group, that she is a woman, and that she is leading prayers not only with her children, but also with neighbours. Her response to the charge that she was a

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<sup>27</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley: John Wesley His Own Biographer*. Volume I (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1984) p. 41.

<sup>28</sup> S. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley*, p. 82. Letter to Samuel Wesley Sr, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1711/12.

<sup>29</sup> S. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley*, p. 82. Letter to Samuel Wesley Sr, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1711/12.

<sup>30</sup> S. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley*, p. 78. Charles Wallace's introductory comments to 'The Evening Prayers Controversy'.



woman is unique. Rack, writes: 'Though she had some qualms about leading, being a mere woman, she really did not care if people thought it scandalous, for 'I have long since shook hands with the world'.<sup>31</sup> Susanna took her role seriously,

With those few neighbours who then came to me I discoursed more freely and affectionately than before. I chose the best and most awakening sermons we had and I spent more time with them in such exercises. Since this our company has increased every night, for I dare deny none that asks admittance. Last Sunday I believe we had above two hundred.<sup>32</sup>

Susanna was accused of creating a Conventicle. Her response is determined, a foretaste of her son's later defiance:

Do you think that what they say is sufficient reason for forbearing a thing that hath already done much, and by God's blessing may do more good?.....'tis plain fact that this one thing has brought more people to church than ever anything did in so short a time.<sup>33</sup>

Susanna refused to dissolve the meeting without Samuel's instruction: 'Send me your positive command in such full express terms as may absolve me from all guilt and punishment for neglecting the opportunity to doing good to souls.'<sup>34</sup>

Rack comments that Susanna, like John, later experimented with a structure beyond the accepted norm and continued with it if people were positively influenced; 'Societary experiments identified a class of pious people not touched by the ordinary church routine, and Susanna, like her son later, showed that she had few inhibitions about formal restrictions if she thought souls were at stake.'<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> S. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley*, p. 80. Letter to Samuel Wesley Sr, 6<sup>th</sup> February 1711/12.

<sup>33</sup> S. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley*, p. 82. Letter to Samuel Wesley Sr, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1711/12.

<sup>34</sup> S. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley*, p. 82. Letter to Samuel Wesley Sr, 25<sup>th</sup> February 1711/12.

<sup>35</sup> H.R Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 54.

## From the family home to Oxford

John attended Charterhouse school from 1714 and went up to Christ Church, Oxford in 1720. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1724 and in 1725 began studying for the priesthood, the point at which he was drawn towards expressing his faith in practical piety,

Wesley's search during this period (University) for a meaningful understanding of the demands of Christian living eventually led him to tie together the perfectionism of the Pietists, the moralism of the Puritans, and the emotionalism of the mystics, which he felt could operate within the structure and doctrine of the Church of England.<sup>36</sup>

Holy living was not easy for John Wesley. Reminiscing in his *Journal* on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 1738, he reflected that even though he was from a devout family, he had no personal sense of faith:

Being removed to the University for five years, I still said my prayers, both in public and in private, and read, with the Scriptures, several other books of religion, especially comments on the New Testament. Yet I had not all this while so much as a notion of inward holiness.<sup>37</sup>

As Wesley began formal ordination studies, his personal practice began to change. He was encouraged in 1725 to read Thomas à Kempis' *Christian Pattern* by Sally Kirkham known in correspondence as *Varanese*. Whilst Wesley considered à Kempis 'too strict'<sup>38</sup> he understood religion was a state of being, as well as an exercise of living. Wesley wrote to his mother; 'I think he must have been a person of great piety and devotion, but it is my misfortune to differ from him in some of his main points.'<sup>39</sup> Wesley began to change his lifestyle:

I began to alter the whole form of my conversation, and to set in earnest upon a *new life*. I set apart an hour or two a day for religious retirement. I communicated every week. I watched against all sin, whether in word or deed. I began to aim at, and pray for, inward holiness. So that *now doing so much, and living a good life*' I doubted not but I was a good Christian.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 31. (Word in italics mine)

<sup>37</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 243.

<sup>38</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 243.

<sup>39</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. I, p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 244.



According to Bob Tuttle's<sup>41</sup> 'quasi autobiography' of Wesley, Sally Kirkham also suggested Bishop Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Holy Dying*, 'I have heard one I take to be a person of good judgement say that she would advise no one very young to read Dr Taylor *Of Living and Dying*: She added that he almost put her out of her senses when she was fifteen or sixteen year old.'<sup>42</sup> Taylor led Wesley to begin a spiritual *Diary*, a practice from the Puritan exercise of godliness:

It was in pursuance of an advice given by Bp. Taylor, in his *Rules for Holy Living and Dying*, that about fifteen years ago, I began to take a more exact account that I had done before, of the manner wherein I spent my time, writing down how I had employed every hour.<sup>43</sup>

Writing to John Newton in 1765 on the issue of perfection Wesley said, "In 1725, I met with Bishop Taylor's *Rules of Holy Living and Dying*. I was struck particularly with the chapter upon *intention*, and felt a fixed intention 'to give myself up to God.' In this I was much confirmed soon after by the *Christian Pattern (à Kempis)*, and longed to *give God all my heart*.<sup>44</sup>" He also refers to William Law whose *Christian Perfection and A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* he read in 1727. As a result he decided to be, "more explicitly resolved to be *all devoted to God*, in body, soul, and spirit."<sup>45</sup> Bebbington suggests that the foundations which Taylor laid for Wesley were anything but secure: 'Sincerity, good works and the contempt of the world remained the rather sandy foundations for his hope of salvation.'<sup>46</sup> This is insightful, as Wesley remained constantly unsure of his salvation prior to May 1738.

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<sup>41</sup> R.G. Tuttle Jr, *John Wesley His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 1978)

<sup>42</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. I, p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 121.

<sup>44</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. IV, pp. 298-299. (Name italicised in brackets mine)

<sup>45</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. IV, p. 299.

<sup>46</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain. A history from the 1730's to the 1980's* (London: Routledge. 1989) p. 49.

In *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* of 1766, Wesley suggests that he was reading William Law before 1730; "A year or two after (1726), Mr Law's *Christian Perfection and Serious Call* were put into my hands",<sup>47</sup> but Rack urges caution in accepting Wesley's recollection;

The reading of William Law came after these (*Taylor and à Kempis*), and much later than Wesley implied in his later accounts. He probably began reading the *Serious Call* at the end of 1730 and *Christian Perfection* after meeting Law himself in 1732.<sup>48</sup>

From his father, John Wesley was aware of the Catholic mystic Marquis de Renty, whose biography had been written by Saint-Jure. Wesley began to abridge de Renty's '*Life*' on the journey home from Georgia in 1738. Orcibal comments that Wesley refers to no other person with such regularity: "His letters are constantly filled with allusions to the noble simplicity of his actions and the extraordinary intimacy of the union with God which this layman enjoyed."<sup>49</sup>

Wesley's reading opened to him a 'pietist mysticism' which encouraged him to lead a serious life by recording his every action and feeling. His regard for mystical teaching was expressed in his quest for spiritual experience and perfection. In this, Wesley was reaching back into the experience of the Puritans discussed in chapter one, who in search of holiness, came to an inward, even introverted, spiritual journey.

Wesley scholars have placed great emphasis on Wesley's formative reading, but Rack believes Wesley assimilated the detail which affected him, and in his own abridgements left out that with which he disagreed: "His selection was

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<sup>47</sup> J. Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, (London: Epworth. 1952 edition) p. 6. (Date in italics mine)

<sup>48</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 73.

<sup>49</sup> J. Orcibal, 'The Theological Originality of John Wesley and Continental Spirituality', in *A History of the Methodist Church*, Vol. 1, p. 90.



conditioned and his interpretations coloured by his own needs and experiences and those of his followers. They become part of his own synthesis of piety and are very much eighteenth-century documents."<sup>50</sup>

Wesley's assimilation is seen in a letter to his mother: "Two things in Bishop Taylor I have been often thinking of since I writ last; one of which I like exceedingly, and the other not."<sup>51</sup> Wesley expurgated from his reading any theology, doctrine or comment with which he did not agree. Wesley's behaviour was reminiscent of Pietists and Puritans of the seventeenth century. Like them, he was creating his own synthesised doctrine, suitable to his temperament and spiritual journey.

In *A Plain Account* Wesley refers to his 1733 sermon, *the Circumcision of the Heart* as the place where his understanding of Christian living was first published. In the sermon, he gave an account of the circumcision thus:

It is that habitual disposition of soul, which in the sacred writings is termed holiness, and which directly implies the being cleansed from sin; from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit; and, by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were in Christ Jesus; the being so "renewed in the image of our mind" as to be "perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect".<sup>52</sup>

Once again, Rack urges caution, "If this is a true account of Wesley's ideals at the time..... contemporary evidence shows considerable uncertainties about the means of achieving it."<sup>53</sup> Heitzenrater believes the sermon 'was a pivotal document in the development of the Wesleyan movement.'<sup>54</sup> He writes that the sermon outlines the basis upon which Wesley was attempting to create a Christian lifestyle. It is interesting that Heitzenrater writes:

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<sup>50</sup> H.D Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 97-98.

<sup>51</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 244.

<sup>52</sup> J. Wesley, *A Plain Account*, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 96.

<sup>54</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 47.

Contrary to the impression carried by many of his contemporaries and perpetuated by subsequent analysts, Wesley's life style.... was neither circumscribed by negative injunctions nor impelled primarily by a set of prescriptive rules. Lists of questions for self-examination guided their actions.<sup>55</sup>

Neither Rack nor Heitzenrater is wholly correct. Rack cites Wesley's use of increasingly complex lists and scales to assist his argument that Wesley was not privy to the state of perfection about which he preached: "His private discipline gradually became more complex, intense and obsessive."<sup>56</sup>

Heitzenrater notes that the Christian perfection explained in the sermon would become "the distinctive hallmark of Methodist theology in the eighteenth century, but also act as a compass for his own lifelong spiritual pilgrimage."<sup>57</sup>

Wesley was at best uncertain of his salvation, and the means to work it out. Written with hindsight, it is much easier to express memories positively. Both opinions, taken together, offer a fuller picture. Wesley had not, in 1733, fully worked through the 'Methodist' interpretation of perfection, but he was seeking perfection for himself. He was racked with self-doubt about his own state, yet nonetheless preached perfection. By 1733 he had come to understand a doctrine of Christian perfection that was to remain with him through his life, and which was to influence the classes and bands. In 1746, when the sermon was first published, Wesley inserted a paragraph relating the vitality of the relationship between the Christian and Christ, brought about by the Holy Spirit in the process of conversion. This addition, inserted after Wesley's 1738 heart warming moment, details theologically a relationship Wesley could by then write about from personal experience.<sup>58</sup> It was this relationship that was the driving force behind the quest for perfection that Wesley had preached about in 1733.

<sup>55</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 47.

<sup>56</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 95.

<sup>57</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 48.

<sup>58</sup> See J. Wesley, *Forty-Four Sermons* (London: The Epworth Press. 1944) p 155.



From 1732 Wesley was influenced by the mystics, introduced to him by John Clayton<sup>59</sup> and William Law. The mystics stressed the need for an inward communion with God. Already aware of de Renty, Wesley was introduced to Tauler, Molinos, the *Theologia Germanica*, Madame Guyon, Antoinette Bourignon and Fénelon. Wesley immersed himself in their writings and shared their "concern for holy living".<sup>60</sup>

The result of this reading was an even more exact *Diary* that detailed every moment of the day. Reviewing the *Diary* served to wipe away the little assurance that Wesley had. He later charged the mystics with almost causing him to lose his faith.<sup>61</sup> Bob Tuttle, in his paraphrase of Wesley's *Journal* suggests that mysticism affected the young Methodists: "Our entire 'company' developed an interest in the ascetical aloofness of mysticism."<sup>62</sup> Tuttle refers to Wesley's letter to Mary Bishop of 1774 to assist his assertion. In the letter Wesley wrote. 'Most of our little flock at Oxford were tried with this, my brother and I in particular.'<sup>63</sup> The combination of mysticism, which urged separation from the world, and practical piety that engaged with those in need, must have caused confusion in Wesley's mind, life and practice. However, the Holy Club, with the variety of personalities and Christian understanding that it contained may well have prevented Wesley from complete introversion.

Although Rack urges caution in accepting Wesley's recollection, there is no doubt that this period was significant to Wesley's spiritual development.

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<sup>59</sup> John Clayton was an ordained Anglican and non-juror. See J.A. Vickers, (ed.), 'Clayton, Rev. John', in *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland*, p. 70.

<sup>60</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 52.

<sup>61</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 487. In a letter to his elder brother Wesley wrote, 'I think the rock on which I had the nearest made shipwreck of the faith was in the writings of the mystics'.

<sup>62</sup> R.G. Tuttle Jr, *John Wesley*, p. 122.

<sup>63</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, p. 128.

Maldwyn Edwards comments; "All these writers created a want they could not satisfy. Strongly as Maximin Piette may speak of Wesley's moral conversion in 1725, it could not and did not supply the dynamic which came through his evangelical conversion of 1738."<sup>64</sup> Similarly, Orcibal notes the change. "Until 1725 he was only lukewarm, but then he realized the impossibility of being 'half a Christian' and the necessity – in the world just as much as in the monastery – of consecrating 'one's whole heart and one's whole life' to God."<sup>65</sup>

Both Edwards and Orcibal refer to 1725 as Wesley's 'first conversion', and whilst this did not lead him to the fields to preach, it did bring sharply into focus his need for a change of lifestyle. The authors he read, and his reflection on them, provided him with the first stages of the theology and practice he was to hold and teach after his conversion. From 1725 pietism, perfection and personal experience marked a succession of changes in Wesley's religious life and understanding. Heitzenrater notes that during this period of Wesley's life 'the demands of Christian living eventually led him to tie together the perfectionism of the pietists, the moralism of the Puritans, and the devotionism of the mystics in a pragmatic approach that he felt he could operate within the structure and doctrine of the Church of England.'<sup>66</sup>

The first 'Methodist' group was formed in Oxford, but it was Charles, who had gone up to Oxford in 1726, who began the Holy Club. By that time, John, ordained deacon and Master of Arts and Fellow of Lincoln College, had become curate to his father at Wroot near Epworth.

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<sup>64</sup> M. Edwards, 'John Wesley', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*. Vol. 1, p. 43.

<sup>65</sup> J. Orcibal, 'The Theological Originality of John Wesley and Continental Spirituality', in *A History of the Methodist Church*, Vol. I, p. 89.

<sup>66</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 31.



In 1729 Charles asked his brother how he might be serious in religion; 'If you would direct me to the same, or a like method with your own, I would gladly follow it.'<sup>67</sup> Charles Wesley was already meeting with a colleague for study and weekly church attendance when John returned to Oxford. From the middle of June 1729, Charles met with John, William Morgan and occasionally Robert Kirkham. Heitzenrater comments, "The little band of friends, encouraged by the presence of John, occasionally met together for study, prayer, and religious conversation, attended the sacrament regularly, and kept track of their lives by daily notations in a *Diary*."<sup>68</sup>

In reality, whilst the group first met in the summer of 1729, it was not until the winter, when John took up his fellowship at Lincoln College as tutor to eleven paying students that the Holy Club met regularly. John's *Diary* records the rooms in which the group met through the week, and study included classics on weekdays and divinity on Sundays. The group observed the fasts of the early Church, confession, penance and mortification, and attended to the means of grace: prayer, Bible study, Communion and fellowship. Wesley received Communion at every opportunity;

He communed every week if possible (a rarity in his day), and often communed daily in the octave of Easter and the twelve festival days of Christmas. As a result he averaged communing about once every five days through his adult life.'<sup>69</sup>

During the early part of 1730 this small group was merely one of a number of groups in Oxford, and although the Holy Club remained a small gathering throughout its five-year life, it was the events of August 1730, when the Holy Club took up practical piety that set Wesley and his friends apart from any other group. Wesley may have rejected the label 'pietist' but his understanding and

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<sup>67</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 38.

<sup>68</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 38.

<sup>69</sup> R.L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace. John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994) p. 202.

social action reflected pietist intentions. If he was not then aware of the social pietism of Halle, his actions belied that lack of knowledge. Through the influence of William Morgan, Wesley began work amongst groups singled out by pietists as needful: prisoners, the poor, the uneducated and the sick.

Around the time Morgan took Wesley to the prisons of Oxford, he resolved to hold the Bible as his rule for living. In 1765 he reminisced that in 1730,

I began to be *homo unius libri*; to study (comparatively) no book but the Bible. I then in saw a stronger light than ever before, that only one thing is needful, even faith that worketh by the love of God and man, all inward and outward holiness; and I groaned to love God with all my heart, and to serve Him with all my strength.<sup>70</sup>

Heitzenrater and Rack make nothing of this statement, yet surely this has to be an important milestone in Wesley's life? If he did place himself entirely under the authority of the Bible then his whole life came to be scrutinised in relation to Scripture itself. Gregory Clapper does pick up on this statement and aims to show that Wesley's understanding of Scripture was grounded in his parents' Dissenting background, but arose too from his regard of it.<sup>71</sup>

Clapper evidences his point by considering Wesley's abridgements of Jonathan Edwards' *Treatise on Religious Affairs*. Clapper agrees with Baker that Wesley's method of dealing with a 'dangerous' book 'was by publishing an expurgated version of it.'<sup>72</sup> But that is not the whole picture. Wesley did not disagree entirely with Edwards. Rather, those elements that Wesley did not hold to be true to Scripture, especially Edwards' Calvinism he expunged from the abridgement. Although Wesley was opposed to Calvinism,<sup>73</sup> he found aspects

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<sup>70</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. IV, p. 299.

<sup>71</sup> G.S. Clapper, *John Wesley on Religious Affections* (Metuchen: The Scarecrow Press. 1989)

<sup>72</sup> G.S. Clapper, *John Wesley*, p. 139.

<sup>73</sup> See G.S. Clapper, *John Wesley*, p. 142.



of Edwards work which, in the light of his understanding of Scripture were worthy of publication.

In the sermon *On God's Vineyard*,<sup>74</sup> Wesley offers an apologia for the Holy Club's turn to Scripture as the sole source of authority, setting out the manner in which Scripture was used. 'They had one, and only one, rule of judgement with regard to all their tempers, words, and actions; namely the oracles of God.'<sup>75</sup>

The decision made individually by Wesley, and corporately by the Holy Club led to derision.<sup>76</sup> Further, the sermon sets out how Scripture was the driving force behind the Methodist people, and the organisation of Methodism itself. Here as elsewhere the primary source for this change is Wesley's own memory, but this sermon, and the letter of 1765 adduces evidence for accepting that the Bible became his primary authority. In Wesley's later life, as will be seen by his use of Scripture after speaking with Böhler about assurance in 1738, all matters were subject to the rule of Scripture, and there is no reason to doubt that in 1730, Wesley made another important decision as to the government and rule of his life and practice.

Wesley and his companions first visited the Castle prison for debtors and condemned prisoners, at William Morgan's request on the 24<sup>th</sup> August 1730. They also took up Morgan's practice of visiting the poor and elderly. Later the same year, visits to the prison at the North Gate of the city began, and the children of poor families were brought together for education.

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<sup>74</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 1, pp. 502-517. See also J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 1, p. 105. In the introduction to the 1746 edition of the *Sermons*, Wesley wrote, 'God himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price give me the book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *Homo Unius Libri*.'

<sup>75</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 1, p. 504.

<sup>76</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 1, p. 505.

Maldwyn Edwards succinctly captures the work of these eager men:

In its five-years of active life the Oxford Methodists observed a remarkably disciplined personal life, and at the same time they visited the prisoners in the castle jail and the debtors in the Bocardo. Under John Wesley's direct guidance they strove to maintain a school for children, and organized visiting and relief of the poor. Food, clothes and physic were found for the poor both in St Thomas's workhouse and in the city.<sup>77</sup>

Whilst Wesley's organisational ability was responsible for a great deal of the Oxford work after August 1730, William Morgan was engaged in social action before then, and he encouraged the Holy Club to join him. Wesley attributed the first stirrings of this social enterprise to William Morgan and Samuel Wesley wanted to 'adopt' William Morgan for introducing his sons to the work, "I think I must adopt Mr. Morgan to be my son, together with you and your brother Charles".<sup>78</sup>

To assist their work, it appears that sympathetic supporters were encouraged to help financially. 'Several we met with who increased our little stock of money for the prisoners and the poor by subscribing something quarterly to it'.<sup>79</sup> Edwards adds that social action amongst the prisoners and needy of Oxford prevented introversion. Although almost persuaded to refrain from 'practical holiness', Wesley's natural eagerness and his father's encouragement meant he continued the work. Edwards comments, "The Holy Club therefore preserved Wesley from the worst effects of a too-introverted mysticism. It encouraged the practice of the Christian ordinances as well as the expression of Christian doctrine in social action."<sup>80</sup> Edwards concludes, "What was then joined together he never afterwards put asunder."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> M. Edwards, 'John Wesley, in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. 1, p. 44.

<sup>78</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 125.

<sup>79</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 129.

<sup>80</sup> M. Edwards, 'John Wesley', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. 1, p. 46.

<sup>81</sup> M. Edwards, 'John Wesley', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. 1, p. 46.



At Oxford much of Wesley's doctrine was formulated and refined. Eventually, he moved away from the mystics but never wholly abandoned their spirituality. Wesley mixed his understanding of perfection and Scriptural Holiness and the personal and practical out workings of piety with the use of the means of grace and social action to live and express his faith.

Heitzenrater considers Wesley to be close to the momentous event of Aldersgate Street, even as a working Fellow of Lincoln College, but needed, 'to go through the Oxford experiment'.<sup>82</sup> Rack contends that the experience of Oxford was deeper than Heitzenrater allows. Oxford was necessary for Wesley's future direction. Much that Wesley accepted and came to teach could only have been formulated from the opportunity Oxford afforded to read and engage in social outreach.

1725 and beyond was part of Wesley's process of Christian conversion. Instantaneous conversion is possible and whilst Wesley would meet many who professed this, for the majority of people conversion is a process. John Finney's study on the way people come to faith shows that it is frequently a gradual process:

On average 31% said their experience was "dateable", and 69% said it was gradual. Even among the New Churches sudden conversions rose to only just over a half of their new members...The gradual experience was said to take anything from one day to 42 years, though many people saw it as an ongoing process which had not yet finished.<sup>83</sup>

Wesley experienced nothing more or less unusual than others experience. His decision of 1725 to live a more devout life cannot be set aside in favour of the single moment in 1738. In the cloistered environment of an Oxford college,

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<sup>82</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 104.

<sup>83</sup> J. Finney, *Finding Faith Today* (Swindon: British and Foreign Bible Society. 1992) p. 24.

Wesley was able to work out spiritually and practically many of the issues which he faced in his quest for salvation and assurance.

The experience of the Holy Club, Wesley's first taste of leadership, would not have been available in a parish. Likewise, for many in the Methodist classes of the eighteenth century, the first experience of being in a position of authority is a benefit that cannot be overestimated. Graham Dale's biographical studies of early labour leaders evinces how they first learned to articulate thought and plan activities through the leading of small groups.<sup>84</sup>

At Oxford, as student and don, Wesley searched for a personal experience of Christ, which he attempted to fathom for himself through a variety of spiritualities expressed in personal piety and its social outworking, regular attendance at the ordinances and use of the means of grace.

### Missionary to Georgia

John Wesley's decision to travel to Georgia under the patronage of the *Society for the Propagation of the Gospel* (SPG) was twofold. First, it cleared away any remaining pressure to take the Epworth living and fulfilled an ambition that Samuel Wesley had expressed to serve in the colonies. Second, Wesley embarked on another stage of his spiritual quest for inward holiness and perfection, searching for primitive Christianity.

Before his father's death, pressure was brought on John Wesley by his elder brother Samuel and his father to take the Epworth living. In 1733, he declined, writing: "You observed when I was with you that I was very indifferent as to having or not having Epworth living. I was, indeed, utterly unable to determine

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<sup>84</sup> G. Dale, *God's Politicians* (London: Harper Collins, 2000)



either way".<sup>85</sup> In December 1734, Wesley wrote to his father, outlining in twenty-six numbered paragraphs arguments for and against taking the living. The letter is a mixture of argument and theological treatise. Wesley even argued against the living because he might not be loved: "If you say 'the love of the people of Epworth to me may balance all these advantages,' I ask, How long will it last?"<sup>86</sup>

Samuel Jr. refused the living, but tried to get his younger brother to accept the appointment. Telford states: "Samuel Wesley's strength was failing, and he was anxious about his family and his parish. He wanted his eldest son to succeed him; but he declined to leave his schoolmaster's life."<sup>87</sup> Samuel Jr. had argued that the very nature of his brother's ordination obliged him to accept a parish. "The continuing exchange of letters led John to note in his *Diary* at the end of February 1735, 'almost convinced to go to Epworth.'"<sup>88</sup>

John's somewhat ill tempered replies to Samuel ended after Bishop Potter confirmed Wesley's view that parish life was not compulsory. Wesley quoted the bishop to his brother,

REVD. SIR – It doth not seem to me that at your ordination you engaged yourself to undertake the cure of any parish, provided you can, as a clergyman, better serve God and His Church in your present or some other station.<sup>89</sup>

Wesley ends triumphantly; "Now, that I can as a clergyman better serve God and His Church in my present station I have all reasonable evidence."<sup>90</sup> As his father lay dying Wesley finally agreed to see whether he could assume the

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<sup>85</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 348.

<sup>86</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. I, p. 174. See also J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 43.

<sup>87</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. I, p. 133.

<sup>88</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley And The People Called Methodists*, p. 55.

<sup>89</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 421.

<sup>90</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 421.

living. He engaged Sir John Phillips, who knew the Bishop of London. Sir John declined to interfere and the matter was settled.

Once Epworth was closed to Wesley, he was free to continue his life as an Oxford Fellow. However, having refused his father's wish, the alternative to parochial life was that of a missionary, and Samuel Wesley had indicated that he would have been willing to become a missionary in a letter written to General James Oglethorpe in the autumn prior to Samuel's death.<sup>91</sup>

Heitzenrater captures the events that led to Wesley's offer of working in Georgia well:

While in London to assist Charles Rivington in the final stages of publication (*his father's book on Job*), Wesley was contacted by John Burton about the possibility of him and his friends going to Georgia, the new colony about which Samuel Wesley had written Oglethorpe the previous fall, "had it been but ten years ago, I would gladly have devoted the remainder of my life and labours to that place" (Memorials, 142). Here then was an alternative to the Epworth living that would still provide a chance for Wesley to fulfil his father's dreams.<sup>92</sup>

Susanna Wesley responded favourably to her son's suggestion to travel to Georgia: "Had I twenty sons, I should rejoice that they were all so employed, though I should never see them more."<sup>93</sup>

Wesley's decision to travel was fuelled by his continuing spiritual quest. Rack remarks that as Wesley's spiritual life at Oxford was not progressing as it might, Georgia seemed an appropriate place to begin again, "In an idealized

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<sup>91</sup> G.J. Stevenson, *Memorials of the Wesley Family* (London: S.W. Partridge & Co. 1876) p. 142.

<sup>92</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley And The People Called Methodists*, p. 56. (Words in italics mine)

<sup>93</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley And The People Called Methodists*, p. 57. Heitzenrater takes this quote from Volume 1 of Henry Moore's *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley* in 2 Volumes published by John Kershaw in 1824



wilderness he would revert to a spiritual state of nature and start primitive Christianity all over again."<sup>94</sup>

Wesley was deeply influenced by the non-jurors and High Church ideals of John Clayton and Thomas Deacon, who proposed that apostolic and patristic patterns of worship, from the first five centuries, were 'authentic Christianity'. These patterns included instructions for devotions and discipline. Allied to his reading of the mystics, Wesley struggled with his spiritual life and Georgia might have seemed the place where any tensions could resolve themselves. Georgia became

an experiment in 'primitive Christianity', and that in more than one sense. It was a way of starting all over again in a virgin land with the prospect also of creating Christians from scratch so far as the Indians were concerned.<sup>95</sup>

It was in Methodism, still some five years away from 1735 that Wesley considered he had 'found' primitive Christianity. Forty two years later, at the laying of the foundation for City Road Chapel in 1777 he declared; 'Methodism, so called, is the old religion, the religion of the Bible, the religion of the primitive church, the religion of the Church of England'.<sup>96</sup>

In correspondence with John Burton,<sup>97</sup> Wesley wrote "My chief motive, to which all the rest are subordinate, is the hope of saving my own soul."<sup>98</sup> This reversed Burton's perception of Wesley's purpose for travelling to Georgia. He understood Wesley was travelling for "the desire of doing good to the souls of

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<sup>94</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 111.

<sup>95</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 114.

<sup>96</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 3, p. 585. Sermon 112, *On laying the Foundation Stone for the New Chapel*. See also the essay by K. Carveley, 'From Glory to Glory: The Renewal of All Things in Christ. Maximus the Confessor and John Wesley', in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality* (ed. S.T. Kimbrough Jr; New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press. 2002) pp. 173-188. Kenneth Carvely quotes this passage from Wesley's sermon in his essay.

<sup>97</sup> John Burton was a tutor at Corpus Christie College, and he also became a Fellow of Eton College. Burton knew General Oglethorpe as they had both studied at Corpus Christie. See J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, pp. 187-188.

<sup>98</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. I, p. 188.

others, and in consequence of that, to your own."<sup>99</sup> The full text of the letter to Burton shows Wesley hoping to escape England, find faith, and employ that for the benefit of others: "A right faith, will I trust, by the mercy of God, open the way for a right practice; especially when most of those temptations are removed which here so easily beset me."<sup>100</sup>

Henry Rack disapproves of Wesley's air of superiority towards Burton, and holds that he should have been more accepting of Burton's advice: "It was in response to this moderating advice that Wesley adopted his high apostolic tone. Burton clearly knew his man, and Wesley might have avoided much grief if he had taken his advice."<sup>101</sup>

Wesley set sail for Georgia on board the *Simmonds* in October 1735. Georgia was a new colony, the first 116 colonists arriving in 1733. By 1737 there were 518 people, of whom 149 were under sixteen and about 180 nominal Anglicans. In the fleet with Wesley's ship were Salzburgers and Moravians. Wesley was joined by his brother, Charles, who had been ordained deacon and priest on successive days, and who was to be secretary to General Oglethorpe; Benjamin Ingham, of Queen's College and Charles Delamotte.

On board the *Holy Club* continued, 'At twelve we met to give an account to one another what we had done since our last meeting, and what we designed to do before our next.'<sup>102</sup> The primitive writers remained part of Wesley's reading at that time,

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<sup>99</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley And The People Called Methodists*, p. 58.

<sup>100</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. I, pp. 188-189.

<sup>101</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 112.

<sup>102</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p.138.



From five to seven we read the Bible together, carefully comparing it (that we might not lean to our own understandings) with the writings of the earliest ages.<sup>103</sup>

The group continued their ministry to others, especially the sick. To one woman Wesley lent a copy of Law's *Treatise on Christian Perfection*. Wesley read August Franke's book *A Treatise on the Fear of Man*<sup>104</sup> or *Nicodemus* on the journey to Savannah. He was so impressed with Franke's work, that on a visit to Halle in July 1738, he described his name as 'Precious ointment.'<sup>105</sup>

During a violent storm, Wesley's cerebral understanding of German Pietism became personal experience. Whilst many passengers were terrified, the Moravian travellers remained calm and continued with the evening service he was attending. Wesley's *Journal* reads:

At seven I went to the Germans. I had long before observed the great seriousness of their behaviour...In the midst of the psalm wherewith their service began, [wherein we were mentioning the power of God,] the sea broke over, split the main-sail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans [looked up and without intermission] calmly sang on. I asked one of them afterwards, 'Was you not afraid?' He answered, 'I thank God, no.' I asked 'But were not your women and children afraid?' He replied mildly, 'No; our women and children are not afraid to die.'.....This was the most glorious day which I have hitherto seen.<sup>106</sup>

Wesley's witness of the Moravians' behaviour during the storm led him to seek out their leaders. The Moravians under Spangenberg were not, as would previously have been the case, merely cast aside by Wesley as Dissenters but met with an open ear and an enquiring mind.

<sup>103</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p.138.

<sup>104</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. I, p. 183. (Footnote 1)

<sup>105</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 264.

<sup>106</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, pp. 142-143.

The *Simmonds* anchored on February 5<sup>th</sup> 1736 in the Savannah River. Two days after landing, Wesley met August Spangenberg who enquired whether Wesley had the assurance of the Holy Spirit and knew Jesus Christ. Wesley felt his answers were less than convincing, and his *Journal* entry is revealing; "I fear they were vain words."<sup>107</sup> However, Spangenberg was not unimpressed with Wesley's responses, writing in his *Journal*: "I observe that grace really dwells and reigns in him."<sup>108</sup>

Spangenberg also introduced Wesley to the differences between the Lutheran Salzburgers, who had settled at New Ebenezer, and who followed Franke and Urlsperger, and the Moravians in Savannah, who followed Zinzendorf and Spangenberg himself. Wesley thought the Moravians manifested many signs of primitive Christianity. By this, Wesley meant the Moravian lifestyle was closer to the apostolic period than any other, sharing possessions and living communally. The Moravians under Spangenberg's direction mixed mysticism (primarily stillness), with a need for the sense of assurance of faith.

Tuttle argues that Spangenberg held a 'synthesis between mystical piety on the one hand and the theology of the continental reformers on the other.'<sup>109</sup> Further, he comments that the time spent in America was nothing more than a mystical experiment. In the early period in Georgia, Wesley was reading and discussing the mystics with Spangenberg, and indeed recommending them to others, but he continued his use of the means of grace and maintained his work as parish priest amongst the colonists, and, albeit abortively amongst the indigenous Indians and the slave colony.

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<sup>107</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 146.

<sup>108</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley And The People Called Methodists*, p. 60.

<sup>109</sup> R.G. Tuttle Jr, *John Wesley*, p151



Jean Orcibal suggests Georgia was a mystical crisis for Wesley, dating his change of opinion about the mystics to October 1736 and arguing that Wesley 'confused mysticism with a love of solitude'.<sup>110</sup> His experiences of feverish activity in Georgia, and Spangenberg's influence of a settled assured faith, were a part of the process of rejection. Orcibal adds that Wesley found the mystics condemned the Christian to a melancholic existence, devoid of any form of spiritual comfort. Wesley would add Pelagianism to his charges against the mystics.<sup>111</sup>

Wesley faced a crisis and he poured out his feelings about the mystics in a letter to his brother Samuel. Wesley included anyone who belittled the means of grace under the term 'mystic'.<sup>112</sup> Primarily, he disliked their use of the means of grace only when they seemed personally useful, or when it would offend others not to use them. The letter offers a developing Wesleyan theology. Wesley would not renounce, as the mystics had, the use of reason in the Christian life. In writing to his brother, Wesley claimed the mystic 'renounced reason and understanding',<sup>113</sup> as these prevented guidance by 'divine light'.<sup>114</sup> Wesley turned away from the spiritual introversion promoted by the mystics, because the means of grace and works of piety were subordinated to personal 'conversion' found in self-examination.

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<sup>110</sup> J. Orcibal, 'The Theological Originality of John Wesley and Continental Spirituality', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. 1, p. 91.

<sup>111</sup> J. Orcibal, 'The Theological Originality of John Wesley and Continental Spirituality', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. 1, p. 91.

<sup>112</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, pp. 487-490.

<sup>113</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 488.

<sup>114</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 488. See also J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, pp. 540-550. For correspondence with William Law about the reading of mystical works. Wesley is sharp in writing, whilst Law remains courteous in reply. These letters give insight into Wesley's understanding, and acceptance of the writings of others.

He did however absorb the mystical understanding of perfection; the need for every Christian to pursue 'inward holiness or a union of the soul with God.'<sup>115</sup>

Rack observes that perfection, especially as outlined by Scupoli, whom Susannah Wesley had also read, 'appealed to them by its concentration on will and intelligence rather than feeling.'<sup>116</sup>

Wesley wanted a wider ministry than that of parish priest. He hoped to work with the Native Americans. Despite meeting with both the Choctaws and the Chickasaws, he was unsuccessful. He met with slaves, instructing a young girl and boy and became involved with the school in Savannah.

In May 1736 Wesley created groups in Savannah and Frederica. Rack notes this has 'always been seen as foreshadowing the future Methodism'.<sup>117</sup> Wesley gathered together the serious members of his congregation and met with them once or twice a week. Their purpose in meeting was 'to reprove, instruct, and exhort one another.'<sup>118</sup> From this group, a smaller, more intimate number were selected, for personal instruction and group conversation. Wesley writes of their first meeting,

This evening we had only Mark Hird. But on Sunday Mr Hird and two more desired to be admitted. After a psalm and a little conversation, I read Mr Law's *Christian Perfection*, and concluded with another psalm.<sup>119</sup>

Heitzenrater adds the names of the members who joined Mark Hird at the second meeting; Betty Hassel, Phoebe Hird and Mrs Hird (not Mr Hird as the

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<sup>115</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 96. Rack writes of Wesley's May 1738 review. He notes from paragraph 11 of the review that Wesley met 'a contemplative man' (William Law) who encouraged the pursuit of inner holiness. The review, written after conversion, shows how Wesley had come to understand perfection in the light of justification by grace.

<sup>116</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 101.

<sup>117</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 119.

<sup>118</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 157.

<sup>119</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 160.



*Journal* recounts). Mark, Betty and Phoebe were 21, 18 and 17. Like the Oxford Methodists, this group was by and large young.

Nehemiah Curnock, editor of the 1909 edition of the *Journals*, footnoted that this was the first attempt at the classes and bands.<sup>120</sup> Rack cautions that these meetings were simply attempts to meet a particular need. They were for personal and group spiritual devotion, and had neither the earlier charitable or educational elements of Oxford. Wesley timed the meetings according to many of the primitive methods of the Church, notably fast days. If anything, they owed more to the Anglican Unitary Societies, but in a small colony divisions by age or sex were impractical, hence the groups unusual make up.

Wesley's adherence to a strictly disciplined life for himself and his fellow Anglicans led to his leaving Georgia under a cloud. By banning Sophy Williamson (née Hopkey) from Communion, he was charged to appear before a grand jury. Sophy had married William Williamson in South Carolina without waiting for banns to be read. As her suitor himself, Wesley was no doubt upset. Treating her behaviour as improper, he refused her Communion. Her guardian, Thomas Causton, Chief Magistrate for Savannah, called a grand jury to hear the charges. Wesley chose to leave America and slipped away from Georgia in December 1737.

Despite the apparent failure of Wesley's parish ministry and mission, it is evident that he left America far more ready for the events of Aldersgate than he had been when he arrived. Conscious of what was to come, Wesley's account of the return journey is that of an unsettled individual;

By the most infallible of proofs, inward feeling, I am convinced,

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<sup>120</sup> J. Wesley, *Journal [SE]*, Vol. 1, p. 198.

1 Of unbelief; having no such faith in Christ as will prevent my heart from being troubled; which it could not be, if I believed in God, and rightly believed in him.<sup>121</sup>

This contemporaneous account, written on board the *Samuel* whilst returning to England, and published retrospectively shows a troubled spirit. Rack notes the clear Moravian influence on Wesley who portrayed faith not as intellectual belief, but as a personal, inward assurance, which he felt he lacked.

### The Journey to faith

Once home, Wesley considered his future. The duties of a Fellow of Lincoln College, his only formal and paying appointment, were possible. This would have allowed him to resume leadership of the Oxford Methodists. Returning to Georgia was impossible,<sup>122</sup> and though he eventually chose to visit the Moravians in Herrnhut, he did not do this until later in 1738.

Significant to Wesley's future was his meeting with Peter Böhler at the home of the Rev and Mrs John Hutton, a non-juring Anglican family. Under Böhler's influence, Wesley's preaching included 'justification, faith and the new birth.'<sup>123</sup> Characteristically, as Wesley reflected upon his meeting with Böhler, he used providential language in his *Journal*,

When Peter Böhler, whom God prepared for me as soon as I came to London, affirmed of true faith in Christ (which is but one) that it had those two fruits inseparably attending it, 'dominion over sin, and constant peace from a sense of forgiveness', I was quite amazed, and looked upon it as a new gospel. If this was so, it was clear I had not faith.<sup>124</sup>

As with Wesley's first meeting with the Moravians under Spangenberg, experience was seminal to his continuing quest for assurance. Wesley rejected

<sup>121</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 208.

<sup>122</sup> See M. Schmidt, *John Wesley A Theological Biography*. Volume I (London: Epworth Press. 1971)

<sup>123</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 139.

<sup>124</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol.18, pp. 247-248.



Böhler's belief in the felt assurance of forgiveness. His contention was simple.

If Böhler was right, he did not have faith. Wesley read the Scriptures and found ample points in support of Böhler's position. However, he was certain experience would prove him right, and that no one could state this position as a personal experience of assurance. Böhler held the trump card, and introduced Wesley to three people who could so testify;

He came again with three others, all of whom testified, of their own personal experience, that a true and living faith in Christ is inseparable from a sense of pardon for all past and freedom from all present sins. They added with one mouth that this faith was the gift, the free gift of God; and that He would surely bestow it upon every soul who earnestly and perseveringly sought it. I was now thoroughly convinced; and, by the grace of God, I resolved to seek it unto the end.<sup>125</sup>

Böhler also advised Wesley to continue preaching, despite Wesley's misgivings whilst he felt he sorely lacked assurance himself. Wesley wanted to stop preaching altogether, and asked Böhler whether he should carry on. When Böhler replied he should, Wesley asked, 'what can I preach?'<sup>126</sup> Böhler's famous advice was, 'Preach faith *till* you have it; and then, *because* you have it you *will* preach faith.'<sup>127</sup> In this response, Böhler was advising Wesley that preaching the reality of the new birth (faith) to others would enable Wesley to experience the forgiveness and assurance about which he preached.<sup>128</sup>

From Böhler's own testimony, and the testimonies of those Böhler brought to meet Wesley, he was becoming convinced that there could be degrees of faith. For this reason, despite that his 'soul started back from the work',<sup>129</sup> he began to preach justification without a personal sense of assurance.

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<sup>125</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 248.

<sup>126</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p.228.

<sup>127</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 228.

<sup>128</sup> See H.B. McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace John Wesley's Evangelical Arminianism* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press. 2001) p. 108.

<sup>129</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 228.

Peter Böhler also insisted that faith could be instantaneous, another obstacle for Wesley. Once again, Wesley resorted to Scripture, and wrote in his *Journal*, 'I searched the Scriptures again touching this very thing, particularly the Acts of the Apostles: but to my utter astonishment, found scarce any instances there of other than *instantaneous conversions*'.<sup>130</sup> Wesley argued this was the pattern described in Scripture of the early Church, but denied that God still worked in such a manner. Again, through personal testimony Böhler proved that such conversion was a reality. Wesley records his reaction, 'Here ended my disputing. I could now only cry out, 'Lord, help Thou my unbelief!''<sup>131</sup> Böhler, noted:

I took ..... four of my English brethren to John Wesley. They told, one after another, what had been wrought in them. Wesley and those that were with him were as if thunderstruck at these narratives. I asked John Wesley what he then believed. He said four examples were not enough. I replied I would bring eight more here in London. After a short time he stood up and said, "We will sing that hymn..." During the singing of the Moravian version he often wiped his eyes.'<sup>132</sup>

It would be a month before the events of Aldersgate would turn acceptance into experience. Before that, Wesley would play a part in the beginning of a society in Fetter Lane. The society, which initially met as a band on the 1st May, was termed 'our little society'<sup>133</sup> by Wesley. Colin Podmore evidenced this society to be neither Anglican nor Moravian.<sup>134</sup>

Membership of Fetter Lane was open, with clear nuances of the later Methodist movement. Admission to a Methodist class was based upon a 'desire to flee from the wrath to come'.<sup>135</sup> Wesley would later write of his own quest for

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<sup>130</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 234.

<sup>131</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 234.

<sup>132</sup> J. Wesley, *Journal [SE]*, Vol. I, p. 455. The hymn was, *My soul before thee prostrate lies*. Wesley had translated this hymn from the German. (Footnote 1)

<sup>133</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 236.

<sup>134</sup> C. Podmore, *The Moravian Church in England 1728-1760* (Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1998) p. 39.

<sup>135</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, pp. 69-75. The specific entry requirement is found on page 70 at paragraph 4. Wesley used this term of his own spiritual search for faith.



salvation that he 'found an earnest desire to live according to those rules (*Holy Living and Holy Dying*), and to flee from the wrath to come.'<sup>136</sup> The requirement that he placed on others he had expected of himself.

### The Conversion of the Wesleys

At the foundation of the Fetter Lane Band on the 1<sup>st</sup> May, Charles Wesley was ill, and staying at the Huttons. John Wesley was present only because he had returned to London to see his brother. Podmore stresses that the society was Moravian in its foundation. William Addison described the Fetter Lane society as a 'fusion of law and grace.'<sup>137</sup> This is a good description of a society, which looked neither to the Church of England nor to the Moravian Church for oversight.

Just three days after the Fetter Lane Society began, Böhler left for America. In early May 1738 Charles Wesley, like his brother was convinced of his sinfulness and lack of faith, 'Mr Piers called to see me. I exhorted him to labour after that faith which he thinks I have, and know I have not.'<sup>138</sup>

Charles' meetings with Böhler, whom he clearly admired, describing him as a 'man of God,'<sup>139</sup> led to a crisis of faith. He too had been convinced of the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith,<sup>140</sup> and eagerly desired it. On the 17<sup>th</sup> May, Charles wrote in his *Journal* that he had read for the first time (with Mr Holland) Luther's commentary on the Letter to the Galatians. As a result he wrote:

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<sup>136</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 3, p. 581. Sermon 112, *On laying the Foundation Stone for the New Chapel*. Words in brackets mine

<sup>137</sup> W.G. Addison, *The Renewed Church of the United Brethren 1722-1930* (London. SPCK. 1932) p. 84.

<sup>138</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 85.

<sup>139</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 84.

<sup>140</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 237.

Who would believe our Church had been founded on this important article of justification by faith alone? I am astonished I should ever think this a new doctrine; especially while our Articles and Homilies stand unrepealed, and the key of knowledge is not taken away.<sup>141</sup>

Arnold Dallimore, quoting William Holland's *Narrative*, shows how Holland, in an autobiographical note on that evening's events, received assurance there and then.<sup>142</sup> Luther's doctrines were virtually obligatory for those wanting to claim pietist credentials.<sup>143</sup> Bebbington writes, 'The decisive impulse to the brothers Wesley came from Luther: Charles was reading his commentary on Galatians and John was listening to his preface on the letter to the Romans when they first came to vital faith.'<sup>144</sup>

I indicated in chapter one that Spener first drew attention to Luther's work, especially the Preface to Romans, and 'made the connection between conversion and the New Birth.'<sup>145</sup> This doctrine became central within the Wesleyan movement born from the brothers' May 1738 experience. Alongside the doctrine of justification, stood New Birth, which Wesley held was a process from the moment of salvation to holiness.<sup>146</sup>

Charles recorded his spiritual state as; 'hungry and thirsty after God.'<sup>147</sup> He wrote that he was tempted, and called out to Christ. Although he was ill with pleurisy, on the 11<sup>th</sup> May Charles moved lodgings as the Wesleys' acceptance of justification had led to disagreement with James Hutton's parents. Jackson's

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<sup>141</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 88.

<sup>142</sup> A. Dallimore, *A Heart Set Free - The Life of Charles Wesley* (Evangelical Press: Darlington. 1988) p. 60. For a fuller account of William Holland's record of this event see W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, pp. 340-342.

<sup>143</sup> W.R. Ward, *Christianity under the Ancien Régime*, p. 74.

<sup>144</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, p. 38.

<sup>145</sup> W.R. Ward, *Christianity under the Ancien Régime*, p. 74.

<sup>146</sup> See H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 394. Rack contends that 'New Birth' is a slippery term. For Wesley the New Birth was more than an instantaneous event, it was a process of transformation from sin to holiness. See also J. Wesley, *John Wesley's Forty-Four Sermons*, pp. 514-525. This is the sermon on *The New Birth*. (Sermon XXXIX)

<sup>147</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 87.



*Memoirs* quaintly states 'their host and hostess (the Huttons) were exceedingly averse to those evangelical views of conversion, justification and the new birth, which the brothers entertained.'<sup>148</sup> Charles met Mr Bray,<sup>149</sup> a fellow member of the fledgling Fetter Lane Society, and lodged with him. At that point, he still lacked faith. A *Journal* entry for the same date reads "*I have not now the faith of the Gospel.*"<sup>150</sup>

Charles' *Journal* records his debilitating illness and his anxiety about his spiritual state. On the 19<sup>th</sup> May, Wesley, confined to bed met Mrs Turner (Mr Bray's sister), and his conversation with her led him to seek faith more eagerly:

At seven Mrs Turner came, and told me, I should not rise from that bed till I believed. I believed her saying, and asked, "Has God then bestowed faith upon you?" "Yes he has." "Why, have you peace with God?" "Yes, perfect peace." "And do you love Christ above all things?" "I do, above all things incomparably."...Her answers were so full to these and the most searching questions I could ask, that I had no doubt of her having received atonement; and waited for it myself with a more assured hope.<sup>151</sup>

Following his reading of Luther's second chapter on the Galatians (17<sup>th</sup> May)<sup>152</sup>

Charles was assured from Scripture that 'he (*Christ*) would come, and would not tarry.'<sup>153</sup> Indeed, he actively sought Christ's appearance.

Mrs Turner was seminal to Charles' experience of the 21<sup>st</sup> May. As Charles rested, preparing to sleep, he thought Mrs Musgrave<sup>154</sup> had come into his room

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<sup>148</sup> T. Jackson, *The Memoirs of the Rev Charles Wesley MA* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office. 1875) p. 59. (Words in brackets mine)

<sup>149</sup> See C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 86. Charles described Mr Bray as 'a poor ignorant mechanic, who knows nothing but Christ'. Charles also considered his meeting with Mr Bray to be providential.

<sup>150</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 86. (Original italics)

<sup>151</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. 1, p. 89.

<sup>152</sup> J. Wesley, *Journal [SE]*, Vol. I, pp. 475-476. Footnote 2 details an account of how William Holland understood the events of 17<sup>th</sup> May. Holland was present that day, and indeed brought Luther's Commentary to Charles.

<sup>153</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 88. (Word in italics mine).

<sup>154</sup> Mrs Musgrave was sister to Mrs Turner and Mr Bray. Charles Wesley mistook her voice for that of Mrs Turner. It was only after Charles had been told that Mrs Musgrave had not been in Bray's house that Mrs Turner stated she had spoken. See C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 91.

and said 'In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, arise, and believe, and thou shalt be healed of all thy infirmities.'<sup>155</sup>

After questioning Mrs Turner whether she had spoken, he wondered whether Jesus himself had spoken, as he had been praying and waiting for Christ: 'I hoped it might be Christ indeed.'<sup>156</sup> As further enquiries were made, Charles Wesley came to a personal assurance of faith; 'I said, yet feared to say, "I believe, I believe!"'<sup>157</sup> Finally, Mrs Turner admitted she had spoken those words, following a dream in which Christ appeared to her.<sup>158</sup> Charles sent for Mr Bray and asked him whether he had indeed received faith. Mr Bray did not doubt that he had. Eventually Wesley recorded 'I found myself convinced, I knew not how, nor when, and immediately fell into intercession.'<sup>159</sup> John Wesley commented on his brother's experience; 'I received the surprising news that my brother had found rest to his soul. His bodily strength returned also from that hour.'<sup>160</sup>

Charles Wesley's conversion occurred after three factors had come into play: First, through Peter Böhler, he was not only receptive to the Moravian doctrines of justification by grace through faith, New Birth and assurance, but had accepted these to be hallmarks of salvation which he could not evidence in his own life. Second, being unwell, he was confined to his room, and this gave opportunity for soul searching, and introspection: 'I seemed deeply sensible of my misery.'<sup>161</sup> Within his room, Wesley had ample time to reflect on that of which he had heard Böhler speak. By the same token his meeting with Mr Bray,

<sup>155</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 90.

<sup>156</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 91.

<sup>157</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 91.

<sup>158</sup> See C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. 1, pp. 91-92.

<sup>159</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 91.

<sup>160</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, P. 241.

<sup>161</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 88.



William Holland and others left him in no doubt that assurance was a real experience.

Third, it may be that Charles Wesley's openness to supernatural events led him to place greater emphasis upon Mrs Turner's statement to him than his brother might have done. From the *Journal* there is no doubt that once he had heard the full story of how Mrs Turner came to speak to him on the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> May, he believed Christ had spoken through her. This was confirmed by Bray's assertion that as Mrs Turner was speaking, Christ was indeed present.<sup>162</sup>

This does not diminish the importance of the event for Charles Wesley. As for John on the 24<sup>th</sup> May, the events of the 21<sup>st</sup> May were a 'heart experience', rather than a 'head decision'. Charles had made the decision in his head to be a Christian but until the 21<sup>st</sup> May 1738 had not made the 'personal invitation' to Christ.

W.R. Ward, commenting on William Holland's journey from Anglicanism into Moravianism, could be speaking of the Wesleys: 'In one man's [Holland's] experience was a religious pilgrimage diverted from the Church of England (temporarily) into Moravianism by a liberating conversion experience without any sense of institutional discontinuity.'<sup>163</sup> Neither Charles nor John would believe or accept that they had wavered from the Church of England through their encounter with Moravianism: a meeting that led both to experience a personal, decisive moment of assurance. As with William Holland, the foray into Moravianism did not persuade Charles or John that they had in any way broken with the past. 'What occurred on *Wednesday* the 24<sup>th</sup>, I think it best to relate at

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<sup>162</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 92. See also C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 95. Charles recorded a conversation with Mrs Pratt in which Christ appeared to her in a dream

<sup>163</sup> W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, p. 342.

large, after premising what may make it the better understood.<sup>164</sup> So began the entry for the day upon which John Wesley was to experience a sense of personal assurance and salvation.

In the days before the 24<sup>th</sup> May, John described his spiritual state as “continual sorrow and heaviness” in my “heart”<sup>165</sup> writing to an unnamed friend that he was nothing more than a sinner.<sup>166</sup> The temper of this letter indicates clearly the sense Wesley had of his own spiritual state, and his desire to experience the same assurance that Böhler and others whom he had met since returning from Georgia had themselves experienced.

Wesley included the letter as a form of propaganda in the *Journal* to display the drama of the 24<sup>th</sup> May, but it is useful to notice that in a contemporaneous letter, as opposed to the reflection of the *Journal*, Wesley is in turmoil. Rack writes ‘On 24 May he was certainly in a highly wrought frame of mind, and a letter to a friend that day (probably Gambold) shows in a mixture of scriptural and personal epithets how conscious he was of sin, of the need for personal fruits of faith and of his lack of them.’<sup>167</sup>

Wesley attended the meeting in Aldersgate Street reluctantly, yet it was here that he was to find the assurance that he had been seeking:

In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.<sup>168</sup>

<sup>164</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 242.

<sup>165</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 241.

<sup>166</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 242. See also J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. I, p. 245.

<sup>167</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 144.

<sup>168</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, pp. 249-250.



Wesley testified publicly to his experience in the meeting. Charles' *Journal* entry adds another dimension to the evening. At around ten o'clock, John was brought in a state of great excitement to Mr Bray's where Charles was staying. 'My brother was brought in triumph by a troop of our friends, and declared, "I believe." We sang the hymn with great joy and parted with prayer.'<sup>169</sup> The evening of the 24<sup>th</sup> May had brought John, like Charles, to declare that he was saved 'from the law of sin and death'. Not by works of righteousness, but simply by faith. The hymn that was sung is likely to have been, 'Where shall my wondering soul begin', composed by Charles as a 'hymn upon my conversion.'<sup>170</sup>

### John Wesley's Conversion Reviewed

What occurred in May 1738 that differed from 1725? In 1725 Wesley made a 'head' decision to seek faith and turned to seriousness. He sought out writers who would enlighten and influence him. He read and discarded the writings of the mystics (with the exception of de Renty). Yet he did not find a personal faith. Bebbington's assertion that Jeremy Taylor's writings proved to be a 'sandy foundation' appears true. Between 1725 and 1738, in the process of the journey, Wesley used the means of grace and from late 1729, met the Holy Club to discuss faith and share mutual concerns. In 1730 he turned to social action at the suggestion of William Morgan.

In 1738 Wesley's heart was strangely warmed in a meeting room in Aldersgate Street.<sup>171</sup> Without Aldersgate, Wesley might have remained an Oxford Don

<sup>169</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 95.

<sup>170</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 95.

<sup>171</sup> For a fuller account of the 1725 turn to seriousness and the 1738 conversion see H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 145. Rack asserts that a Catholic (and Anglican) view may be taken of Wesley's 1725 change, and he refers to V.H.H. Green, *The Young Mr Wesley*, pp. 258-274. An evangelical view may also be taken of the event of May 1738 and he refers to M. Schmidt, *John Wesley, A Theological Biography*. Vol. 1, pp. 213-310.

seeking a personal faith, but without 1725 the warmed heart could not have been put into context of a broad, welcoming and evangelical theology that by 1738 encompassed many types of theological understanding.

As a demonstration of this, Wesley later urged his followers to use the means of grace, a distinct Anglican practice, and at the same time, meet for mutual confession and absolution, a Moravian practice. I will show in chapter four how, when the issue of stillness arose at Fetter Lane, discarding the means of grace for 'waiting on the Lord', he was prepared to separate from the Fetter Lane Society.<sup>172</sup> Wesley would not afford pre-eminence to one doctrine. For Wesley, the issue was not that stillness was wrong, but that to abandon all other practices in its favour was.<sup>173</sup> Wesley's faith was a mixture of practice and teaching that set him apart from other church leaders. Thomas Langford, quoting Gordon Rupp, evidences this:

Here, then, are some of the reasons why the Methodists became distinct from the other evangelicals: the Arminianism of the Wesleys, their High Church, non-juring associations, their many-sided spiritual inheritance, Protestant and Catholic, and the influence upon them of the Pietists and the Moravians.<sup>174</sup>

Third, it would be wrong to ignore the 24<sup>th</sup> May experience. Not only did Wesley *feel* forgiven (new birth), but he also received assurance that he *was* forgiven (the Witness of the Spirit). Many of Wesley's letters and *Journal* entries prior to May 24<sup>th</sup> show a longing to experience what he knew in his mind to be true. The letter to his friend on the day of his conversion is an indication of what he felt personally – sinfulness<sup>175</sup> and what he longed to experience – peace and joy.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> See also C. Podmore, *The Moravian Church*, p. 59-66. Podmore asserts that Spangenberg had also taught the doctrine of stillness at Fetter lane

<sup>173</sup> J. Wesley *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 122. The *Journal* entry for Monday 19<sup>th</sup> November 1739 shows that Wesley preached to the Bristol Society from the Psalms and urged the members to 'wait upon God in *all* his ordinances.' (Italics mine) Stillness was acceptable, but not to the exclusion of other practices.

<sup>174</sup> G. Rupp, 'Introductory Essay', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. I, quoted in T.A. Langford, *Methodist Theology* (Peterborough: Epworth Press. 1998) p. 5.

<sup>175</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 242.



J Ernest Rattenbury<sup>177</sup> drew upon Charles Wesley's hymnody as a source for understanding the Wesleys' life-changing experience. He argued that the reprinting of his brother's hymns was an acceptance by John of their doctrines and the experiences they related. Using the hymns, 'Where shall my wondering soul begin?', 'And can it be that I should gain?' and 'Come, O thou traveller unknown', Rattenbury argued the moment of conversion was not merely an academic acceptance of faith, but an experiential moment. He asserted the hymn 'Come, O thou traveller' to be 'the great classic of evangelical conversion.'<sup>178</sup> Of this hymn Rattenbury wrote that the recognition of divine love came in the verse containing the words;

Assurance comes, and adoption, and then the victorious wrestler  
declare his message to the world; he generalises his experience.

The morning breaks, the shadows flee,  
Pure UNIVERSAL LOVE THOU ART.<sup>179</sup>

Rattenbury concluded that once this divine love was recognised and received, 'faith is born and faith penetrates into the mystery of God'.<sup>180</sup> In the 1780 edition of *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, John Wesley placed this hymn in the section 'For Mourners Brought to the Birth'.<sup>181</sup> The hymn was written in 1742, and first appeared in the collection *Hymns and Sacred Psalms*.<sup>182</sup>

For both John and Charles Wesley, the experience of faith received in the moment of assurance was to be a guiding principle amongst the people called Methodist. From this life enhancing moment of justification by grace through

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<sup>176</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 242.

<sup>177</sup> J.E. Rattenbury, *The Conversion of the Wesley's* (London: Epworth Press. 1938) pp. 95-100.

<sup>178</sup> J.E. Rattenbury, *The Conversion of the Wesley's*, p. 99.

<sup>179</sup> J.E. Rattenbury, *The Conversion of the Wesley's*, p. 100.

<sup>180</sup> J.E. Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (London: Epworth Press. 1941) pp. 98-99.

<sup>181</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 7, pp. 250-252.

<sup>182</sup> See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 7, p. 250. Footnote to hymn 136.

faith, the Wesleys would become leaders of a movement that would seek to spread 'Scriptural Holiness', built upon a personal assurance of faith and a desire to be disciplined as a Christian by peers and leaders alike. The classes and bands of the movement would become the primary meeting places where that holiness could be discovered, experienced and practiced.

### The Wesleyan Inheritance

So far, I have shown that the Wesleyan inheritance is a broad schema. John Wesley embraced the piety of the English Puritans, and the continental pietists, and created a routine of pietistic fervour. Wesley was influenced by mystics, and non-jurors under whom he sought a primitive Christianity, primarily in Georgia, and he was a clergyman for whom the articles and practice of the Church were of utmost importance, even though he held lightly to these on more than one occasion.

In all, the Wesleyan heritage is not a neat package of doctrine but an eclectic collection of influences and ideals which became embedded in John Wesley's psyche. This model of faith and practice, when allied to his organisational skill, created at first a movement, and later an organisation for men and women who did not, or were not able to, engage with the established Church. Methodism received the legacy of John Wesley, codified it, and perhaps fossilised it, so that as will be discussed later, the Class meeting, the group that embodied the bulk of the Wesleyan inheritance, petrified too.

A note of caution must be raised about the depth of the Puritan influence on John Wesley.



It is possible that not only did Wesley inherit his High Church and anti-Dissenting prejudices from his parents, but they kept him in ignorance of his strong Puritan ancestry.<sup>183</sup>

This view is shared by Frank Baker,<sup>184</sup> who remarks that Wesley only became aware of his grandfather's ejection after reading Edmund Calamy's *Continuation* in 1765.<sup>185</sup> Not only did Calamy give a full account of the appearance before the Bishop of Bristol and subsequent trial of John Westley,<sup>186</sup> Wesley's grandfather, but he also notes the ejection of his great grandfather, Benjamin Westley.<sup>187</sup> Bearing in mind this caution, I will argue that through his reading, and his background, Puritan teachings were an influence on the developing Wesley.

In 1725 as Wesley began to amend his personal practice, he read English Puritan and mystic writers, evincing a move towards godliness in the tradition of Richard Rogers. For those who sought to be godly, the final state to be achieved was assurance, and as I mentioned in chapter one, Wesley would ultimately accept a pietist understanding of assurance as a first step of faith, thereby overturning the Puritan teaching. Godliness developed into a search for holiness, which took piety 'centered in law to a piety centered in an immediate relationship to God.'<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 306.

<sup>184</sup> F. Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, p. 237.

<sup>185</sup> See E. Calamy, *A Continuation of the Account of the Minsters, Lecturers... who were ejected and silenced after the Restoration in 1660, by or before the Act for Uniformity. To which is added the Church and Dissenters compar'd as to persecution, in some remarks on Dr. Walkers attempt to recover the names and sufferings of the clergy that were sequestered, &c Between 1640 and 1660, And also some free remarks on the twenty-eighth of Dr. E. Bennets Essay on the 39 Articles of Religion* (London: R. Ford. 1727).

<sup>186</sup> E. Calamy, *Continuation*, pp. 437-452. An account of the conversation between John Wesley's grandfather, John Westley, and the Bishop of Bristol is recorded in J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol 21, pp. 513-518. John Westley was minister of a gathered church in Dorset.

<sup>187</sup> E. Calamy, *Continuation*, p. 429. Bartholemew Westley was ejected from his living in Arlington, Dorset.

<sup>188</sup> F.E. Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, p. 79.

As Wesley began, in the pursuit of godliness, to write exact diaries of his spiritual state, so with the pursuit of holiness he longed for a relationship with God that seemed lacking. This is evidenced in correspondence with Burton,

But you will perhaps ask: 'Can't you save your own soul in England as well as in Georgia?' I answer, No; neither can I hope to attain the same degree of holiness here which I may there; neither, if I stay here knowing this, can I reasonably hope to attain any degree of holiness at all.<sup>189</sup>

Godliness failed to impart any sense of assurance. Once the godly life was linked to the Puritanism of Richard Greenham, who urged Christians to use time wisely in pietistic acts, and Wesley adopted these into his way of life in the Holy Club, he needed to receive a sense of assurance that his work was pleasing to God. This was not forthcoming.

Through his turn to seriousness Wesley was exhibiting classic Puritan behaviour by way of exact diaring and living. The use of reason within Puritanism was not simply to know that God had given a means of ascertaining his will ('what to do') as was the case for the Anglicans, but to use reason as a tool for daily living ('how to be'). From 1725, Wesley used reason in the classic High Church manner, but his later meetings with Dissenters, whilst maintaining the correctness of Anglican order and practice, allowed a generosity of intellectual spirit which meant that he saw reason in another tradition and could assimilate it into his own faith pattern.

Wesley's accommodation of mysticism into his schema of Christian living did nothing to help his searching soul. Puritanism encountered mysticism through the pursuit of holiness, the state of being which drew a Christian into union with God. The writings of Thomas à Kempis, and the Marquis de Renty, dogged

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<sup>189</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 441.



Wesley's pursuit of holiness through their mystical devotion to God. Through his life, Wesley adhered to the means of grace and other models of spiritual development, and he drew his use and reliance on the means from the High Anglican tradition as much from the Puritans.

The most striking element of Wesley's theology was his Arminianism, which came through his parents. Herbert McGonigle illustrates the depth of Wesley's familial inheritance in *Sufficient Saving Grace*.<sup>190</sup> However, McGonigle also shows how Wesley inculcated a personal Arminianism through his reading from 1725 onwards.

Arminianism had been the Court party line under Charles I, with Parliament taking a Calvinist line. Martin writes,

The courtiers damned the predestinarians, while the mob jeered at the Arminians. The King, Laud and Buckingham were for free will: Parliament was for predestination.<sup>191</sup>

The doctrine of Arminianism cannot be nailed to the Puritan, or the High Church tree, although Calvinism was predominant amongst Puritans, it was not the only teaching on salvation and the efficacy of the atonement.

The Arminian versus Calvinist debate spilled beyond academic argument into the life of society. Peter Lake, in his study of pamphleteering and the stage in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, draws out the doctrinal views of the pamphleteers who were anxious to show the death of offenders as good or bad, depending on their background and the author's own doctrinal stance. As an example, Lake

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<sup>190</sup> H.B. McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, pp. 73-106. See also pp. 124-128. Susanna Wesley published a response to Whitefield's anti-Arminian pamphlet *A Letter to the Rev Mr John Wesley*, itself a reply to Wesley's sermon on *Free Grace*. McGonigle asserts this response represented the Wesley family's Arminianism. The sermon *Free Grace* can be found in J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 3, pp. 542-563.

<sup>191</sup> H. Martin, *Puritanism and Richard Baxter*, p. 124.

shows how Peter Studley, 'an Arminian in theology and as a rabid anti-Puritan'<sup>192</sup> took the case of Enoch ap Evans, a Puritan convicted of murder, and attempted to show how Evans' Puritan Calvinist brethren had depicted him as mad, rather than encourage Evans to accept his fate and own a good death. The Puritans wanted Evans to eschew his Puritanism. Effectively, they tried 'to persuade ap Evans himself to suppress all mention of his Puritanism in his account of the crime.'<sup>193</sup> As an Arminian chaplain, Studley sought to prove from conversation that he had attempted to show ap Evans the error of his ways and bring him to an Arminian view.

Wesley inherited his Arminianism from parents who reached back to the Stuart inheritance. Susanna's Arminian credentials can be seen in an undated *Journal* entry,

I so long labour under such and so many difficulties in my way to heaven as makes me so often upon the point of despairing ever to arrive there. I cannot without renouncing my reason as well as faith question or doubt of thy being willing all men should be saved.<sup>194</sup>

Christopher Hill alludes to why this might be so. He suggests that under Archbishop Laud, there was an attempt, through Arminianism, to restore to the priesthood a position of honour and reinvigorate the sacraments and ceremonies. In other words, to establish free will within the constructs of a State Church. This contrasted with the Puritan Arminianism of people like Milton, who espoused individualism.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> P. Lake, with M. Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale. 2002) p. 171.

<sup>193</sup> P. Lake, with M. Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat*, p. 171.

<sup>194</sup> S. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley*, pp. 306. This is from an undated Sabbath meditation. See also pp. 465-479. In this response to a letter from George Whitefield to John Wesley, Susanna is defending her sons preaching and teaching of Arminian doctrine.

<sup>195</sup> See C. Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London: Mercury Books. 1964) p. 495.



For John Wesley, Arminianism arose from the safety of an Established Church of England, rather than from the individualistic sects who devised their own understanding of free will. This view is strengthened by Hill. He suggests that under James I, Arminianism was ascendant in the Church of England, with the Arminians holding 'all the best bishoprics and deaneries in England, the restriction by rank was in effect a party restriction.'<sup>196</sup> This makes the ascendancy of Calvinism under Parliament all the more understandable, and the resulting Church, post restoration, was predominantly Calvinist. John Wesley's inheritance of Arminius' teaching came through his parents, his personal regard for the Church of pre-Commonwealth England and his exhaustive anti-Calvinist reading. Whether Wesley read Arminius first hand is debatable, as McGonigle states, 'Among scholars who have researched John Wesley's 'Arminianism' there has been uncertainty as to whether or not he had read the Dutch theologian.'<sup>197</sup>

Wesley was also influenced by the Non-Jurors,<sup>198</sup> meeting John Clayton in 1732, when he began to attend the Holy Club. Rack believes Clayton has been underestimated: 'Clayton was a more important influence on the Oxford Methodists and Wesley himself than has perhaps always been recognised'.<sup>199</sup> Wesley's own quest for primitive Christianity in Georgia was fuelled by Clayton and others of his circle. Clayton introduced Wesley to Thomas Deacon, a Manchester Non-juror, and they led Wesley to practice (along with the Holy Club) the fasts of the Church, and look to the apostolic period for the most

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<sup>196</sup> C. Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, p. 37.

<sup>197</sup> H.B. McGonigle, *Sufficient Saving Grace*, p. 100.

<sup>198</sup> The Non-Jurors were those who supported the Stuart monarchy which had been expelled in 1688. Unable to assent to the Act of Supremacy, and the accession of King William and Queen Anne, ordained ministers lost their livings. Non-Jurors also looked to the first five centuries of the church for 'primitive' teaching and practice.

<sup>199</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 90.

authentic or primitive form of the Christian life. It was this which Wesley sought in Georgia.

After reading the *Apostolic Constitutions* Wesley's life was guided by its principles, and by the influence of Clayton and Deacon. He observed the fasts, baptised by immersion, and used Communion observances (adding water to the wine) that were not regularly practised.

Wesley's first baptism in Georgia was by immersion, 'Mary Welch, aged eleven days, was baptized according to the custom of the first church and the rule of the Church of England, by immersion. The child was ill then, but recovered from that hour.'<sup>200</sup> Wesley refused to baptise the child of Henry Parker whose parents declined immersion, and would not certify the child as sick to salve Wesley's conscience sufficiently to allow sprinkling.<sup>201</sup> Although this view was tempered, he maintained his view of the need for an episcopally ordained minister to perform a baptism. He refused Communion to John Martin Boltzius because of this scruple, an occasion he reflected upon after he received a letter from Boltzius in 1749, 'I did refuse to admit (Boltzius) to the Lord's Table, because he was *not baptized* – that is, not baptized by a minister who had been *episcopally ordained!*'<sup>202</sup>

Wesley's non-juring credentials were bolstered by his observance of the Prayer Book of Edward VI (1549), believing it to have greater authority than the authorised 1662 Prayer Book. The Manchester Non-Jurors also introduced Wesley to the poor of the workhouse, and to discriminate between 'idle and

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<sup>200</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 150. The diary entry for the following day states Wesley baptised Mary Welch 'by trine immersion'. See p. 360.

<sup>201</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p.157.

<sup>202</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 20, p. 305. (word in brackets mine) See also J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 528. Wesley's *Journal* and *Diary* show that he spoke with Boltzius on the 17<sup>th</sup> July 1737 and this was the day on which he refused him communion



worthy beggars'.<sup>203</sup> They were concerned for education, and Rack suggests this may have led to Wesley's request to his mother for her views on childhood education.<sup>204</sup>

Wesley's pietist influences are clearly seen in the period of Fetter Lane membership, but it is important to reach back to the journey to Georgia. Wesley was clearly predisposed towards Spangenberg's Moravian group and the Lutheran pietists in New Ebenezer. Whilst the first hand witness of the Moravians' behaviour during a storm deeply unsettled Wesley's personal spiritual state, he was drawn towards the practical piety of the pietists who followed Franke and Urlsperger.

Wesley considered Moravian practice and lifestyle close to ancient Christianity, yet he maintained a healthy scepticism towards their leader Zinzendorf, especially after meeting the Lutherans. As Rupp noted, 'From what he learned from the Ebenezer Lutherans, from correspondence, and from his own later first-hand knowledge, he had reservations about Count Zinzendorf'.<sup>205</sup> In Wesley's opinion, Zinzendorf exercised undue authority over the Moravians, allowed his followers to use guile in order to achieve an aim, maintained secrecy over matters of importance<sup>206</sup> and undervalued good works. In Wesley's conversation with Zinzendorf on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1741,<sup>207</sup> Wesley raised a further reservation; that Zinzendorf accepted imputed perfection, whilst Wesley allowed that perfection was inherent. Wesley was aware of continental

<sup>203</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 91.

<sup>204</sup> See S. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley*, pp. 369-373. Here, Susanna expresses her views.

<sup>205</sup> G. Rupp, 'Introductory Essay', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*. Vol. 1, pxxxiii.

<sup>206</sup> J. Wesley, *Minutes of The Methodist Conferences from the First, Held in London, by the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M., in the Year 1744*, Volume I (London: John Mason. 1862) p. 60. In the *Minutes* the question is asked 'Q. What power is this, which you exercise over both the Preachers and the Societies?' The response is, 'Count Zinzendorf loved to keep all things close.'

<sup>207</sup> See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 21, pp. 211-215. Wesley raised the issue of Zinzendorf's understanding of imputed perfection; that is perfection comes only in Christ. In Wesley's view a believer grew in holiness towards becoming perfect.

piety before meeting with them in the New World, having read Franke on the *Simmonds*. The life of the Holy Club owed much to the practice of the Halle pietists through William Morgan's influence.

In Georgia, Wesley established two small Pietist societies, in Savannah and Frederica, and from them smaller groups.<sup>208</sup> Their purpose was to 'reprove, instruct and exhort one another'. It is noteworthy that Wesley saw first hand the Moravian's organisation into groups for instruction and devotion. He chose to allow some laxity in membership, admitting females into the society, eschewing the strict segregation of the Moravians.

The return to London in 1738 brought Wesley into contact with the Unitary Societies detailed in chapter three, at which he became a frequent preacher, if not leader. There is no evidence to suggest that Wesley had any involvement with Anglican Societies prior to sailing for Georgia, and this may well have been due to his work with the Holy Club.

From May 1738 to April 1739, Wesley's time was predominantly spent in the company and organisation of the Fetter Lane Society, a Moravian-inspired, but Anglican-led society which advanced the form of societary life. After April 1739, Wesley was increasingly absent in Bristol. However, his association continued until the separation of 20<sup>th</sup> July 1740. Through Fetter Lane Wesley found a model of organisation, which with a few important amendments would become the structure of Methodism. Equally Wesley appears to have shed his scruples towards lay leadership, female leadership, and Dissenters. All were a part of the life at Fetter Lane discussed in chapter four.

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<sup>208</sup> See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 157.



Wesley continued to re-baptise Dissenters, even as members of Fetter Lane, and his own societies, and evidence will be adduced to show Wesley's determination to ensure Methodists were Anglicans too. Wesley's baptismal views were not swayed, even after Georgia and Fetter Lane. Essentially, Wesley 'retained his rubrical scruples and punctilios as to the necessity of Episcopalian baptism, and even went so far, on at least one occasion ... to re-baptise Dissenters.'<sup>209</sup>

In the Fetter Lane period the administration of Communion in societies and private homes was a point of difficulty for Wesley; sacramental observance was properly limited to the parish Church. Wesley's High Church principles were tested by his presidency at Communion in private homes. John Wesley argued he administered home Communion to the sick and to those who were 'Methodist friends, claiming that this was not the sort of "private administration" that was prohibited by the Church.'<sup>210</sup> The numbers mentioned in the *Journal* and the regularity with which he administered at specific homes indicates his practice was to preside at a private service.<sup>211</sup> Between April and October 1739 he communicated a minimum of nine and a maximum of fifty six people at any given time.

Wesley exercised a distinctive ministry beyond the unorthodox organisation of the Fetter Lane Society. In some ways he delved into the pietist Anglican inheritance of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, detailed in chapter one. However, this was tainted with the doctrine of assurance which

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<sup>209</sup> B.G. Holland, *Baptism in Early Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1970) p. 6.

<sup>210</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 140.

<sup>211</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol.19, p. 383. April 1<sup>st</sup> 1739: Mr Deschamps (thirty there). April 6<sup>th</sup>: Mr Williams', p. 393. June 9<sup>th</sup>: Mrs Williams' (ten there) p. 399. July 22<sup>nd</sup>: Mr Willis' (twenty-five there) p. 400. July 28<sup>th</sup>: Mrs Willis' (fifteen there) p. 401. August 4<sup>th</sup>: Mrs Williams' (nine there) p. 403. August 15<sup>th</sup>: Mrs Grace's (nine there) p. 403. August 18<sup>th</sup>: Mrs Williams' (fourteen there) p. 404. 19<sup>th</sup> August: Mrs Willis' (twenty-two there) p. 404. 22<sup>nd</sup> August: Margaret Somerel's (nine there) p. 411. 13<sup>th</sup> October: Mrs Williams' (twenty there) p. 411. 14<sup>th</sup> October: Mrs Willis' (fifty six there)

Wesley preached after his conversation with Peter Böhler,<sup>212</sup> a more recent doctrine which proved popular amongst the piety of the societies and groups he was invited to meet.

One of the keys of the Methodist movement from 1740 was Wesley's allegiance to the doctrine of perfection. This doctrine, like much of Wesley's inheritance, did not develop from one single strand of religious experience or teaching, rather, it grew in a cross fertilisation of Puritanism, Pietism and Catholicism. In each tradition, perfection theology arose from a desire for a more intimate union with God.

As previously mentioned holiness brought the Puritan Christian to an understanding of *being*, rather than simply *doing* as the goal of life. The shift into mysticism resulted from the desire to be inwardly holy. Mystical Puritanism was subjective; devotion to God, leading to a union with God. Coats argues 'Mysticism as a form of piety is the passion and hunger of the soul for immediacy of access to the Father, and the all-satisfying vision of his eternal glory.'<sup>213</sup> Wesley turned the introspective perfection of Puritanism into a world affirming understanding, wherein the freedom from outward sin did not remove the individual from interaction with the world. In effect, for Wesley, love, experienced through perfection replaced sin.

Wesley undoubtedly acquired a form of perfection theology from the Catholic Marquis de Renty that was inextricably linked with the pursuit of good works. De Renty, a seventeenth century French nobleman, began small classes for those who wrote to him for spiritual advice, and through personal example

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<sup>212</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 228. The conversation took place on the 4<sup>th</sup> March 1738.

<sup>213</sup> R.H. Coats, *Types of English Piety*, p. 156.



encouraged people to undertake pietistic works. Orcibal notes that Wesley's letters frequently referred to the work of the Marquis, and Wesley felt his life was one of 'noble simplicity ...and ... extraordinary intimacy of union with God'.<sup>214</sup>

Wesley's understanding of perfection was first articulated in the 1733 sermon, *The Circumcision of the Heart*. As previously quoted, perfection, or spiritual circumcision leads the Christian to be clean from sin and hold the nature of Christ, such that an individual becomes "perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect".<sup>215</sup> By 1733 Wesley had come to hold a doctrine of Christian perfection that was to remain with him through his life, and which was to influence the classes and bands, even though he remained unsure of his spiritual state until 1738.

The mystics, with the exception of de Renty were jettisoned by Wesley whilst in Georgia, explaining to his brother that they had served only as rocks on which he almost shipwrecked his soul.<sup>216</sup> This careful appraisal and ultimate rejection of one form of doctrine enabled Wesley's inheritance to be highly personal, yet would prove effective for the Methodists he would lead for a large part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### Chapter Summary

The Wesleyan schema of faith was predominantly laid by the time of the 'Aldersgate experience'. Reason, experience, tradition were understood in relation to Scripture – to which Wesley had resolved to be 'homo unius libri'. If Scripture offered the foundation of the life he would lead after his experience, it

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<sup>214</sup> J. Orcibal, 'The Theological Originality of John Wesley and Continental Spirituality', in *A History of the Methodist Church*, Vol. I, p. 90.

<sup>215</sup> J. Wesley, *A Plain Account*, p. 7.

<sup>216</sup> See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 487.

would not be a sandy foundation, as every aspect of faith and spirituality would be tested. Hempton properly writes that in reality, to see Scripture, reason, tradition and experience as a 'quadrilateral'<sup>217</sup> is inadequate. Having dismissed Albert Outler's description, he writes,

If Wesley's theology must be reduced to a model, one that offers better explanatory power than the quadrilateral is to see it more as a moving vortex, fuelled by scripture and divine love, shaped by experience, reason and tradition, and moving dynamically towards holiness or Christian perfection.<sup>218</sup>

The Fetter Lane Society was the final building block prior to the foundation of the Wesleyan movement. In this society, of which he was both member and leader, he noted flawed pietism that gave up the means of grace, and which would not engage with works of mercy. For Wesley, whose faith demanded rigorous discipline and social outreach, this was ultimately unsatisfying, and the permission to travel to Bristol in 1739 opened a new dimension in his life. Wesley began Societies based on his own model: a model that would give rise to the Class meeting, the crown and cross of Methodism; a model that did indeed allow Hempton's 'vortex' full expression for the earliest Methodist people. Yet it was a vortex that would become a schema set as Outler described, a 'quadrilateral', based not on the dynamic experiences through which Wesley had been, but on the settled life of a class, in which dynamism gave way to routine, and the settlement of a received doctrine.

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<sup>217</sup> Albert Outler, (1908-1989) was an American Methodist minister. He taught at Yale, Duke and Southern Methodist Universities. He coined the term of 'Wesley's quadrilateral' which has become widely known within the field of Wesleyan studies.

<sup>218</sup> D. Hempton, *Methodism Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press. 2005) p. 57.



## Chapter 3: Religious Societies in England from 1678

### Context

Religious societies in England can be traced to the foundation of the Savoy Society in 1678. The English societies did not emerge in a vacuum, but as the result of, or as descendants of, previous models of Christian expression discussed in chapter one. In the 16th century the English Church held a significant part in local life, as Clark stresses: 'The most important covered space in a community was the parish church,'<sup>1</sup> providing a meeting place for social and liturgical purposes.

Post-Reformation, the social function of the church waned. However, the church did not lose its hold on community life. During the reign of Elizabeth I, market and fast days were marked by extended preaching and 'prophesying services', which later became 'combination lectures'<sup>2</sup> intended to improve spiritual standards. Laymen also met at private prayer meetings, and whilst these were mainly conformist Puritans, Dissenters and Catholics also met in groups. Two societies existed within the ecclesiastical framework of the Church of England prior to 1678: Nicholas Ferrar's society at Little Gidding<sup>3</sup> and the Company for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England.<sup>4</sup>

### The Savoy Society and the Poplar Regulations

The English Religious Society can be traced to Anthony Horneck, born in 1641 at Bacharach. After studying at Heidelberg and Wittenberg Universities he travelled to England, studying at Queen's College, Oxford (completing the Master's degree begun in Wittenberg). He was ordained in the Church of England, and after a period at the court of the Elector Palatine returned to

<sup>1</sup> P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, pp. 121-122.

<sup>4</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, pp. 123-124.

England to take up a post at the Savoy Chapel. Whilst at the Savoy he was awarded the degree of Doctor of Divinity by Cambridge University.

Bullock offers a suggestion of the Unitary Society's purpose; 'Horneck's pastoral work and sermons so moved a large number of young men that they began in 1678 to meet together with him weekly for devotional purposes and for mutual instruction in *The Principles of the faith*.'<sup>5</sup> Portus echoed this, and suggested that the Savoy Society began because young men were approaching their ministers 'concerning their awakened state.'<sup>6</sup> The Savoy Society was concerned with poor relief<sup>7</sup> and two members were elected to act as Stewards, responsible for the administration of funds. Josiah Woodward gave them an alternative title, '*Managers of their charity*'.<sup>8</sup>

Savoy Society membership was confined to confirmed Anglicans. In addition, as the first rule indicated, prospective members had to 'resolve upon a holy and serious life.'<sup>9</sup> The rules were also heavily influenced in favour of the presiding minister having a veto on prospective members.<sup>10</sup> The local clergyman who led and directed the society acted as 'president'. Horneck's rules are general as to the choice of minister, which was open to the society members, but once appointed, he directed business and regulated admission. There were no lay leaders in his society.

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<sup>5</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 127.

<sup>6</sup> G.V. Portus, *Caritas Anglicana*, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>8</sup> J. Woodward, *An Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London &C. And of the Endeavours for the Reformation of Manners Which have been made Therein* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (London: R.A. Simpson. 1698) p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> Appendix 1: Rule 1.

<sup>10</sup> Appendix 1: Rule 14.



Bullock described Horneck's role as 'general spiritual adviser',<sup>11</sup> and this role can be seen in the rules which he drew up.<sup>12</sup> Horneck was not automatically the Director of Societies he founded. If, as Bullock states, citing Dr. Richard Kidder, Horneck 'had the care of several societies of young men'<sup>13</sup> he would have been anxious to create rules which could be used at any number of societies.

The significance of membership is further evidenced by the weekly payment towards a 'poor fund'.<sup>14</sup> Funds were increased by fines paid by members who absented themselves from meetings,<sup>15</sup> and by the 'fine' of five shillings paid to leave the society.<sup>16</sup> This undoubtedly increased the value of membership, and ensured that members took the pursuit of seriousness and holiness with due diligence.

The philanthropic nature of these early societies grew, and as the number of societies increased, so did the work they accomplished through their weekly giving. Societies distributed monies to the poor, to widows and orphans and provided money for a funeral sermon for any deceased member.<sup>17</sup> Woodward wrote:

at every meeting (as it was advis'd) they consider the Wants of the Poor, which in time amounted to considerable sums, that thereby many *poor families* have been reliev'd, some *poor people* set into a way of Trade suitable to their Capacities, sundry *Prisoners* set at liberty, some poor *Scholars* furthered in their Subsistence at the University, several *Orphans* Maintained.<sup>18</sup>

Bullock believed Spener's *Collegia Pietatis* influenced the design and nature of Horneck's society. Horneck was in the service of the Elector Palatine from 1669

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<sup>11</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 128.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>13</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 128.

<sup>14</sup> Appendix 1: Rule 11.

<sup>15</sup> Appendix 1: Rule 10.

<sup>16</sup> Appendix 1: Rule 16.

<sup>17</sup> G.V. Portus, *Caritas Anglicana*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>18</sup> J. Woodward, *An Account*, p. 36.

to 1671, and Spener had been tutor to the Palatine princes some years before. His belief is speculative, 'probably the Elector remained in close sympathy with his old tutor's ideals',<sup>19</sup> and 'it would appear very likely that Horneck would go to that city, (Frankfurt)'.<sup>20</sup> The argument rests upon the assumption that Horneck heard about Spener's work and remembered it.

Bullock also asserted that Horneck probably read Spener's *Pia Desideria* and that he was in correspondence with others in Germany who knew of Spener's work and the *Collegia Pietatis*.<sup>21</sup> Woodward's *Account* supports Bullock's argument. The second edition was published in 1698, but the first edition had already been widely read:

Since the first edition of this *Account*, I have understood in my conversation with many Divines in and about this city, and by Letters from the remotest parts of this Land...that the Piety of many Persons, especially the younger sort, has been evidently enlivened thereby; and that it has been read by them *with a very Surprizing Joy*.<sup>22</sup>

Likeminded people in other areas of England were picking up the patterns established in London, and knew of Horneck's society by the time the second edition was published. Samuel Wesley knew of Woodward's book by 1701, asking for a copy in a letter to the SPCK in June 1701, and writing in his own *Account of the Religious Society begun in Epworth* that he read 'over with more attention then (sic) formerly D<sup>r</sup> Woodward's Book of the Religious Societys Edit: 3'.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 130.

<sup>20</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 130. (Words in brackets mine)

<sup>21</sup> See S. O'Brien, 'Eighteenth Century Publishing Networks in the First Years of Transatlantic Evangelicalism', in *Evangelicalism* (eds. M.A. Noll, D.W. Bebbington, G. Rawlyk; Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1994) pp. 38-57.

<sup>22</sup> J. Woodward, *An Account*, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> W.O.B. Allen, & E. McClure, *Two Hundred Years: The History of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. 1698-1898* (London: SPCK. 1898) p. 89.



Bullock noted similarities from the general design of the rules to further support his argument. These included: the need for an ordained director; the encouragement of holiness; the avoidance of controversy; the need for confirmation; the assistance of the poor; self examination and loving one another. There are points at which Spener's rules diverge, but Bullock wrote, 'Their similarities are far closer than their differences, and the resemblances between them do seem too close to be purely accidental and un-associated.'<sup>24</sup>

This point is interesting, and if true, it serves to emphasise the associations that were being made amongst Christian groups. This is not to say that they were by any means slavishly adopting another group's rules and style, but that a pre-existing society provided the base for a new society with its own distinctive ethos. Such a move will be seen through the formation of the rules at Fetter Lane. Although not a Moravian Society at the outset, there were many similarities with the Herrnhut rules.

Portus, charting the life of the Savoy Society, noted two events that occurred after the accession of James II.<sup>25</sup> First, societies which 'enjoined that strangers were only to be admitted to meetings with extreme caution, and membership was only accomplished after private discussion of a candidate's fitness,'<sup>26</sup> were open to attack as secret Catholic societies. Whilst this caused some members to leave the societies, it resulted in a second effect: the creation of societies expressly founded to combat Catholicism,<sup>27</sup> through endowments for the provision of preachers, and the establishment of regular lectures, prior to Holy Communion. These endowments were anti-Catholic.

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<sup>24</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 131.

<sup>25</sup> J. Woodward, *An Account*, p. 38. Woodward gives a short, yet graphic account of the executions that took place after the accession of James II in 1685

<sup>26</sup> G.V. Portus, *Caritas Anglicana*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>27</sup> J. Woodward, *An Account*, pp. 39-41.

Secondly, as a result of suspicion many religious societies moved from private to public meetings, becoming 'clubs'. These meetings could be in public houses, where 'spending the odd shilling in drink, they continued to remain unmolested.'<sup>28</sup> This contrasted with the Poplar Regulations, which expressly urged members to avoid public houses and play-houses. By the time the Poplar Regulations were written, religious societies had embraced characteristics of the *Societies for the Reformation of Manners*, and lewd and profane behaviour was no doubt believed to have been most rife in those places. These new 'clubs' are written up in Portus' account of the early societies. Of fifteen societies, only one met in church. The others met in 'private chambers or taverns.'<sup>29</sup>

Over time, societies came to be regarded as an element of church life for young men, and Bishop Compton of London and Archbishop Tillotson of Canterbury approved of them.<sup>30</sup> After Horneck's death, other societies were founded to achieve similar aims to those of the Savoy Society. Josiah Woodward provided the most informative account of the earliest societies. He was involved with a religious society in Poplar,<sup>31</sup> the London parish of which he was vicar. The rules of his society are fuller than those of the Savoy Society, and chart a development in thinking and practice in the purpose of a religious society.

Woodward's Society had similar rules to Horneck's but elaborates the recommendations relating to personal conduct. The Poplar Regulations are as much concerned with behaviour in society, especially to frequenting public

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<sup>28</sup> G.V. Portus, *Caritas Anglicana*, p. 14. See also J. Woodward, *An Account*, p. 42.

<sup>29</sup> G.V. Portus, *Caritas Anglicana*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>30</sup> G.V. Portus, *Caritas Anglicana*, p. 15. Compton stated 'God forbid that I should be against such excellent designs'. Tillotson stated 'these *Societies* were a support to our *Church*'. See also J. Woodward, *An Account*, pp. 50-65. In chapter III 'An Account of the Progress of These Societies; and of the Real Aim and Design' Woodward details the progress of the societies and within the chapter relates the difficulties initially faced by them in relation to the established church.

<sup>31</sup> These rules, called *the Poplar Regulations* are annexed at Appendix 2.



houses and taverns, the avoidance of gambling 'ale-house games'<sup>32</sup> and 'lewd play-houses'<sup>33</sup> as they are with behaviour within the Society itself. Scriptural warrants are applied to some of the rules, perhaps to give them greater strength with the membership. This is especially true of rule 10, with twenty numbered sub-headings, seventeen of which have one or more passages of Scripture annexed.

Bullock suggested two significant changes developed in later societies, especially Fetter Lane: lay leadership and the opportunity for deeper spiritual conversation. I suggest there is a third, drawn from Woodward's model; the abstention from licentious behaviour, coupled with a keen interest in the maintenance of public morality.

Lay leadership was exercised through elected stewards<sup>34</sup> who oversaw the distribution of monies to the poor and regulated entry into the society.<sup>35</sup> Stewards also had authority to 'exclude any member proved guilty of any misbehaviour, after due admonition, unless he gives sufficient testimony of his repentance and amendment, before the whole Society.'<sup>36</sup>

Poplar Society stewards have no social function related to their role to distribute funds to the poor, as in Horneck's Savoy Society.<sup>37</sup> They are elected to fulfil a quasi-judicial role in the admission and exclusion of members. Woodward's *Account* also indicated that when the Society Director, an ordained minister, was not present, a Steward might fulfil the director's duties at the meeting. Guidelines were laid down for the execution of this role;

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<sup>32</sup> Appendix 2: Rule 9.

<sup>33</sup> Appendix 2: Rule 9.

<sup>34</sup> Appendix 2: Rule 5.

<sup>35</sup> Appendix 2: Rule 8.

<sup>36</sup> Appendix 2: Rule 8.

<sup>37</sup> Appendix 1: Rule 12.

one of the Stewards (if the director be absent), or any other person desired, may begin the conference thus' – there follows an exhortation and form of prayers, then a reading from Scripture with pauses, so that any member can interject a remark if he so desires, "or some part of an approved exposition on the Holy Scripture or on the catechism may be read".<sup>38</sup>

The lay leader at that meeting could also decide on the subject for the following week's meeting.

Spiritual conversation was encouraged and achieved by allowing members to comment during the reading of Scripture, and through the detailed sub-headings of rule 10, which indicate that personal spiritual advancement was not achieved at Society meetings alone but during private devotions, public prayer and attendance at the Lord's Supper.

The final major development was the interest and requirement placed upon members to be involved with the reformation of public morals and manners. This development is significant as the Savoy Society was founded merely for those resolved 'upon a holy and serious life.'<sup>39</sup> The members who accepted the Poplar Regulations as societal government acquiesced to abstention from attending taverns and theatres,<sup>40</sup> and a pro-active role in promoting public morals and the maintenance of social order.<sup>41</sup> Again, Scriptural warrant is given to this element of the society's business. Here, for the first time, the religious society is not merely for the purpose of private advancement in faith, but for the upholding of the social status quo, as an outworking of the designs of the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>38</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 143.

<sup>39</sup> Appendix 1: Rule 1.

<sup>40</sup> Appendix 2: Rule 9.

<sup>41</sup> Appendix 2: Rule 11.



By the time the Poplar Regulations were codified, there were many societies formed with the purpose of reforming public morals: 'During the reigns of Charles II and James II, profanity, drunkenness, immorality and excessive gambling were particularly rife. Sunday observance was very slack.'<sup>42</sup> The *Societies for the Reformation of Manners*, which flourished from 1691, used many tactics to achieve their stated aim including informing on offenders.

There was a cross-fertilisation between the two distinct groups, and from the Poplar Regulations it is apparent that religious societies adopted one aspect of the work of the reforming societies: the moral imperative for improving public behaviour, by personal adherence to the law, and through societal action to procure adherence to the law.

In 1693, Dissenters were allowed to join the reforming societies; the first time Anglicans and Dissenters shared a common purpose. This mutuality extended only to the *Societies for the Reformation of Manners*. The next time such a union would occur would be in Fetter Lane forty-five years later, in a religious, rather than a reforming society.

### The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge

The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), founded in 1698, is the only surviving religious society from the early period of religious association.

The SPCK first met on March 8<sup>th</sup> 1698-1699. Amongst the founders was 'The Right Hon<sup>ble</sup> the Lord Guildford, S<sup>r</sup> Humphrey Mackworth, Mr. Justice Hook, Dr.

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<sup>42</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 135.

Bray, Co. Colchester.<sup>43</sup> This society is distinctive in that its founders were gentlemen. Among the early corresponding members was the Rev Samuel Wesley.

The purpose of the SPCK was the furtherance of the gospel, both in Britain and overseas. It supported missionaries abroad, and provided publications to create 'Parochial Libraries throughout the Plantations'.<sup>44</sup> Smaller parishes in Britain were to be endowed with 'catechetical Libraries'<sup>45</sup> to encourage young people to be taught the Christian religion. These were enhanced with the provision of schools to educate poor children to read and write. The schools were aimed at eradicating vice and debauchery and overcoming gross ignorance of Christian principles.<sup>46</sup>

Portus contended that the SPCK sought to achieve the same aims as the reforming societies by approaching the problem through education and publication. He stated, 'It attacked the cause rather than the result of the evil which was manifested in contemporary manners, and therefore it gradually supplanted the Reforming Societies'.<sup>47</sup> The SPCK did not act as a religious society. Today the SPCK might be termed as a 'Para-Society', which works above the grass roots of societal structure.

Peter Clark argues that although the influence of the moral reform societies was waning, the SPCK was providing financial and institutional support for the continuing societies in London and beyond.<sup>48</sup> He also argues that the SPCK alone withstood the decline of moral reform societies. This was possible

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<sup>43</sup> W.O.B. Allen, & E. McClure, *Two Hundred Years*, p. 13.

<sup>44</sup> W.O.B. Allen, & E. McClure, *Two Hundred Years*, p. 22.

<sup>45</sup> W.O.B. Allen, & E. McClure, *Two Hundred Years*, p. 23.

<sup>46</sup> W.O.B. Allen, & E. McClure, *Two Hundred Years*, p. 27. See the order for Charity Schools.

<sup>47</sup> G.V. Portus, *Caritas Anglicana*, p. 62.

<sup>48</sup> P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p. 75.



because of its 'extensive institutional structure.'<sup>49</sup> Through this, the SPCK was able to be

Active in fostering local religious societies and charity schools, the SPCK provided continuing support for moral reform during the first half of the eighteenth century.<sup>50</sup>

Religious societies began outside London once the SPCK began distributing publications, and of note is the Epworth Society of the Rev Samuel Wesley.

### The Epworth Society

Samuel knew of the work of the religious societies, and wrote an article about their design in *A Letter Concerning The Religious Societies*. (An appendix to *The Pious Communicant Rightly Prepared*). Wesley believed societies were helpful to members and clergy of large parishes. Membership was a guard against the world; 'these Christian societies now erected namely to make a stand for religion and virtue, so many redoubts against an encroaching world.'<sup>51</sup>

Membership was limited to communicants, and met 'wholly upon a religious account to promote true piety in themselves and others and all of them are strict members of the Church of England.'<sup>52</sup> In the article, Samuel Wesley mentioned the Marquis de Renty's religious societies. Though he was a Catholic, Samuel considered de Renty;

The noble and pious de Renty in France was of this number. He employed much of his time in this happy exercise particularly at Caen, where he settled many societies of devout persons to meet weekly, and consult about the relief of the poor and preventing offences against God.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p. 434.

<sup>50</sup> P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p. 434.

<sup>51</sup> S. Wesley, *A Letter Concerning The Religious Societies*, (1699)

<sup>52</sup> S. Wesley, *A Letter*,

<sup>53</sup> S. Wesley, *A Letter*,

Samuel understood the society's purpose was not to create schism or new churches from existing congregations, 'but rather to promote the glory of God in the practice of humility and charity.'<sup>54</sup>

Wesley began a society in Epworth after reading Woodward's *Account*.<sup>55</sup> His parish had around 7,000 inhabitants in 1701<sup>56</sup> and he had no curate. His aim was to reform manners and increase spirituality. Samuel Wesley did not use informers, but education and religious devotion. Wesley sought and received the agreement of his bishop to begin a society. The first Epworth meeting was held on the 7<sup>th</sup> February 1701, with eight people. These were young men, and at least one (if not all) was in the choir.<sup>57</sup>

Samuel Wesley's report to the SPCK states, 'There are I believe 30 or 40 other sober persons in the Town who would be glad to enter the society.'<sup>58</sup> Lay leadership was allowed when Samuel Wesley could not be present. 'The members of the Society promis'd to continue in my absence.'<sup>59</sup>

Eventually, as the need for more groups emerged, others were put into leadership of new groups. New members were admitted only by unanimous consent.<sup>60</sup> The results were notable, members becoming 'much more careful of their lives and conversations.'<sup>61</sup> Rack remarks that the meetings were not solely for personal edification and spiritual growth. He writes, 'They intended to help

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<sup>54</sup> D.L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, p. 72.

<sup>55</sup> G.V. Portus, *Caritas Anglicana*, p. 146. See also W.O.B. Allen, & E. McClure, *Two Hundred Years*, p. 89. The addition of the work of the society in Old Romney spurred Samuel Wesley to form the Epworth Religious Society.

<sup>56</sup> W.O.B. Allen, & E. McClure, *Two Hundred Years*, p. 88.

<sup>57</sup> W.O.B. Allen, & E. McClure, *Two Hundred Years*, p. 90.

<sup>58</sup> W.O.B. Allen, & E. McClure, *Two Hundred Years*, p. 91.

<sup>59</sup> W.O.B. Allen, & E. McClure, *Two Hundred Years*, p. 90.

<sup>60</sup> See appendix 3: Rule III.

<sup>61</sup> D.L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, p. 72.



the poor and to correspond with similar societies abroad and translate their tracts.<sup>62</sup>

The Epworth Society took a cautious approach to admission to the group, restricting membership to those who had themselves been converted and were serious about spiritual growth. A regular collection was taken which was used to educate the poor, purchase treatises, correspond with other societies and care for the poor and sick. Samuel's Society met to nourish the individual soul and provide a form of social service. This was to be further advanced by the erection of a Charity School in the parish.

### John Wesley and the Religious Societies

There is little available detail about the work of Anglican religious societies up to 1738 when John Wesley returned from Georgia, and it is Wesley's *Journal* and *Diary* which offer the greatest amount of information about these societies in the second quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. From May 1<sup>st</sup> 1738, Wesley became involved with the Fetter Lane Society. However, he remained an assiduous preacher at numerous societies across London. There had clearly been some developments in societal meeting by 1738 as Wesley records meetings in homes and taverns.

Wesley was regularly present at meetings at Mr Exall's<sup>63</sup> home on a Saturday evening. Wesley's correspondence to his brother indicates this was not a small band-like group: 'Many were cut to the heart, both here (at Lady Hume's) and at Mr Exall's'.<sup>64</sup> Exall belonged to Fetter Lane, and remained with Wesley after his

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<sup>62</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 53.

<sup>63</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 13.

<sup>64</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. I, p. 337.

separation from that society.<sup>65</sup> John Bray held a meeting in his home<sup>66</sup> and Thomas Crouch,<sup>67</sup> organised a society at Dowgate Hill, with regular visitation from John Wesley.

Wesley was also involved with traditional societies across London, most of which followed traditional rules. Rack points out that whilst Fetter Lane was a break from the societies that preceded it, other 'traditional' societies were beginning at the same time:

In fact a new crop of societies was beginning to emerge, and these as well as some of the old ones would be infiltrated by the Moravians and Whitefield converts, reflecting the doctrine and priorities of the 'new birth'.<sup>68</sup>

The Aldersgate Street society was founded by James Hutton and it was here that John Wesley found his heart strangely warmed in May 1738. He attended it at least twice after his return from Germany in 1738.<sup>69</sup> The entries for this society are interesting as on the first occasion (20<sup>th</sup> September 1738) the *Journal* reads, 'I spoke the truth in love at a society in Aldersgate Street',<sup>70</sup> whilst the *Diary* records '6 At James Hutton's, Mrs Claggett,<sup>71</sup> etc; sang; religious talk; prayed'.<sup>72</sup> On the second occasion (Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> February 1739), it appears Wesley led a traditional preaching service there: '3 At Aldersgate, read Prayers, Sermon'.<sup>73</sup> Wesley's *Journal* and *Diary* agree on the societies that

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<sup>65</sup> J.N. Libby, 'The Personnel of the Fetter Lane Society', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XVI, p. 145.

<sup>66</sup> See Appendix 9. The *Diary* entry for the same day, shows Wesley 'at home; Society' at 6pm. See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 406.

<sup>67</sup> See Appendix 9. Wesley later records attending meetings at Dowgate Hill. J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, See pp. 375, 377, 407 & 415.

<sup>68</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 141. Rack cites Podmore's article in the *Proceedings*, Vol. XLVI. 1988, part 5, pp. 125-153. as a definitive account of these new societies

<sup>69</sup> See Appendix 9. See also J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 375.

<sup>70</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 13.

<sup>71</sup> Mrs Claggett's personal testimony is contained in the *Early Methodist Volume* held at the John Rylands University Library Manchester, p. 41.

<sup>72</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 354. For further information about the site of the society that met here see J. Wesley, *Journal [SE]*, Vol. II, p. 475. Footnote 1

<sup>73</sup> Appendix 9, J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 375.



he visited. Although the *Diary* names more societies, the *Journal* adds notes about Wesley's relationship with these societies.

Some societies clearly hired rooms over public houses, '8 At the Green Man, religious talk';<sup>74</sup> '4 Plaistow, The Ship; Mr Bray etc, teas, religious talk',<sup>75</sup> '1 At The Three Cups, religious talk, dinner, prayed.'<sup>76</sup> In all, Wesley attended and spoke at 32 societies<sup>77</sup> across London between September 1738 and July 1740, most regularly at the Savoy society.<sup>78</sup>

As a clergyman without a parish living, Wesley was free to visit Anglican societies. This became more important to Wesley as incumbents who considered Wesley to be an enthusiast closed their pulpits to him. From September 1738, frequent notes in the *Journal* show that Wesley was welcomed at fewer and fewer Churches:

Sunday 5, (November) in the morning at St. Botolph's, Bishopsgate, in the afternoon at Islington, and in the evening to such a congregation as I never saw before at St. Clement's in the Strand. As this was the first time of my preaching here, I suppose it is to be the last.<sup>79</sup>

One Sunday, Wesley preached in Spitalfields in the morning and afternoon, but the invitation to conduct the evening service was withdrawn. Wesley notes that this gave him, 'a good remembrance that I should, if possible, declare at every time the *whole* counsel of God.'<sup>80</sup> Benham's *Memoirs* of 1856 related the closure of pulpits to 'negligence and unconcern'<sup>81</sup> on the part of the clergy.

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<sup>74</sup> Appendix 9. See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 393.

<sup>75</sup> Appendix 9. See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p.407.

<sup>76</sup> Appendix 9. See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 408.

<sup>77</sup> See Appendix 9.

<sup>78</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 354. Wesley attended this society seventeen times, always on a Thursday.

<sup>79</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 20.

<sup>80</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 35. The chapel was in the patronage of Sir George Wheeler's family.

<sup>81</sup> D. Benham, *Memoirs of James Hutton*, p. 42.

However, he accused the Methodists of 'misguided zeal and unexampled indiscretion'.<sup>82</sup>

John Walsh addressed the issue of membership in the Anglican Societies to 1740, when Wesley broke away from Fetter Lane, and the Methodist movement began. Prior to the field preaching of Whitefield and Wesley, Walsh states, 'recruitment to the societies had been aimed at the urban, literate and respectable of Dr Woodward's social milieu,'<sup>83</sup> the new Methodists in contrast attracted 'the 'outcasts', 'the forlorn ones'; the marginalized who squatted on the edges and in the gaps of the parochial system'.<sup>84</sup>

To that must be added Methodism's ability to cut into existing societal life.

Walsh's comment is stark:

The rapidity with which early Methodism established itself owed a great deal to its ability to cannibalise the religious societies of London, Bristol and elsewhere.<sup>85</sup>

The first Methodist society in St Ives, Cornwall, began after visits by Joseph Turner. At his initial visit in 1743 he met with a distinctly Anglican Society. Simon comments that their rules were 'founded probably on Dr Woodward's plan.'<sup>86</sup> After visits by two lay preachers and Charles Wesley in that year, the group became a Methodist society.

Anglican opposition to the new 'enthusiasts' was vigorous and vociferous. Thomas Bullock received widespread support from lay leaders of the older religious societies in London in 1743, when at the behest of the Bishop of

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<sup>82</sup> D. Benham, *Memoirs of James Hutton*, p. 42.

<sup>83</sup> J.D. Walsh, 'Religious Societies: Methodist and Evangelical 1738-1800', in *Voluntary Religion: Studies in Church History*. Volume 23 (eds. W.J. Shiels, & D. Wood; Worcester: Blackwell.1986) p. 286.

<sup>84</sup> J.D. Walsh, 'Religious Societies', in *Voluntary Religion*, Vol. 23, pp. 286-287.

<sup>85</sup> J.D. Walsh, 'Religious Societies', in *Voluntary Religion*, Vol. 23, p. 284.

<sup>86</sup> J.S. Simon, *John Wesley and the Methodist Societies*, p. 139.



London, he publicly opposed the Moravians. The stewards of the older societies also acted to remove those who attached themselves to Whitefield, or other enthusiasts.<sup>87</sup> In 1759, there were still fourteen 'old style' religious societies in London, and older pre-1740 societies continued to exist without Methodist or Evangelical Anglican influence. Rack cites the *Diary* of Thomas Day, a Methodist, who in 1756 met three 'old style' societies in Southwark.<sup>88</sup>

To address, or perhaps offer an apologia for his role amongst the new societies, George Whitefield wrote a public letter in 1740, outlining the differences between the old and new societies. Whitefield stated his fondness for the old societies which had been overshadowed by new societies. Rack mentions Whitefield's comment that the new societies offered the opportunity of 'confessing your faults and communicating your experiences to one another'.<sup>89</sup> This same opportunity was a major stronghold of Wesley's *Rules of the Band Societies*<sup>90</sup> written in December 1738.

### Anglican Responses to Methodism

Unsurprisingly within Anglicanism there was a move to counter Methodist Societies as evangelical clergy began to fill parishes. Their presence aroused parishioners' desires for more than the Sunday services, and in response, the evangelicals of the Church of England adopted the society system. These clergy were well aware that failure to satisfy their parishioners' needs would only lead to Dissenters and Methodists doing that for them.

<sup>87</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 200.

<sup>88</sup> H.D. Rack, *Religious Societies*, JEH, Vol. 38, part 4, p. 583.

<sup>89</sup> H.D. Rack, 'Religious Societies' in JEH, Vol. 38, part 4, p. 586. Rack cites from Whitefield's *Letter to the Religious Societies lately set on foot in several parts of England and Wales*. Extracts of this letter are contained in Luke Tyerman's *Life of George Whitefield* published in 1877 (i. 317-319)

<sup>90</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [SE]*, Vol. 9, pp.77-78. See also Appendix 11 rules 4, 6 and 11. The openness of conversation in the Bands was its hallmark. All conversation *in band* was confidential.

William Grimshaw began religious societies in Rochdale in 1741. After meeting Benjamin Ingham, William Darney and John Nelson, he began classes modelled it seems upon the Methodist pattern in Howarth:

I joined people (such as were truly seeking or had found the Lord) in Society...These meetings...are held once a week, about two hours, and are called 'Classes', consisting of about ten or twelve members each.<sup>91</sup>

Thomas Vivian<sup>92</sup> in Cornwood organised his societies directly on the Methodist model, even using Methodist hymnody.<sup>93</sup> Others formed societies that were very different. For example, Hervey's society in the Northampton area required members to bring copies of the New Testament in Greek to meetings.

The parish system with its vagaries of size and location frequently dictated how religious societies should be organised. In a compact parish, clergy supervision was reasonably simple, and the strict clerical hold over the business of each meeting was maintained. For Henry Venn, vicar of Huddersfield, however, clerical authority was tempered by the vastness of his parish. Walsh writes, 'Their (the classes) remoteness meant that Venn could only visit them monthly and had to recognise their self-governing autonomy.'<sup>94</sup> Venn was in contact with John Wesley from 1754, and they met in 1759. The Methodist society which met within his large parish existed before Venn took the incumbency; Wesley refused to disband it and a compromise was reached that Methodist preachers would enter the parish only monthly. In 1771 Venn<sup>95</sup> moved to Yelling, and his successor who was not of the same evangelical fervour soon

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<sup>91</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 203.

<sup>92</sup> The Rev. Thomas Vivian (1720-1793) was vicar of the parish of Cornwood, a small village near Ivybridge, Devon. Vivian was in correspondence with Wesley, and had been ejected from his curacy in Redruth owing to his sympathetic stance towards Methodism. See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 20, pp. 402-403. See footnote 45.

<sup>93</sup> See J.D. Walsh, 'Religious Societies', in *Voluntary Religion*, Vol. 23, p. 296.

<sup>94</sup> J.D. Walsh, 'Religious Societies', in *Voluntary Religion*, Vol. 23, p. 296. (Words in brackets mine)

<sup>95</sup> J. Pawson, 'The Life of John Pawson', in *Preachers*, Vol. IV, p. 34. Pawson recounts the Conference decision to begin preaching in Venn's parish after his move to Yelling.



found the societies failing. Members left the Church and joined other churches, whilst others formed a separate meeting. Even though this vicar left after two years, Venn's work could not be re-established.

In Truro, Cornwall, Samuel Walker, curate at St Mary's, organised religious societies<sup>96</sup> based upon Woodward's model. Walker restricted membership to regular communicants. He ran the society formally, allowing no extempore prayer and no one other than the director, or the deputy could speak.<sup>97</sup> The aim of the Truro religious society was threefold, 'to glorify God – to quicken and confirm ourselves in faith and holiness – and to render us more useful among our neighbours.'<sup>98</sup> Unwritten, but clearly intended was the preservation of the Established Church.<sup>99</sup>

Samuel Walker borrowed the band system and allowed freedom of speech in the small segregated groups, forbidden in the meeting of the society. Personal behaviour was the major topic of discussion, and members were free to encourage or reprove others. Walker published a small book to help these bands in their business, as he was not present at the smaller meetings.<sup>100</sup> The deputy mentioned in rules 5, 10 and 11 of appendix 5 might have functioned as 'band leader'. Samuel Walker was highly directive in the business of the Truro Society bands, but in allowing the creation of this sub-group, he was seeking to enable deeper Christian discipleship, or trying to beat the Methodists at their own game.

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<sup>96</sup> See Appendix 4.

<sup>97</sup> See J.D. Walsh, 'Religious Societies', in *Voluntary Religion*, Vol. 23, p. 297.

<sup>98</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 206.

<sup>99</sup> There is a shorter and possibly earlier set of rules held at Lambeth Palace Library in the *Lavington Papers*. These rules expressly direct the manner of business to be conducted, and print the prayers and collects which were to be used. See *Articles of the Religious Societys at Truro* Lambeth Palace Library, Secker 8.16, Lavington Papers. These are annexed at Appendix 5.

<sup>100</sup> See F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, pp. 210-211. Sidney's book *The Life, Ministry and Selections from the Remains of the Rev Samuel Walker* was published in 1835.

In 1755, Walker urged Wesley not to found Methodist Societies in parishes where there was an evangelical incumbent, and to ensure that the Methodist movement did not separate from the Church of England. Wesley refused to accept the suggestion on the grounds that when a clergyman moved away his successor might not be evangelical.

James Hervey, a Holy Club member and clergyman, who began societies during his ministry, was believed to have written to Wesley asking why he allowed Methodist societies in parishes of which he was not incumbent. Wesley's reply contains the phrase 'I look upon all the world as my parish'.<sup>101</sup> Although it is not now clear to whom Wesley was replying, he is plainly arguing that his commission under God to preach the gospel is greater than the niceties of parish convention.

Hervey became an evangelical in 1741, and agreed with Methodist principles. Like Walker, Hervey began his own society, an *Assembly for Christian Improvement*.<sup>102</sup> Members paid fees for belonging and fines for non-attendance to the treasurer to be used for charitable purposes. Meetings were held at inns and the times of commencement and finishing were clearly stated. As mentioned above, this society heard readings in New Testament Greek. A working knowledge of Greek was unusual, and may have limited membership to clergy and gentlemen. Hervey later met Samuel Walker and declared that a society formed upon his rules was 'productive of great good, and in some

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<sup>101</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 616. For the *Journal* entry see J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 67. The letter that Wesley wrote to Hervey on March 20<sup>th</sup> 1739, previously thought to contain this phrase has now been found. See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, pp. 609-610. The recipient of this letter may have been John Clayton.

<sup>102</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 214. See appendix 5.



degree revives the dropping interest of Christianity, wherever it was prudently managed.<sup>103</sup>

From 1740, the Anglicans did not stand by and watch the Methodists use the Religious Society for their own ends. Evangelical Anglican clergy realised that their preaching and ministry required parishioners to meet midweek for instruction and support, if they were not to be lost to the Methodists. In contrast, the older, High Church societies waned in influence as their purpose of promoting holiness of living and the reformation of society lost impetus.

For many evangelical clergy the problem with Methodism lay in its aggressive growth and refusal to stay away from evangelical parishes. Many clergy who were in sympathy with the aims of Methodism became wary when Methodism became embroiled in discussions over administration of the sacraments, and the resulting possible consequence of separation from the Church of England.

However, Anglicanism's failure lay in an inability to organise a system of quasi – connexional religious societies across the country, offering an alternative to Methodism clearly within the Established Church. There are three main reasons for this: the broadness of Anglican churchmanship, the right to the freehold of the parish afforded to the clergy, which often meant incumbents remained in post for many years,<sup>104</sup> and the inability of parish clergy to reach those whom Bishop Butler had described as 'the rabble'.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 216.

<sup>104</sup> For example, The Rev Samuel Wesley was rector at Epworth for 40 years (1695-1735). Likewise Thomas Vivian was vicar of Cornwood for 46 years (1747-1793). Both remained in their parish until their deaths.

<sup>105</sup> J.D. Walsh, 'Religious Societies', in *Voluntary Religion*, Vol. 23, p. 287.

Rack poses two interesting arguments which further account for the decline in Anglican societies. The first is simply that the Anglicans sought to change society through influence in the upper echelons of society, including the royal family. Lady Huntingdon hoped for preferment for George Whitefield to the Episcopacy and she 'did her best to insinuate evangelicalism into the prince's circle.'<sup>106</sup> Secondly, the inherent Calvinism of the Anglican Evangelicals meant they had no need to subdivide their societies into small groups for discipling and spiritual growth; rejecting any form of perfection negated any need of meeting in societies. In Methodism, a member had a personal goal to aim for perfection, and the achievement (or failure) of that goal was seen in band and select band membership.

The English religious movement that began in earnest with Horneck's Savoy Society developed from the Restoration. Anglicanism post 1660 was concerned with maintaining its fragile place as state church, and the non-juring ejections of the period, combined with the later societies, were intended to impose Anglican doctrine and order on post Commonwealth England. The Piety and Puritanism which Anglicanism intended to overcome could never be assuaged, and even in Horneck's Society, overtones of Dissenting doctrines can be traced, although Dissenters could not belong. This derived in part through the recent Puritanism of the Commonwealth and the sixteenth century thinking on which it fed. It also developed through the increasingly associational and mobile leaders of religious thought who corresponded with, and visited other Christian leaders whose novel doctrines or practices could be considered and used in other countries.

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<sup>106</sup> H.D. Rack, *Religious Societies*, JEH, Vol. 38, part 4, p. 592. This was Prince Frederick, Prince of Wales, the eldest son of George II. The prince died in 1751



Thus far, I have outlined the development of the Unitary Societies from the Savoy Society of 1678. With the foundation of the SPCK the purposes of the Unitary Societies became widely known. Samuel Wesley's Epworth Society was modelled on the Poplar Regulations of Woodward. The rules of the societies charted in this chapter<sup>107</sup> show that within the Unitary system the purpose of meeting developed over time; Horneck's Society provided the basis for the rules of the other societies.

### The Distinctives of the Unitary Societies

This chapter turns now to consider the aspects of societal life that were common to all the societies from 1678 to the founding of Fetter Lane in 1738. I have shown that Unitary Societies continued post 1738, and these distinctives can be seen in those societies that were not touched by the doctrines of New Birth, felt assurance or perfection.

**The turn to seriousness and holiness:** The rules of the Savoy Society and the Poplar Regulations countered a prevailing trend away from religion that arose during the Restoration. Clark argues that the ascendancy of Catholicism in the Court and growing numbers of Dissenters gave impetus to the desire to encourage young men to remain within the Church of England. With the passing of the Toleration Act in 1689, Dissent gained a more stable position, which encouraged the building of new chapels for worship. The need therefore to encourage young men to remain Anglicans was all the greater after the Glorious Revolution.

In an England which had come through a period of civil war and Commonwealth, the Anglican Church was no longer the sole repository of faith

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<sup>107</sup> See Appendices 1 to 5.

and teaching. Puritanism had replaced Anglicanism during the Protectorate, and although the Restoration ensured there was a return to the established order, the 'old order' could not be wholly reconstituted. The Puritans, instrumental in the restoration, were not going to surrender their gains quietly;

The Presbyterians had played an important part in the Restoration, and appeared to be firmly entrenched in positions of power.<sup>108</sup>

For this reason amongst others, the Church was anxious to ensure that young men turned towards the Church of England. Even though the Test Act prevented Catholics from holding positions of authority, and Dissenters were sporadically persecuted, there was still a danger that some might be drawn towards the practice of religion beyond the Church of England.

The seriousness required from the Poplar Regulations placed a duty upon individual members to practise their faith beyond the society and the organised church, and rule 10<sup>109</sup> which has 20 sub-sections, was no doubt intended to offer members a yardstick by which to measure their progress. John Wesley's turn to seriousness in 1725 was said by him to have been occasioned by reading à Kempis. However the Poplar Regulations have a very similar aim to those he expressed in his retrospective account of May 1738.<sup>110</sup> Wesley's turn to a devoted and holy life bear a remarkable likeness to these sub-sections.<sup>111</sup>

**Reformation of manners:** A development of the personal resolution to holiness, seen in the Poplar regulations, was the desire to reform the behaviour of others. The Savoy rules do not envisage the need to reform the behaviour of others, and concentrate wholly on the member's personal living. Samuel Wesley's society takes a similar line, but coming from the early SPCK tradition

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<sup>108</sup> G.R. Cragg, *The Church & the Age of Reason 1648-1789*, p. 50.

<sup>109</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>110</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 244.

<sup>111</sup> Appendix 1: Rule 10.



the desire to reform manners was evidenced by the distribution of tracts and pamphlets and the opening of charity schools, rather than by using informants as the *Societies for the Reformation of Manners* did.

The desire to reform manners, evident in the Poplar Regulations, is not obvious. It may be that as societies which sought to reform manners became popular, religious societies lost members, and these new rules encouraged members to remain by including the business of reforming society to the business of reforming self.

**Young membership:** The societies founded by Horneck and Woodward were aimed at young men, over sixteen,<sup>112</sup> confirmed into the Church of England. Clark argues that these men, predominantly apprentices, were using the society structure in the manner of the earlier trade guilds for career advancement, and spiritual development.<sup>113</sup> Samuel Wesley may have had members younger than this.<sup>114</sup> Common to all the annexed rules is the individual's need to express a desire to join the society. It is clear that belonging was a voluntary, and perhaps in some places enviable status, especially if Clark is correct and advancement in business could be found in a Unitary Society.

**Rules of entry:** At a time when, as Woodward, Portus and others pointed out, society was in need of religion, it may seem surprising that membership was strictly controlled. In the Savoy Society, the presiding clergyman controlled entry to the society<sup>115</sup> although the choice of presiding clergyman seemed to be made

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<sup>112</sup> Appendix 1: Rule 2.

<sup>113</sup> P. Clark, *British Clubs and Societies*, p. 55.

<sup>114</sup> W.O.B. Allen, & E. McClure, *Two Hundred Years*, p. 90. Samuel Wesley approached a young man who was 'sober and sensible' from amongst his singers.

<sup>115</sup> Appendix 1: Rule 14.

by the society members'.<sup>116</sup> Under the Poplar regulations entry was controlled by elected stewards and the society,<sup>117</sup> but only after a careful examination of the applicant's reasons for joining. Samuel Wesley's Society allowed new members entry only with the unanimous consent of the existing membership.<sup>118</sup> The reason for this rule is simply the prevention of admittance to 'a little leaven' which would 'spoil the whole lump'.<sup>119</sup> Samuel Wesley's Society allowed sub division when the group became larger than twelve.<sup>120</sup>

In time, joining a society was not simply an act of accepting regulations covering personal religious development. As some societies began to meet in public houses, or chose to meet away from church buildings, rules expressly forbade vice, gambling and drinking.<sup>121</sup> Moral uprightness might have occurred because societies which chose to meet openly in public houses were no longer fulfilling their primary aim of personal holiness.

**Ordained/lay leadership:** The developing role of the leaders of religious societies is easily traced through the annexed rules. In some respects, Samuel Wesley's Society is the most developed, for it allows for sub-groups, using members of the earlier group as leaders of the new society.<sup>122</sup>

Horneck could not act as director of all the groups formed using the Savoy Rules, acting rather as a 'spiritual advisor'<sup>123</sup> to a number of Societies. The rules associated with the name of his church allowed only an ordained clergyman<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Appendix 1: Rule 3.

<sup>117</sup> Appendix 2: Rule 8.

<sup>118</sup> Appendix 3: Rule III.

<sup>119</sup> Appendix 3: Rule III. See also Rule V.

<sup>120</sup> Appendix 3: Rule III.

<sup>121</sup> Appendix 2: Rule 9.

<sup>122</sup> Appendix 3: Rule III.

<sup>123</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 128. Bullock cites Dr. Richard Kidder who wrote that Horneck 'had the care of several societies of young men' p. 128.

<sup>124</sup> Appendix 1: Rule 3.



as director. Presumably this rule was created to prevent dispute in theology and discussion of politics. The clergyman was also required for those elements of the liturgy reserved to the ordained priest.<sup>125</sup> Lay leadership was encouraged under the Poplar Regulations with elected stewards who acted as administrators and leaders in the absence of the clerical director. Horneck's society appointed stewards in an administrative position. Woodward required ordained clergy only for amendments of the rules.<sup>126</sup> Woodward envisaged each member of the society being a catechiser of 'young and ignorant people in their families',<sup>127</sup> a role enshrined by Samuel Wesley in his rules as a duty of membership.<sup>128</sup>

Allowing men to lead the societies formed from the first Epworth Society developed the role of lay leaders.<sup>129</sup> Samuel Wesley was forced to take this action as he was in a rural parish without clerical assistance. Henry Venn, vicar of the massive parish of Huddersfield, needed to staff the rural societies he had begun, and had no additional clerical help.

Walker's rules of 1754<sup>130</sup> allowed little lay participation in the Truro Society. He wanted Wesley to hand over the lay-led Methodist Societies to local clergy, in part to prevent separation from the Church of England.<sup>131</sup> Wesley refused this request. Walker's fiercely prescriptive and protective rules for his own Society prevented any external interference.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Appendix 1: Rules 4, 5 and 6.

<sup>126</sup> Appendix 2: Rule 13.

<sup>127</sup> Appendix 2: Rule 12.

<sup>128</sup> Appendix 3: Rule VIII.

<sup>129</sup> Appendix 3: Rule III.

<sup>130</sup> Appendices 4 & 5.

<sup>131</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, pp.582-586. pp. 592-596. pp. 606-608. See also J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. II, pp. 192-196.

<sup>132</sup> See H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 300.

It is often asserted that John Wesley was responsible for the introduction of lay leadership and disciplined rules as standards for his societies from the early 1740's. It can be seen that over 50 years before, religious societies developed rules of government and organisation. Their growth led to lay leadership through elected stewards, family catechists and disciplined regulation. John Wesley distilled the rules of these early societies with the lessons learned from Fetter Lane into the rules of the United Societies.

After 1738 the Fetter Lane Society eclipsed its predecessors and moved societal life forwards. Fetter Lane admitted women and Dissenters to the Society. Horneck and Woodward assumed that women would not be admitted, whilst Samuel Wesley expressly forbids their membership.<sup>133</sup> Samuel Walker allowed women to belong to a segregated Society in Truro, probably because the Methodist Societies admitted women.<sup>134</sup> Dissenters were not admitted to any Unitary Society, although Woodward's Regulations invited members to 'express due Christian charity, candour and moderation to all such Dissenters as are of good conversation.'<sup>135</sup>

From the early eighteenth century, the impetus of the religious societies to promote religion and reform manners began to wane, in part due to religious apathy. Many members held Jacobite views, which sat uneasily with the Hanoverian succession of 1714. The society meeting at St Giles Cripplegate specifically, included a declaration of loyalty to King George I, and non-jurors were ejected if they could not assent.<sup>136</sup> Portus suggested the declaration was required by outside authority.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Appendix 3: Rule VIII.

<sup>134</sup> Appendix 4: Rules 1 and 2. Appendix 5: Rule 1.

<sup>135</sup> Appendix 2: Rule 2.

<sup>136</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 165.

<sup>137</sup> G.V. Portus, *Caritas Anglicana*, p. 195.



### James Hutton and the Unitary Societies

Many of Fetter Lane's leaders were actively involved in societal life before 1738. The Wesleys have already been considered in detail. James Hutton founded societies in London prior to 1738; one to read correspondence from the Wesleys whilst they were in Georgia. This Meeting included 'prayer, Bible study and mutual counsel'.<sup>138</sup> Bullock asserted that John Wesley's letters to the Society influenced Hutton, especially as he was as dissatisfied with his own spiritual state as John Wesley was with his. He also founded the Society in Aldersgate Street.

Hutton's societies differed from the Unitary Societies. He allowed members of the older societies to attend them by arranging different meeting times. The Rev George Whitefield, who would lead his own branch of the revival, was known within Hutton's circle. He stirred people up and encouraged them to join Hutton's new societies. Whitefield also affected renewal amongst the older societies:

When they applied to him personally for advice, he...recommended them to the society raised by Hutton and his friends, by which it was much increased, and so extensively made known that even the wardens of the original societies [the older religious societies], entreated Whitefield to preach their quarterly sermons before them.<sup>139</sup>

Portus attributes the introduction of extempore prayer to Whitefield, a feature that would be a mark of Methodism. The earlier religious societies had expressly forbidden extempore prayer as this was a Puritan practice, and a mark of Dissent.

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<sup>138</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 171.

<sup>139</sup> G.V. Portus, *Caritas Anglicana*, p. 201.

## Chapter Summary

I have shown that by 1738 the religious associational milieu was untidy, having diversified from meetings at the Savoy Chapel to homes, public houses and clubs. Societal life was no longer confined to young men, as women who sought religious association were meeting beyond the traditional Unitary Societies. Wesley attempted to meet that novel requirement. The foundation and life of the Fetter Lane Society encouraged religious association in a model of meeting which drew together Anglican and Moravian teaching and life.

This chapter has analysed the purposes of the Unitary Societies in their historical context. This approach is used in the next chapter, and will assist in understanding the new mode of association experienced at Fetter Lane.

The original approach of chapters two and three, offers insights into the model of association found within the Wesleyan societies, and sets out clear indicators of the origins of the Methodists, and Wesley's openness to novel ideas, practices and methods of religious awakening, justification and discipleship. This openness would mean Wesley embraced the possibilities which the class meeting presented when suggested in 1742.



## Chapter 4: The Fetter Lane Society

### Context

The previous chapter outlined the Wesleys' involvement with Anglican Societies across London. This association continued during the Fetter Lane period, when John and Charles Wesley mixed not only in warm hearted, Pietist circles, but also with the Unitary Societies, to whom they preached a gospel of justification by faith alone. It was this doctrine that caused pulpits to be closed to them, and the charge of enthusiast to be laid against them. Wesley was a tireless society preacher and was meeting with small groups, predominantly women, at his own home and those of others.

### The Foundation of the Fetter Lane Society

On the 1<sup>st</sup> May 1738 John Wesley was present at the foundation of what became the Fetter Lane Society, in the home and shop called the 'Bible & Sun' of James Hutton, a bookseller. This was in Little Wild Street, now Keeley Street.<sup>1</sup>

Charles had returned to James Hutton's on the 28<sup>th</sup> April, and was immediately taken ill: 'No sooner was I got to James Hutton's having removed my things thither from his father's, than the pain in my side returned, and with that my fever.'<sup>2</sup> John travelled to Hutton's to visit Charles, and was present on the evening of the 1<sup>st</sup> May when the group met.

John Wesley records the creation of the Fetter Lane Society quite simply with the words, 'This evening our little society began which afterwards met in Fetter

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<sup>1</sup> Watson and Heitzenrater state that this meeting occurred at the home of the Rev. John Hutton. This is incorrect. See D.L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, p. 80. See also R. P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 79. However, Heitzenrater's incorrect name may simply be a typographical error.

<sup>2</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 85.

Lane.<sup>3</sup> Peter Böhler convened the group but did not assume leadership. He was preparing to leave for America on the 4<sup>th</sup> May. Benham wrote of the first meetings, 'During the stay of Peter Böhler in England, he made certain regulations among those who desired to walk in conformity to the mind of Jesus; and who at first consisted of six or eight persons in whom he had confidence.'<sup>4</sup>

Present with Böhler (Moravian) and Wesley (clergyman) were James Hutton (bookseller) John Bray (brazier) Shepherd Wolf (barber) John Edmonds (poulterer) William Oxlee (clog maker) William Hervey (wine-cooper) Matthew Clarke (barber) John Shaw (attorney, retired).<sup>5</sup> Curnock incorrectly suggests that Charles Wesley and Henry Piers, vicar of Bexley were present.<sup>6</sup> Podmore states the facts succinctly: 'John Wesley was present only by chance, Charles Wesley ill in bed, and the vicar of Bexley, Henry Piers, miles away.'<sup>7</sup>

Böhler did not expect John Wesley to be present at James Hutton's home. Wesley would have been in Oxford but for Charles' illness.<sup>8</sup> Others however were invited to Hutton's that evening and two additional names, other than those mentioned above are included in Böhler's *Diary* entry:

For just that time the brethren had been summoned who are of one mind and seek closer fellowship with each other and therefore want to form a band with each other, that is Hutton, Bray, Edmunds, Wolf, Clark, Oxlee, Procker, Harvey, Sweetland and Shaw and the elder Wesley.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol.18, p. 236.

<sup>4</sup> D. Benham, *Memoirs of James Hutton* (London: Hamilton Adams & Co. 1856) p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> W.M. Trousdale, 'The Moravian Society. Fetter lane – London', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XVII, part II, p. 30.

<sup>6</sup> J. Wesley, *Journal [SE]*, Vol. I, p. 458. Footnote 1.

<sup>7</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian Church*, p. 40. The view that Henry Piers was present was re-stated in F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 174.

<sup>8</sup> P. Böhler, *Peter Böhler's Diary*, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1738 The original diary is in the Unitatsarchiv Herrnhut, and a copy is held at Moravian Church House. Ref: AB43.A3.

<sup>9</sup> P. Böhler, *Peter Böhler's Diary*, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1738.



It is clear that Böhler's use of the word *antreffen* (meet, chance upon, unexpectedly) indicates Wesley's presence was chance. Böhler's *Diary* is positive about the future for this group; referring to men who may want to join, 'Fisch, Braun, Hartley, Greenwich and others'.<sup>10</sup> Fisch [or Fish] and Hartley are signatories to the letter of the 2<sup>nd</sup> May to Zinzendorf, asking that Böhler should remain amongst them.<sup>11</sup> The letter has a further six signatories, none of whom were present on the 1<sup>st</sup> May. For this reason the group can properly be described as a 'band'.<sup>12</sup> An indication of the age of these people is given by Böhler, 'they will divide themselves and the youths and the men will meet separately. But every four weeks both classes will have a meeting together.'<sup>13</sup>

George Whitefield's first contact with Fetter Lane came in December 1738 when he returned to England from America. His *Journal* gives the impression that Fetter Lane was the result of his own preaching and ministry; 'In the evening went to a truly Christian Society in Fetter Lane, and perceived God had greatly watered the seed sown by my ministry when last in London.'<sup>14</sup>

### The Fetter Lane Rules

There are three forms of rules for this group, but only two rules (created under the advice of Peter Böhler)<sup>15</sup> operated at the outset.<sup>16</sup> They were:

That they will meet together once in a Week to confess their Faults one to another, and to pray for one another that they may be healed.  
[cf. James 5.16]

That any others, of whose Sincerity they are well assured, may if they desire it, meet with them for that purpose.

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<sup>10</sup> P. Böhler, *Peter Böhler's Diary*, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1738 (old style) 1<sup>st</sup> May 1738 (new style)

<sup>11</sup> D. Benham D, *The Memoirs of James Hutton*, p. 32.

<sup>12</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian Church*, pp. 40-411. Podmore notes that this initial group numbered only ten people. The letter to Zinzendorf has a further six signatories.

<sup>13</sup> P. Böhler, *Peter Böhler's Diary*, 12<sup>th</sup> May 1738 (old style) 1<sup>st</sup> May 1738 (new style)

<sup>14</sup> G. Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals* (Guildford: The Banner of Trust. 1960) p. 193.

<sup>15</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 236.

<sup>16</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 6.

The second part of rule 1, that society members should 'confess their Faults one to another, and to pray for one another that they may be healed', bears a striking similarity with the wording of the Moravian band rule recorded by Wesley in his *Journal*<sup>17</sup> during his visit to Herrnhut some weeks later.

John West, describing the early meetings ascribes the creation of bands to Böhler, 'At our request he (Böhler) formed us into 'bands'.<sup>18</sup> West, like others, was influenced by Böhler's preaching, and although Böhler spoke only broken English, his words 'came home with power to those who heard him.'<sup>19</sup>

Trousdale's *Proceedings* article adds a further 28 rules according to a manuscript he accessed at the Moravian archives in Herrnhut,<sup>20</sup> and a further 31 rules according to the account in Benham's *Memoirs*.<sup>21</sup> Wesley's *Journal* records 11 rules under the date, 1<sup>st</sup> May.<sup>22</sup>

The rules of the Herrnhut manuscript (*Rules A*) and the *Memoirs* (*Rules B*) are the result of a process. These clearly show that on the 29<sup>th</sup> May a further three rules were added. On the 20<sup>th</sup> September (*Rules B* only) yet another rule was added. On the 26<sup>th</sup> September, final rules were included.

Wesley was absent when the 20<sup>th</sup> September rule was added, but present on the 26<sup>th</sup> September.<sup>23</sup> These additions took care of the creation of the society into bands (29<sup>th</sup> May) the nature of the Band Leader's role (20<sup>th</sup> September) and

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<sup>17</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 292. See rule II part 3 'ninety bands, each of which meets twice at least but most of them three times a week, to 'confess their faults one to another, that they may be healed.'

<sup>18</sup> 'Memoirs of Brother John West', in *Moravian Messenger*, 1875, p. 238. (Name in brackets mine)

<sup>19</sup> 'Memoirs of Brother John West', in *Moravian Messenger*, 1875, p. 238.

<sup>20</sup> Appendix 6. Rules A. See W.M. Trousdale, 'The Moravian Society. Fetter lane – London', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XVII, Part II,

<sup>21</sup> Appendix 7. Rules B. See W.M. Trousdale, 'The Moravian Society. Fetter lane – London', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XVII, Part II, pp. 32 – 35. See also D. Benham, *Memoirs of James Hutton*, pp. 29-32.

<sup>22</sup> Appendix 8. Rules C. See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, pp. 236-237.

<sup>23</sup> D.L. Watson, *The Early Methodist*, p. 173. Endnote 70.



the conditions for entry to the bands and the society (26<sup>th</sup> September). As Podmore suggests, this was a society that was Anglican in membership but Moravian in organisation.<sup>24</sup> There are rules common to them all, and *Rules A* and *Rules B* are considerably more detailed than Wesley's own *Journal* account in *Rules C*. Bullock pointed out that the *Journal* form of the rules noted only those which were considered 'fundamental'.<sup>25</sup>

Wesley left for Germany on the 14<sup>th</sup> June 1738 returning on the 16<sup>th</sup> September. The rule added on the 20<sup>th</sup> September (*Rules A: 6*) is similar to that recorded in the *Journal* for the Moravians.<sup>26</sup> The Elders of the Moravians held a weekly conference to discuss the 'state of souls'<sup>27</sup> and the Fetter Lane rule emulates this. Similarly, the later rules, added on the 26<sup>th</sup> September, have overtones of Wesley's own experience whilst amongst the Moravians. The day of general intercession (*Rules A: 25* and *Rules B: 27*) was one of Wesley's first experiences during his journey.<sup>28</sup> These days were an opportunity for the community to pray for the needs of others over a twenty-four hour period. Likewise Love Feasts, integral to Moravian community life, became part of Fetter Lane practice (*Rules A: 26* and *Rules B: 28*) and had been held in Wesley's absence.<sup>29</sup> Wesley's *Journal* records witnessing, but presumably not sharing in, a love feast<sup>30</sup> for the 'married men'.<sup>31</sup> He had already experienced a German lovefeast in Georgia.<sup>32</sup> Philip Hardt, commenting on the development of Methodist structures, notes what he believes to be a change from Moravian

<sup>24</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian Church*, pp. 39-41.

<sup>25</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 176.

<sup>26</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 292. This rule, numbered III in the Moravian discipline was recorded by Wesley during his visit to Herrnhut.

<sup>27</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 292.

<sup>28</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 256. See also p. 260, (conference for strangers), p. 272 and p. 293.

<sup>29</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian Church*, p. 44.

<sup>30</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 85. Heitzenrater suggests that Wesley did participate in a love feast, but as the *Journal* only records one instance of a love feast for married men it is not likely that he shared the meal.

<sup>31</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 267.

<sup>32</sup> J. Wesley, *Journal [SE]*, Vol. I, p. 377.

practice. 'Wesley...departed from the Moravian model. First, he allowed all society members to attend the lovefeast; the Moravians restricted attendance to only band members.'<sup>33</sup> In reality, the Moravians held lovefeasts for the choirs which were single sex, and for the Congregation, which included everybody. In the same way, the Moravian custom of continual intercession (which began at Herrnhut in 1727)<sup>34</sup> was included in Fetter Lane practice during Wesley's absence<sup>35</sup> (*Rules A: 29 and Rules B: 29*).

Böhler's authority and knowledge of Moravian life meant that before Wesley's journey, aspects of these later rules were already Fetter Lane practice, if not codified by the leadership. Wesley wrote to his mother,<sup>36</sup> brothers,<sup>37</sup> and at least James Hutton<sup>38</sup> during his visit to the Moravians, and elements of his experience reflecting Fetter Lane life are seen in this correspondence. Much of the correspondence sent from Germany has not survived.<sup>39</sup>

### Fetter Lane and the Oxford Methodists Compared

For the Wesleys, the life of Fetter Lane was not a complete break with the Oxford Methodists who had met between 1729 and 1735. Rack records that Wesley wished to bring some of the rigorous exercises of the Oxford Methodists into Fetter Lane; Wesley 'would have liked the Fetter Lane members to do the same (fast).'<sup>40</sup> In personal practice, Wesley maintained his regular fast days,<sup>41</sup>

<sup>33</sup> P.F. Hardt, *The Soul of Methodism. The Class Meeting in Early New York Methodism* (Maryland: University Press of America. 2000) p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 295. This was extracted by Wesley from the 'Constitution of the Moravian Brethren 1733' It is paragraph 10.

<sup>35</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian Church*, p. 44.

<sup>36</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, pp. 556-557.

<sup>37</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25. Wesley wrote to Charles on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 1738 (old style) pp. 557-558, and the 4<sup>th</sup> August 1738 (old style) p. 560. Wesley wrote to Samuel on the 7<sup>th</sup> July 1738 (old style) pp. 558-559.

<sup>38</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, pp. 561-562. Wesley wrote to James Hutton on the 4<sup>th</sup> August 1738 (old style)

<sup>39</sup> J. Wesley, *Journal [SE]*, Vol. II, p. 12.

<sup>40</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 188. (Word in brackets mine)

<sup>41</sup> J. Wesley, *Journal [SE]*, Vol. II, p. 79. See also p. 82, p. 88, and p. 96.



his attention to prayer<sup>42</sup> and to reading the Scriptures.<sup>43</sup> He also received Holy Communion regularly. In the days around Christmas 1738, he received the Sacrament daily.<sup>44</sup> Writing on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1738 to James Hutton he explicitly states he wants the Friday fast introduced.<sup>45</sup> By August 1739, Wesley had established this practice and a shortened general intercession into the Bristol society.<sup>46</sup>

The Fetter Lane Society was in contact with the Oxford work and J. Hutchings, who was at Pembroke College, wrote regularly to James Hutton. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1738,<sup>47</sup> he wrote to Hutton about a society he had begun in Woolmistone. The reverse of the letter has the names of members, who presumably were passed the letter to read in a 'round robin' fashion. Among the names were Thorold, Hutchings, Ingham, Shaw, Wesley and Boehler (Böhler). There is also a note 'where's Mr C Wesley?'<sup>48</sup> An undated letter from George Whitefield to James Hutton has similar annotations.<sup>49</sup>

The social outreach of Oxford Methodism was not integrated into the life of Fetter Lane. Böhler and others visited condemned prisoners, but this was to win their souls for Christ before execution, a practice Wesley initially found hard to bear, as he could not accept death bed repentance as genuine:

The first person to whom I offered *salvation by faith alone* was a prisoner under sentence of death. His name was Clifford. Peter Böhler had many times desired me to speak to him before. But I could not prevail on myself so to do, being still (as I had been many

<sup>42</sup> J. Wesley, *Journal [SE]*, Vol. II, p. 89. See also p83, p88 and p93

<sup>43</sup> J. Wesley, *Journal [SE]*, Vol. II, p. 88. See also p93

<sup>44</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, pp. 367-468. From the 21<sup>st</sup> December until the 29<sup>th</sup> December he communicated every day except Christmas Day. See also H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 188. Also C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 139.

<sup>45</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, pp. 594-595. See MCH. AB100.A.3

<sup>46</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 88.

<sup>47</sup> Hutchings J. to Hutton J. 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1738. MCHp88A.3 [folder 13]

<sup>48</sup> Hutchings J. to Hutton J. 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1738. MCHp88A.3 [folder 13]

<sup>49</sup> Whitefield G. to Hutton J. undated MCHp91A.3 [folder21]

years) a zealous asserter of the *impossibility of a death-bed repentance*.<sup>50</sup>

Although the social work of the Oxford Methodists was dying out by the time Wesley commented in his *Journal* on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1739; 'I had a little leisure to take a view of the shattered condition of things here'<sup>51</sup> there was never a comparable work from Fetter Lane amongst poor or uneducated people.

### Wesley the Anglican and Fetter Lane

Wesley continued to adhere to his Anglicanism, most notably in his conformity to recognised forms of clerical authority. James Hutton proposed a Moravian<sup>52</sup> structure of leadership for Fetter Lane, suggesting the appointment of monitors, and a president<sup>53</sup> elected annually by lot. Wesley was unhappy with this plan, 'What is proposed as to casting lots concerning a president ...Would that not [require] more particular consideration?'<sup>54</sup> He was also concerned that the president had no formal role. Monitors were to have responsibility for telling others their faults. He held that monitors would simply do away with the need for bands, as group accountability would be nullified. 'Every man in my band is my monitor, and I his; else I know no use of our being in Band.'<sup>55</sup> He also believed his ordination afforded the position of 'monitor'.<sup>56</sup> Monitors never appear in any rules as Podmore noted, 'It may be that his (Wesley's) viewpoint won in the end, since monitors are mentioned in neither version of the rules.'<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 228.

<sup>51</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 100.

<sup>52</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, pp. 294-297. Wesley records the organisation of the Moravian settlement in Herrnhut. The Herrnhut community has the post of *monitor*. See rule 8.

<sup>53</sup> See F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, Bullock states that Hutton acted as president whilst John Wesley was in Germany and that Wesley assumed this position upon his return. This cannot be correct as correspondence indicates the office of president was an innovation. See pp. 178-179. See also D. Benham, *Memoirs of James Hutton*, p. 41. Benham states that Wesley presided over meetings when in London, and in his absence, Hutton presided. This does not however mean that either was 'president'.

<sup>54</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, pp. 590-592. See MCH. AB100.A.3

<sup>55</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 591.

<sup>56</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 592.

<sup>57</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian Church*, p. 46. (Italics mine)



Watson believes that Wesley's *Rules of the Band Societies* countered the fault in leadership and mutual responsibility he saw in the Moravian system. Wesley's own bands were to be based on 'mutual confession and accountability.'<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Martin Schmidt wrote, 'The basic principle which he expressly put into effect was the mutual responsibility which no one could transfer to or take, from another.'<sup>59</sup> The appointment of monitors would have removed mutual accountability, fundamental to the later Methodist class and band system.

Wesley's understanding of the society's relationship to the Church of England is seen in a letter of the 27<sup>th</sup> November to Hutton. Wesley wrote, 'I believe bishops, priests, and deacons to be of divine appointment, though I think our brethren in Germany do not.'<sup>60</sup> Wesley understood the Fetter Lane Society to be submissive to the Church of England, and in correspondence with James Hutton in late 1738, he refers to the authority of the Church as guiding the members of the society, 'Are we members of the Church of England? First, then, let us observe her laws, and then the by-laws of our own Society.'<sup>61</sup>

However, Wesley's Anglican outlook and practice was not imposed upon the Fetter Lane membership. He did not compromise his position as a clergyman, or promote himself to leadership over any other member, and was sensitive to the suggestion that the membership required pastoral oversight.<sup>62</sup> James Hutton by contrast was seeking to make decisions affecting the society without

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<sup>58</sup> D.L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, p. 83.

<sup>59</sup> M. Schmidt, *John Wesley A Theological Biography*. Volume II, Part I, (London: Epworth Press. 1971) p. 20.

<sup>60</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 593. See MCH. AB100.A.3

<sup>61</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, pp. 592-593. See MCH. AB100.A.3

<sup>62</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, pp. 592-593. See MCH. AB100.A.3

consulting the whole membership,<sup>63</sup> which Wesley seemed anxious to avoid.

Wesley's loyalty to the Church of England subordinated the Fetter Lane rules to 'by-laws'.<sup>64</sup>

Wesley was seeking to work out his own faith post May 1738, and how and where that faith might be used. Whilst he was an Anglican, which guided much of his life and practice, the Pietists of whom he had read and who he had met heavily influenced him. Wesley's views can be observed in two statements; the first relating to his Anglicanism, 'A serious clergyman desired to know in what points we differed from the Church of England, I answered; "To the best of my knowledge, in none. The doctrines we preach are the doctrines of the Church of England"'.<sup>65</sup> The second statement related his warmness to Moravian Church practice. 'What unites my heart to you is the excellency (in many respects) of the doctrine taught among you'.<sup>66</sup> These preface the fourth part of the *Journal*. He found no difficulty being a clergyman of the Church of England, who was involved with pietism, a charge many others held against him.

### Disagreement at Fetter Lane

The Society grew and in September 1738, after Wesley returned from Herrnhut he recorded in his *Journal*, 'I rejoiced to meet with our little society, which now consisted of thirty-two persons.'<sup>67</sup> Between September and October the *Journal* shows that Wesley was present at twenty society and band meetings in London and Oxford beyond the Fetter Lane Society. His life was centred on the growing Society but he was by no means confined by it. By January 1<sup>st</sup> 1739,

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<sup>63</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, pp. 590-592. See MCH. AB100.A.3 This correspondence deals with the exclusion of women from the general meeting and the appointment of monitors and a president

<sup>64</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 595. See MCH. AB100.A.3

<sup>65</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 96. The fuller response to the clergyman is found on pp. 96-97.

<sup>66</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 117. The fuller letter is found on pp. 116-118.

<sup>67</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 12.



there were at least sixty members,<sup>68</sup> and at a Love Feast at around three in the morning, the 'power of God'<sup>69</sup> broke out amongst those present. The briefly described scene of crying out and falling to the floor was to become a 'hallmark' of much of Wesley's early ministry.<sup>70</sup>

From 31<sup>st</sup> March to 13<sup>th</sup> June, Wesley was in Bristol, having been given permission by the leadership to accept George Whitefield's invitation to take over the work there. Wesley received a letter<sup>71</sup> on the 11<sup>th</sup> June about problems in London and returned within two days. That evening he met with the women of Fetter Lane at 6pm and the men at 8pm.<sup>72</sup> The causes for concern, recorded in Charles Wesley's *Journal*, were the influence of the French Prophetess Lavington,<sup>73</sup> the claim by John Shaw that he had authority to administer the sacraments without being ordained,<sup>74</sup> a dispute regarding lay preaching,<sup>75</sup> and the disavowal by two members (Shaw and Wolf) of their membership of the Church of England.<sup>76</sup> At a meeting of the Society on the 13<sup>th</sup> June, the Society

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<sup>68</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 29.

<sup>69</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 29.

<sup>70</sup> In a letter from John Thorold to James Hutton dated the 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1738, it appears that a similar (though smaller) occurrence had happened there. Thorold wrote that amongst 'the great crowd of people that was there the Thursday before, the fainting away of 2 people.' MCHp88A.3[packet 13]

<sup>71</sup> J. Wesley, *Journal [SE]*, Vol. II, p. 216. Footnote 1

<sup>72</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 69

<sup>73</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, pp. 152-153. See H. Schwartz, *The French Prophets: The History of a Millennial Group in Eighteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1980) pp. 72-113. This offers an overview from their arrival in England in 1706. See pp. 205-207. This describes Wesley's opinion of the French Prophets during the Fetter Lane Period. A brief discussion of the French prophets can also be found in J. Symonds, *Thomas Brown and the Angels* (London: Hutchinson & Co. 1961) part 1. Charles Wesley spent time and effort in ascertaining Prophetess Lavington's background which he then spent time telling the society, and any who would hear him. John Bray was under the influence of Prophetess Lavington

<sup>74</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 151. Shaw accused Charles Wesley of seeking pre-eminence amongst the society. One Mr Fish considered Charles was under the influence of the devil. Fish, (along with Shaw and Wolf) disassociated himself from the Church of England, but is not recorded as having been expelled on the 13<sup>th</sup> June. Ward & Heitzenrater indicate that Shaw and Wolf were Moravians. This cannot be the case, as the Moravians had no members in England. See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 69. Footnote 51.

<sup>75</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 149.

<sup>76</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 153.

disassociated itself with Prophetess Lavington and expelled<sup>77</sup> John Shaw and Shepherd Wolf. John Bray, another founder member, was 'humbled'.<sup>78</sup>

The issue of lay preaching arose after George Whitefield preached in the open air in Islington, London. Whitefield had already preached in the open air in Bristol; breaching the order of the Church of England. After Whitefield preached on the 28<sup>th</sup> April, a lay man, Thomas Bowers<sup>79</sup> got up to preach. Charles Wesley unsuccessfully tried to restrain him, and left along with others from the Society. The issue did not die away, and was raised at a later meeting. Bray and Shaw, two founders of the society spoke for it, whilst Charles Wesley and George Whitefield spoke against. The Moravians were against preaching in the open air, and the Church of England would not allow open air preaching without a licence. This development was irregular.

John Wesley's actions were not an attempt to exert clerical authority. He returned as a result of a request. The meeting's decisions appear to have been corporate, with no one individual's opinion taking precedence over any other. Some five days later, a former Fetter Lane member, Richard Tompson, who had previously left the society and the Church of England, was re-admitted.<sup>80</sup>

Benjamin Ingham, who was a member of the society, but in ministry in the North of England, wrote an insightful letter to Hutton after these events: 'All the confusion that has happened, has been owing to people's rashness and forwardness, leaning more to their own understanding and self will, than to

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<sup>77</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 153. Charles Wesley states that their names were 'erased out of the society-book'.

<sup>78</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 153.

<sup>79</sup> Bowers did not cease lay preaching. Charles Wesley records that Bowers' preaching in Wycombe, prevented him from being able to preach there. See C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 160.

<sup>80</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 71. The diary shows the meeting occurred at Mrs Mills', p. 394.



sober advice.'<sup>81</sup> He concluded that there was a need for, 'somebody at the head who is able to direct and govern, and willing also to be directed and governed.'<sup>82</sup>

By Monday 18<sup>th</sup> June, Wesley had left London for Bristol, returning at the end of August. On the 9<sup>th</sup> September he attended Fetter Lane and 'exhorted them to love one another.'<sup>83</sup> Seemingly, there was little love amongst the members. Whilst still in London, Wesley heard for the first time the issue that led to his separation from Fetter Lane. At the home of Mrs Stover, Wesley met with Mrs Crouch who, under the advice of Mr Delamotte<sup>84</sup> had ceased to receive Communion.

Thur. 20. Mrs C[rouch], being in deep heaviness, had desired me to meet her this afternoon. She had long earnestly desired to receive the Holy Communion having an unaccountably strong persuasion that God would manifest himself to her therein and give rest to her soul. But her heaviness being now greatly increased, Mr. D[elamotte] gave her that fatal advice not to communicate till she had living faith. This still added to her perplexity. Yet at length she resolved to obey God rather than man. And 'he was made known unto her in the breaking of bread.'<sup>85</sup>

This early meeting with stillness for Wesley is not mentioned by Podmore and preceded the visit by the German Moravians of November 1739, which led the society into crisis. The doctrine of stillness began to pervade the Society after a visit by Phillpp Heinrich Molther. Molther was introduced to Moravianism by Zinzendorf's son, Christian Renatus. He was appointed to lead the Moravians in

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<sup>81</sup> Ingham B. to Hutton J. 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1739 MCHpp88-89A.3 [folder 14] Ingham's letter raised the issue of Thomas Broughton's views on baptismal regeneration: that a person was forgiven and born again in baptism, and any sin committed after that date required repentance. See J. Wesley, *Journal [SE]*, Vol. I, p. 456. (Footnote 2), and J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, p. 234. See footnote 89. He also referred to Charles Kinchin's resignation as an Oxford fellow and his intention to sell his living.

<sup>82</sup> Ingham B. to Hutton J. 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1739. MCHpp88-89A.3, [folder 14].

<sup>83</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 95.

<sup>84</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 98. Footnote 42 states that this may have been Charles Delamotte. Ward and Heitzenrater indicate Charles Delamotte had become a Moravian. This is not so. He was influenced by the Moravians, but was not received into the Moravian Church at that time. Charles Delamotte was received into the Moravian Church in 1761. See P.J. Lineham, 'Charles Delamotte' in *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730-1860*. Volume I (ed. D.M. Lewis; Oxford: Blackwell. 1995) pp. 307-308.

<sup>85</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 98.

Pennsylvania, and came to London *en route* for the colonies. He was held up in London, as there was no ship able to take him to America until the next year. At the same time, Spangenberg returned from America.

Podmore disagrees with the accepted argument that Molther introduced stillness to the Fetter Lane members, arguing that Spangenberg spoke of 'the deep repose to be found in the blood of Christ',<sup>86</sup> and that Molther spoke little English. However, Charles Delamotte was speaking about the doctrine (at least to individuals) before Molther and Spangenberg arrived in London, and it was the English members of Fetter Lane who took stillness to extremes.

Molther's reaction to the members' behaviour is noted by Podmore. 'He was shocked by what he found: the groaning, crying, contortions, and strange gestures at the meeting were, he remarked, 'enough to bring one out in a cold sweat'.<sup>87</sup> It was Spangenberg, however, who addressed the society about stillness in definitive terms that until there was a certainty of faith, the individual should refrain from using the means of grace.

Podmore stresses that it was not Molther, as Wesley suggests in his *Journal*, but Spangenberg who first raised stillness with the Society as a whole. Wesley was already aware of this doctrine from his meeting with Spangenberg in Georgia. The *Journal* gives the impression that stillness had not been mentioned to the society before Molther's arrival. This is not however correct – stillness was a tenet of Moravianism and Böhler had advocated waiting upon God before the Fetter Lane Society began.

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<sup>86</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian*, p. 60.

<sup>87</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian*, p. 59.



Wesley's *Journal* from the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1739 related how the first person he met on returning to London from Bristol had been influenced towards stillness. She was previously a zealous woman, who now believed she had never had any faith at all.<sup>88</sup> The teaching also influenced John Bray. Attending the Society on the 4<sup>th</sup> November Wesley recorded how they 'continued *silent* till eight. One then spoke of 'looking unto Jesus' and exhorted us all to 'lie *still* in his hand'.<sup>89</sup> On the 7<sup>th</sup> November, Wesley held a conference with Spangenberg, and whilst they agreed on much, there was no agreement about stillness.

Abstention from the means of grace was anathema to Wesley whose background and previous experience gave these a high value in the quest for faith. This does not mean the Moravians held a low view of Communion, rather, their argument that it should not be received until a person had faith signals a high view of communion as a confirming ordinance.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> November, Wesley met with a woman who had received assurance whilst receiving communion, and from this he drew the conclusion that communion was not merely a confirming ordinance, but a converting ordinance.<sup>90</sup> Here he was moving away from accepted Anglican teaching. His mother would later write to Wesley of her similar experience.

However much the teaching on stillness concerned Wesley, he still left for Oxford on the 12<sup>th</sup> November, travelling to Tiverton soon after as his brother Samuel had died. On the journey to Tiverton, he stopped in Bristol to speak and

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<sup>88</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 119.

<sup>89</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 119. See also the following pages.

<sup>90</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 121. See also p. 158.

preach against stillness.<sup>91</sup> Wesley returned to London on the 19<sup>th</sup> December, perhaps in part precipitated by the reports he was receiving from Fetter Lane 'I received several unpleasing accounts of the state of things in London'.<sup>92</sup> One report suggested that Fetter Lane members were leaving the meetings after recording their attendance and that Molther was meeting with a group of Fetter Lane members at the home of Matthew Clarke.<sup>93</sup> Another report suggested that Hutton, Bray and Edmonds, under Molther's direction, were planning to 'raise a church'.<sup>94</sup>

The *Journal* indicates that Wesley was more concerned with the effect stillness was having upon the membership at Fetter Lane rather than the doctrine itself; 'I found every day the dreadful effects of our brethren's reasonings, and disputing with each other. Scarce one in ten retained his first love, and most of the rest were in utmost confusion, biting and devouring one another.'<sup>95</sup>

A clue to Wesley's withdrawal is found in the *Journal* entry for Monday 24<sup>th</sup> December. Molther and Spangenberg's insistence on stillness may have rested on a desire to curb the excesses of the Fetter Lane members, first seen at the meeting of the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1739, as on abstention from the means of grace *per se*. Wesley's *Journal* records a meeting where one individual was 'overwhelmed with joy and love, and could not help showing it by strong cries and tears.'<sup>96</sup> Another at the meeting declared this to be 'nature, imagination and animal spirits'.<sup>97</sup> It seems Wesley was willing to allow the quasi-Pentecostal outburst as a degree of faith, and an expression of God at work. Although his own

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<sup>91</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 122.

<sup>92</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 128.

<sup>93</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 129. See footnote 56.

<sup>94</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 130.

<sup>95</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 130.

<sup>96</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 131.

<sup>97</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 131.



experience of the 24<sup>th</sup> May 1738 was not as expressive, he could not see how, in the light of his experience, such behaviour was merely 'human'. This must be held in 'tension' so to speak, with his view of the spiritual excesses of the French Prophets (especially Prophetess Lavington) about whom Wesley was at best sceptical.

Stillness boiled down to a clear doctrinal difference between the Wesleys on one side and the majority of the English leadership on the other. The Germans present in London were not part of this division. They were passing through London and were not as extreme about stillness. To this major problem should be added the nature of reception of New Birth and assurance, and perfection.

Holland's account picks up these issues:

It was now (1740) a great dispute arose in our Society, some speaking as if there was no Means of Grace and left off coming to the Church and Sacraments expecting to find the Lord sooner by stillness – Some declared that after we were justified there was generally an intermediate space before we received the witness of the Spirit. Others that we were justified and had the witness of the Spirit at the same time.<sup>98</sup>

After meeting with Molther on the 31<sup>st</sup> December, Wesley wrote down what he 'conceived to be the difference between us,'<sup>99</sup> He laid five charges against the Moravians and five replies.<sup>100</sup> Essentially, they were unaltered from Wesley's first objection to stillness, relying on his understanding of degrees of faith, justification and the work of the Holy Spirit (the gift of God)<sup>101</sup> There is however an additional charge, the use of guile.<sup>102</sup> Molther had suggested to Wesley that certain fabrications could be told to hearers that they might seek to attain beyond their present state.

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<sup>98</sup> W. Holland, *Extract of a Short Account of Some Few Matters Relating to the Work of the Lord in England 1745*. (Manuscript document annexed into the Fetter Lane Congregation Book for 1742) MCH

<sup>99</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 131.

<sup>100</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, pp. 131-134.

<sup>101</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 132.

<sup>102</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 133.

By the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1740 Wesley was again travelling, returning to London to minister to Gwillam Snowde, a condemned prisoner at Newgate, on the 5<sup>th</sup> February. Wesley found himself at odds with the Society over the issue of plain speaking, and 'leaving off the ordinances of God'.<sup>103</sup> He was content to allow any who wished to abstain from the means of grace to do so, but he was not prepared to allow others to harass those who chose to use the means of grace.

By March the situation at Fetter Lane was serious. Charles Wesley visited the Morgan family,<sup>104</sup> who, having spent a week with John Bray in London, were now convinced the means of grace were unnecessary. Bray had persuaded Mrs Morgan to cease attending Church, praying, reading the Bible or receiving communion. She was content to wait for religion to come 'when it will'. Mr Morgan was dissuaded from preaching or leading family prayers. The influence of Bray and others in the Society by then was such that George Whitefield and the Wesleys were considered mischievous because of their preaching. Charles Wesley expressed his view of stillness as; 'a Christianity which had no cross in it, no work of faith, no patience of hope, no labour of love.'<sup>105</sup>

### Separation

By April, Charles Wesley concluded, 'A separation I foresee unavoidable.'<sup>106</sup> On the 6<sup>th</sup> April, John Bray threatened Charles with expulsion from his band<sup>107</sup> unless he attended it the next day. John Wesley returned to London after receiving a letter from John Simpson asking him to prevent Charles from

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<sup>103</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 140.

<sup>104</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 200.

<sup>105</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 201.

<sup>106</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 207. Charles' *Journal* for the days preceding that entry records several accounts of members abstaining from the means of grace.

<sup>107</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 210. See also p. 222. John Bray reproved Charles for not attending his band. At the same meeting Bray expelled a member from the society meeting



'preaching up the ordinances'.<sup>108</sup> John and Charles met with Molther on the 25<sup>th</sup> April, without agreement. Charles was aware of the seriousness of the dispute and the entrenched positions of both sides; 'I see no middle point wherein we can meet.'<sup>109</sup>

The female bands at Fetter Lane were well disposed to the Wesleys, and were in danger of expulsion from the society because Thomas Maxfield<sup>110</sup> was present at their Lovefeast. Pre-emptively, the Wesleys removed them from Fetter Lane's authority. Charles records that they; 'rescued our lambs out of their hands.'<sup>111</sup> This course of action was possible, as they had taken a lease on a disused foundry. The female bands moved from Fetter Lane discipline to the new Wesleyan discipline drawn up on Christmas Day 1739. Ostensibly, the unity of the Society was at an end.

An attempt to visit Molther on the 5<sup>th</sup> June in Islington was unsuccessful as he was ill. Neither Spangenberg, nor Böhler were in London at the time and the society was in the hands of John Bray<sup>112</sup> who was joined by; 'John Simpson and George Stonehouse (both clergymen), Charles Delamotte, William Oxley, and Richard Bell.'<sup>113</sup> These leaders attempted to prevent Charles Wesley from

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<sup>108</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 146. Simpson had spoken publicly at the Fetter Lane meeting against Charles Wesley's preaching on the ordinances. See C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 212. See also p. 221. Charles Wesley did not help matters by composing a hymn entitled *The Means of Grace*.

<sup>109</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 223. See also J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 147. This gives John Wesley's account of this meeting.

<sup>110</sup> Maxfield, a member of John Wesley's Bristol society had travelled to London with Wesley and attended a meeting of the female lovefeast.

<sup>111</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 223. The *Journal* for the ensuing days shows that Charles Wesley met with many of the female bands who had joined the Foundry society.

<sup>112</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian Church*, p. 67. Podmore's footnote 218 to Charles Wesley's *Journal* suggests the 23<sup>rd</sup> April. There is no date in the *Journal* beside the appropriate entry but John Wesley's *Diary* relates the meeting at Fetter Lane 'our society' to that date. See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 417.

<sup>113</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian Church*, p. 68.

preaching at the Society, ensuring Fetter Lane meetings coincided with those of the Foundery.<sup>114</sup>

John Wesley sought to accommodate the differing opinions of the Fetter Lane Society, by dividing bands along doctrinal lines. Those who wished to follow stillness could do so in a band of like-minded people, and those who wished to use the means of grace could join a similarly 'exclusive' band; 'My brother proposed new-modelling the bands, and setting by themselves those few who were still for the ordinances.'<sup>115</sup> This proposal was accepted after Benjamin Ingham had seconded it, and 'as many as were aggrieved put into new bands.'<sup>116</sup>

From the 22<sup>nd</sup> June onwards, Wesley used the morning Bible study to 'expound the basic Christian teaching as he understood it,'<sup>117</sup> On the 16<sup>th</sup> July matters came to a head, when it was asked whether Wesley would be allowed to preach in the new building. The Society had leased another building 'the Great meeting House', and this had till then been used by the Society. He was refused, being told 'This place is taken for the Germans.'<sup>118</sup> Wesley, after debate 'gave them up for God.'<sup>119</sup>

Within a week, after a meeting at which his mother was present, it was decided to leave Fetter Lane.<sup>120</sup> At the conclusion of a Lovefeast Wesley read a statement and invited any who agreed with him to follow him; 'nothing now

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<sup>114</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 229.

<sup>115</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 239.

<sup>116</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 239.

<sup>117</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 153. See footnote 75. The notes of these Bible studies are contained in the *Journal* on pp. 153-159.

<sup>118</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 161.

<sup>119</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 161.

<sup>120</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 427. The *Diary* for the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> July gives little detail. The *Diary* for the 18<sup>th</sup> reads 'agreed to leave the Society!' whilst for day on which he left Fetter Lane he wrote, '8.15 Fetter Lane; Love-feast; parted!'



remains but that I should give you up to God. You that are of the same judgment, follow me.<sup>121</sup> Some eighteen or nineteen followed him from the society. Hutton recounts that Wesley left the meeting without his hat, as it had been hidden.<sup>122</sup> The Foundery society, which met on the 23<sup>rd</sup> July, recorded twenty-five male and some forty-eight female former Fetter Lane members. The number of women was higher due to their separation after Maxfield's presence at their Lovefeast.<sup>123</sup>

James Hutton's own memoir of the separation is telling for its candour, and propaganda:

Wesley became hostile, partly through our imprudent behaviour towards him, partly from inability to bear that he should be less thought of amongst us than Br. Molther. In short he broke off from us, contradicted our teaching publicly, but we contradicted his only quietly. He took away from us almost all of the women folk who then belonged to us, but only some 14 men. He became our declared enemy.

During Br. Molther's illness our meeting became very small, and Wesley gave opportunity for those who were unsound and wished to remain so, to leave us.<sup>124</sup>

Annexed to the notes of a Prayer Day held on the 17<sup>th</sup> September 1740 is a letter from Molther to Fetter Lane dated 20<sup>th</sup> October 1740. Molther reflects on the issue that had brought about the separation:

When the Saviour is a pulling down of them and giveth them a deep sense of their misery and sinfulness, then people, who besides the Lord have a great many means to help themselves, fly to them, instead of lying still, and being helped by the Lord Jesus, get into self working force themselves to pray and sing hymns, till they have got rid of the Pain, they have upon their hearts, and got up from the dust when the Lord would have them continue there...but also on the other hand empty of all means to help yourself, and of all workings of your own. He is able to save you alone, without your assistance, and will have the glory alone.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>121</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 162.

<sup>122</sup> J.E. Hutton, *History of the Moravian Church*, p. 299.

<sup>123</sup> See footnote 110 above.

<sup>124</sup> J.N. Libby, 'James Hutton's Account of "The Beginnings of the Lord's Work in England to 1741"', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XV, Part 7, p. 188.

<sup>125</sup> Philip Molther's Letter to the Fetter Lane Society, MCHp43A.3

Wesley wrote to Zinzendorf on August 8<sup>th</sup> 1740 setting out his view of the Moravians. Molther's letter may be a reply to that. The front page of the Prayer Day notes has pencilled 'Brother Hutton is to take a copy of the answer to Mr. Wesley's letter'.<sup>126</sup> Molther's annexed letter was intended only for Fetter Lane, and he makes no apology for the doctrine of stillness, inviting the reader to 'lie still at the feet of our Saviour'.<sup>127</sup> It was only by recognising personal sinfulness and being still that an individual came to faith. Molther's understanding of stillness is not as extreme as the English leaders, and whilst his feelings about the use of the means of grace are clear in the letter, his argument against using the means is that they hinder the acceptance of faith.

Wesley's letter laid before Zinzendorf the faults of doctrine he saw within Moravianism.<sup>128</sup> This letter was the subject of a conversation between Zinzendorf and Wesley just over a year later.<sup>129</sup> He did not apologise for the separation, but set out his charges against Moravian practice and discipline. Wesley's apologia is contained in the preface to the fourth part of his *Journal*,<sup>130</sup> published in 1744, after any possibility of reconciliation with the Moravian Church had passed.

Podmore's comment on the separation is poignant; 'Little more than two years after its inception, the Fetter Lane Society's unity was at an end, and the revival movement was divided – as it turned out, permanently.'<sup>131</sup> Perhaps Wesley precipitated the separation through his reading an excerpt from *The Mystic*

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<sup>126</sup> Prayer Day notes, MCHp43A.3

<sup>127</sup> Philip Molther's Letter to the Fetter Lane Society, MCHp43A.3

<sup>128</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, pp. 24-31.

<sup>129</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, pp. 211-224.

<sup>130</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, pp. 116-118.

<sup>131</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian Church*, p. 70.



*Divinity of Dionysius*,<sup>132</sup> but there was no middle ground upon which to build.

Relations within Fetter Lane had been disintegrating for some time, and the separation cannot have been a surprise, 'the temporary partnership between the two wings of the army of revival was dissolving throughout 1739 until the final breach in July 1740.'<sup>133</sup>

Benham's *Memoirs* illustrate the revival's division. In 1740, after Whitefield returned from America, and Wesley had separated from Fetter Lane, Whitefield asked Hutton to publish a Calvinist tract in response to one of Wesley's anti-Calvinist sermons.<sup>134</sup> Hutton declined on the basis he could not accept Calvin's doctrine of predestination: 'Whitefield at this took offence against the Brethren as well as against Wesley, and thus the Methodists not only quarrelled with the Brethren but wrangled among themselves.'<sup>135</sup>

Walsh captures the division;

Emotions ran high. Feelings of Pentecostal fraternity coincided with a combativeness that split Methodist from Moravian and Arminian from Calvinist. There was a movement to and fro, much spiritual wayfaring – a very rapid turnover of membership in the societies, as converts were not only won but lost.<sup>136</sup>

This wayfaring was felt by John West who wrote after the Wesleys' departure for the Foundery, 'After Mr Wesley withdrew from us, I was in a great strait whom to follow but finally concluded it was best for me to join the Brethren.'<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 160. Wesley read an excerpt which denied the value of using any means of grace prior to conversion. He invited the members present to assent to or deny whether they agreed with the excerpt. Mr Bell responded that it was right, and that using the means prior to conversion prevented coming to faith.

<sup>133</sup> W.G. Addison, *The Renewed Church*, p. 84.

<sup>134</sup> Whitefield published a tract in response to Wesley's sermon on *Free Grace*. See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 3, pp. 542-563.

<sup>135</sup> D. Benham, *Memoirs of James Hutton*, p. 53.

<sup>136</sup> J.D. Walsh, "Methodism" and the Origins of English Speaking Evangelicalism', in *Evangelicalism*, p. 23.

<sup>137</sup> J West, *Memoirs of Brother John West*, *Moravian Magazine*, 1875, p. 238.

### The Distinctives of Fetter Lane

The second section of this chapter echoes the analysis of the distinctive features of the Unitary Societies discussed in chapter three. Fetter Lane modelled its rules upon those of the Moravian Church. Two pillars assisted the membership develop as Christians; the band, a close knit community of people, sharing problems and issues together; the society, a large-scale meeting at which preaching and teaching would take place. Within the society disputes could be aired and individuals or groups taken to task and even expelled.

The society also introduced lovefeasts, prayer days and general intercession days into English religious life and stressed the importance of fast days, an established practice for High Anglicans, but with the introduction of a continual fast changed the pattern of fasting. These practices added to the sense of community amongst the society members, but were not compulsory.<sup>138</sup>

The following headings expand those elements of Fetter Lane life that were new to the English scene. These distinctives illustrate a clear progression from, if not a break with the unitary system.

**Communal Pattern:** The society functioned with a particular model of religious life:

*Band meeting* – Monday evenings, and one other night by agreement. New members would be formed into ‘trial bands’. If no objections were raised to an individual, full membership of the society would be granted one or two months later.<sup>139</sup> (Segregated by age, sex and marital status)

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<sup>138</sup> Appendix 6: (Rules A): Rule 16 and Appendix 7: (Rules B): Rule 18.

<sup>139</sup> *Rules A*: 24 one month, *Rules B*: 26 two months.



*Society meeting* – Every Wednesday at 8pm. New members proposed once a month, and maximum meeting length of two and a half hours.<sup>140</sup>

*General Intercession* – One Saturday a month

*Lovefeast* – Sunday evening, seven days after the General intercession.

(Segregated by sex)

*Continual intercession* – each member would spend an hour every day praying for other members.

*Continual fast* – three members each day fasted except on Sundays and holidays.

This exacting pattern of meetings suited the settled community of Herrnhut where the community lived and worked within community boundaries. However, it was a very different matter for those who did not live in community, and worked as employees or self employed artisans to follow such a rigorous pattern. Heitzenrater is right when he states that the formation of religious bands within a settled community at Herrnhut was not 'well suited to the needs of working-class English people who faced the hardships of changing social and economic conditions of the workaday world.'<sup>141</sup>

It is not easy to ascertain how successful the bands and society were in fulfilling the functions that it laid down, or in regulating members and their activities. From October 1742, when Fetter Lane became a Moravian congregation, there is a wealth of documentary evidence which helps to establish the society's success. Prior to 1742, no records survive. There was a society book, as

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<sup>140</sup> *Rules C: 14.*

<sup>141</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 108.

Charles Wesley refers to the names of Thomas Shaw and Shepherd Wolf

being 'erased out of the society-book',<sup>142</sup> but this is not extant.

**How many bands can be identified?** William Holland noted that in 1732 there were 'thirty or forty of these societies in the City and suburbs of London,'<sup>143</sup> and Fetter Lane was one of a 'network' of societies in London in 1738

James Hutton's account of the origins of Fetter Lane recollects the earliest days of the Society:

Böhler before he left, made some rules for those who had grace, and to begin with formed only one Band, out of 6 or 8 in whom he had the most confidence. This gradually increased, out of the first new Society founded by the Bookseller, etc., and from other souls lately awakened, and met in the Bookseller's house, when they wished to meet apart.<sup>144</sup>

Whilst Wesley was in Germany with Ingham and Töltschig, the Society consisted of 'some 30 or 40 hearers, with the Bookseller, who, in Wesley's absence, held the meetings for edification'.<sup>145</sup> Returning from Germany, John Wesley visited some 20 societies and bands in London and Oxford.<sup>146</sup> Some, identifiably pre-dating Fetter Lane, are generally referred to by place name. 'I went to a society in Bear Yard',<sup>147</sup> rather than by a personal name; 'at Mr E[xall]'s society'.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>142</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 153.

<sup>143</sup> W. Holland, *Extract of a Short Account*, p. 1.

<sup>144</sup> J.N. Libby, (translator & editor), 'James Hutton's "Account of the Beginnings of the Lord's Work in England to 1741"', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XV, Part 7, p. 185.

<sup>145</sup> J.N. Libby, (translator & editor), 'James Hutton's "Account"', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XV, Part 7, p. 185.

<sup>146</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 12. Bear Yard, p. 13. Aldersgate Street, Gutter Lane, Savoy and Mr Exall's, p. 14. Bow (this may have been a number of societies meeting together), p. 16. Wapping, p. 19. at Mrs Fox's (three times in one day), Mrs Mear's, Westminster, p. 355. the Minories, Savoy Chapel and Mr Wolfe's, p. 356. Bear Yard, Mr Brockmer's, Mr Parker's, p. 357. Mrs Fox's, Mrs Ford's, p. 358. Mr Washington's (this may have been a Holy Club meeting. See J. Wesley, *Journal [SE]*, Vol. II, p. 88.)

<sup>147</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 12. See also p. 354.

<sup>148</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 13. See also footnote 36. William Exall was a member of the Fetter Lane Society.



In a letter to the Herrnhut leaders, shortly after his return from Germany, Wesley stated, 'Fourteen were added to us since our return, so that we have now eight bands of men, consisting of fifty-six persons; all of whom seek salvation only in the blood of Christ.'<sup>149</sup> At this point there were only two female bands. By January 1739 Abraham Richter noted, 'gatherings several hundred strong were not unusual.'<sup>150</sup> An exhaustive study of Wesley's *Diary* names individuals,<sup>151</sup> all women, who led bands. This may simply reflect the opportunity that Fetter Lane offered women. Whitefield's *Journal* for the 28<sup>th</sup> April 1739 records his preaching before a 'thronged society of women at Fetter Lane'.<sup>152</sup>

John Wesley belonged to a band, and from the *Diary* his leader appears to have been James Hutton.<sup>153</sup> It certainly met at Hutton's home. A band also met at his home.<sup>154</sup> Charles Wesley belonged to Mr Bray's band. The *Diary* mentions several other people whom Wesley met at home, but these meetings are not referred to as 'band meetings'. The basic requirement for a band meeting was that they should begin and end with prayer and singing, and contain an opportunity for free and honest speech.<sup>155</sup> Using these rules as a basic guide, and allowing for Wesley's abbreviation of the phrase 'sang, prayed, religious

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<sup>149</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 572.

<sup>150</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian Church*, p. 47. Podmore cites Richter's diary entry for the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1739

<sup>151</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19. Many of those mentioned by name have multiple references. For the purpose of this footnote, each individual is mentioned only once. *Diary*: Monday 18<sup>th</sup> September 1738 'Mrs Wolf', p. 367. Monday 15<sup>th</sup> January 1739 'J[enny] Loyd', p. 371. 5<sup>th</sup> February 'Mary Hanson', p. 374. Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> February 'Mrs Chambers', p. 376. Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> February 'Mrs West', p. 377. Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 'Mrs Thacker', p. 381. Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 'Mrs Mills', p. 381. Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> March 'Mrs Sellars', p. 382. Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> September 'N Tilson', p. 406. Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> September 'Mrs Soane', p. 408. Friday 21<sup>st</sup> September 'Mrs Dixon', p. 408. Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> November 'Sister Hodges', p. 415. Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> November 'Mrs Vaughan', p. 415.

<sup>152</sup> G. Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals*, p. 260.

<sup>153</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19. Wesley records meeting at Hutton's on the following days: Monday 18<sup>th</sup> December 1738, p. 367. Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> December, p. 368. Monday 8<sup>th</sup> January 1739, p. 370. Monday 15<sup>th</sup> January, p. 371. Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> January, p. 371. Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> January, p. 372. Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> January, p. 373. Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> February, p. 374. Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> September, p. 406.

<sup>154</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 356. This band met regularly on a Sunday evening.

<sup>155</sup> *Rules A: 10 & 11. Rules B: 9 & 10.*

talk, sang, prayed'<sup>156</sup> to anything as short as 'sang etc.'<sup>157</sup> there is a number of groups which fulfilled a function similar to that of a band but which may not have actually been recorded as bands of the Society proper.<sup>158</sup> Some of these can be identified as members of the Fetter Lane Society.<sup>159</sup>

**Faith development:** At a basic level, the bands offered a platform for faith development. Charles Wesley's *Journal* noted that an individual's declaration of faith occasioned a general thanksgiving. 'In the bands, one witnessed her having received her pardon. We gave thanks with her, whom the Lord hath redeemed.'<sup>160</sup> Conversion was not experienced in isolation, as the whole group shared the moment of witness.

From early 1740, Charles held 'conferences' in which men and women expressed their spiritual state to him. These conferences appear to have been one on one conversation: 'From eleven to one is devoted to conference. The first that came was Stephen Dupee, a soldier, who informs me he received forgiveness this week in hearing the word'.<sup>161</sup>

A conference was an opportunity for Charles Wesley to collect evidence of the progress of a Society member, and possibly counter stillness. However, they also provide an understanding of the work of the bands as faith development

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<sup>156</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 354. See the entry for 8.30am on the 18<sup>th</sup> September. Like many entries the basic band requirements are interspersed with other phrases.

<sup>157</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 356. See the entry for 5.30pm on the 11<sup>th</sup> October.

<sup>158</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19. See Monday September 18<sup>th</sup> 1738 'Mrs Delamotte', p. 354. Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> September 'Mr Harris', p. 354. Also Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> September, p. 355. Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> September 'Mr Brockmer', p. 355. Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> October 'Mr Summers', p. 357. Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> October 'Mr Hodge's', p. 359. Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> October 'James Ha[rris]', p. 359. Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 'Mrs May', p. 361. Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> November 'Mrs Duzzy' 'Mrs Ironmonger' 'Mrs Claggett', pp. 361-362. Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> December 'Mr Parker', p. 367. Friday 26<sup>th</sup> January 1739 'Mr Abbott', p. 373. Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> January 'Mr Agutter', p. 373. Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> February 'Mr Savage', pp. 376-377. Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> March 'Mr Hastings', p. 381. Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> September 'Lady Hume', p. 407. Monday 17<sup>th</sup> September 'Mr Bowe's', p. 408. (See also the entry for Monday 24<sup>th</sup> September, p. 409. Here the name is given as 'Mr Bowers'.)

<sup>159</sup> J.N. Libby, 'The Personnel of the Fetter Lane Society', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XVI, pp. 144-147.

<sup>160</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 158.

<sup>161</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 207.



groups, 'In the hours of conference Eliz. Holmes informed me, she had been filled with the spirit of love while we were praying at S. Anderson's.'<sup>162</sup>

The bands also gave opportunity for the teaching of catechumens. The rules of the Society<sup>163</sup> allowed faith seekers to join on probation, varying between one and two months 'on trial'. These 'on trial' bands provided a place where the stirrings of faith could be nurtured. The questions asked of the 'on trial' members introduced potential new members to the rules and discipline of the society from the outset. John Wesley's view on this group is shown in his letter of October 1738 to Herrnhut, 'there are many others who only wait till we have leisure to instruct them how they may most effectually build up one another in the faith and love of Him who gave himself for them.'<sup>164</sup> The implication being that these individuals were not settled into 'on trial' bands.

More than that however, the 'on trial' period allowed for new Christians to undergo baptismal initiation into the Church of England after instruction. John Wesley's *Journal* relates the baptism of five adults at St. Mary's Islington<sup>165</sup> on the 25<sup>th</sup> January 1739. The *Diary* entry for the same day reads '8.30 The catechumens came, sang prayed'.<sup>166</sup> Charles Wesley also baptised adults, who had presumably been through a similar catechumenate period.<sup>167</sup> During the early life of the Fetter Lane Society, at least one request for baptism was

<sup>162</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 227.

<sup>163</sup> Appendix 6: Rules A: no's 19 to 24: Appendix 7: Rules B, no's 21 to 26

<sup>164</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. pp. 571-573.

<sup>165</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 32. The five adults are John Smith, Ann Turner, Sarah Pappet, Judith Probert and Anna Taylor. (From baptismal registers of St Mary's Church Islington, held at The London Metropolitan Archives. Reference X085/079)

<sup>166</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, pp. 372-373. See also p. 374. The *Diary* relates the christening of Mrs Dymox. There is another occasion when he baptised three women on the 9<sup>th</sup> July 1740 (see p. 426.) these were probably Foundery members rather than Fetter Lane members.

<sup>167</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 151. On this occasion Charles Wesley did not perform the baptism, but there are other occasions when he did. Towards the end of the Wesley's association with St. Mary's Islington, the wardens refused to allow Charles Wesley to baptise Bridget Armstead (p. 227. 9<sup>th</sup> May 1740.) He had to wait until the 21<sup>st</sup> May, when she was baptised by the minister of Bloomsbury Church (p. 235. 21<sup>st</sup> May 1740.)

received from a woman, previously baptised by a Dissenter. Charles Wesley conferred about this with the Bishop of London, who in a stormy meeting was equivocal.<sup>168</sup> Later that day he did baptise. 'I read prayers at Islington, and baptised an adult; Mr. Stonehouse, M. Sims and M. Burton, being the witnesses'.<sup>169</sup> The register shows that Ann Fillney was baptised that day. If, as seems probable, the women's bands were proving successful in reaching people previously neglected by the religious societies, then the need for baptism as part of the faith development process was a very real issue for the Society. The assumption is that John and Charles Wesley had responsibility for the catechumen's progress, at least to baptism.

Gradually a dichotomy arose over degrees of faith. Wesley's allowance for the young, growing Christian, who was justified, but not fully sanctified, highlighted the difference between his theology and Moravian theology. Heitzenrater, succinctly expresses this

Wesley was clearly differentiating between justification and sanctification and becoming more positively inclined to value the experience of the "almost" Christians.<sup>170</sup>

Moravianism did not accept the bands as a place where faith was steadily developed. Rather, the tendency towards stillness, simultaneous justification and assurance did away with any need for growth in faith and negated the purpose of the bands themselves. Heitzenrater comments that Wesley 'represents a direct challenge to the Moravian's unitary concept of faith.'<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, pp. 135-136.

<sup>169</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 136. Ann Fillney's name is the sole entry for the 14<sup>th</sup> November 1738. (From the baptismal registers of St Mary's Church Islington, held at The London Metropolitan Archives. Reference X085/079). Charles Wesley's *Journal* also indicates the baptism of two women at Islington on the 11<sup>th</sup> March 1739. There is no record of these in St Mary's registers. The only entries for that day relate to two male children, John Johnson and Joseph Gardner. (Also from the baptismal registers of St Mary's Church Islington, held at The London Metropolitan Archives. Reference X085/079).

<sup>170</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory* (Nashville: Kingswood Books. 1989) p. 139.

<sup>171</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, p. 141.



Assurance was central to eighteenth century evangelicals. Bebbington contends that this bound up the strands of discontinuity evident in early eighteenth century conservative Protestantism.<sup>172</sup> However, this doctrine added to those about which Wesley disagreed with the Moravians. Heitzenrater states that even though there was a widening gap between Wesley's thinking and that of the Moravian teachers, he still preached 'the necessity of full assurance of faith and actual freedom from sin as the true ground of a Christian's happiness.'<sup>173</sup> Wesley came to understand that the 'assurance of salvation was an essential complement to justification'.<sup>174</sup> This assurance would elicit the Fruits of the Spirit in the life of the believer, and would also lead the Christian to know that the Spirit was witnessing with his/her spirit. Randy Maddox makes the point that in private correspondence Wesley spoke of 'degrees of faith, as well as *degrees* of assurance. In short, he was allowing that someone could be *truly* Christian (albeit, imperfect) who was not yet *fully* Christian.'<sup>175</sup>

In this the band played an important role, as some, who had a 'higher' degree of faith, would encourage even the newest seeker. This contrasted with the Moravian requirement of assurance being evidenced by the Fruits of the Spirit, as the expectation of the true Christian.<sup>176</sup> Wesley used others' experience to evidence his views, which Heitzenrater succinctly details.<sup>177</sup> As the work of the Holy Spirit was evident in the lives of his hearers, so their witness increased his confidence. These were 'living arguments'.

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<sup>172</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, p. 42.

<sup>173</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, p. 126.

<sup>174</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 393.

<sup>175</sup> R.L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, p. 126.

<sup>176</sup> See R.P. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, p. 127. The dilemma Wesley faced in this regard showed itself in self examination. On this topic, see also R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, pp. 87-89.

<sup>177</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Mirror and Memory*, pp. 131-132. The evidence to which Heitzenrater points show how Wesley tested the spirits, to ascertain how real the experience claimed was. In the case of the French Prophets, he would not allow their claims to divine revelation.

Wesley also produced some form of material to be used in the band meetings.<sup>178</sup> However, with the emphasis of the bands on small group experience and growth, this may have been study or discussion material.

**Female membership:** A unique feature of Fetter Lane was the full inclusion of women. Previously women had been catechised at home by male relatives, who led family prayers. In October 1738 there were two female bands, 'As yet we have only two small bands of women – the one of three, the other of five persons.'<sup>179</sup> By November the number had increased to six settled bands.<sup>180</sup>

On two occasions in the *Diary* John Wesley indicates the formation of new women's bands. One met at Mr. Thacker's home, led by Mrs. Thacker.<sup>181</sup> He was the only male allowed, other than the leader.<sup>182</sup> Her band needed division, and Mrs. Chambers<sup>183</sup> was to lead the new band formed from it. In March he was also present at Mrs. Sellar's, 'the new band'.<sup>184</sup> John Wesley wrote the rules which governed the women's bands.<sup>185</sup>

Hutton's suggestion in November 1738 that the women should meet separately from the men was met with a stern response from Wesley.<sup>186</sup> Hutton was concerned that the women were causing familiarity. Wesley suggested appointing their own meeting, although this would cause them offence, 'at least, unless you *first* fix a night for them to come by themselves – which I firmly

<sup>178</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 408. (September 18<sup>th</sup>) Wesley also recorded writing for the society. These entries occur from April 1740 and probably relate to the Foundery. See p. 417. 26<sup>th</sup> April 1740, p. 423. 12<sup>th</sup> June 1740, p. 424. 26<sup>th</sup> June 1740, p. 425. 30<sup>th</sup> June 1740 and 1<sup>st</sup> July 1740, p. 426. 8<sup>th</sup> July 1740.

<sup>179</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 572.

<sup>180</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 591. This letter was written after women had been separated from the general meeting. Wesley thought the bands he settled had not been successful, having been allowed to fail.

<sup>181</sup> Appendix 6: Rules A: No's 17 & 18

<sup>182</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 381. (22<sup>nd</sup> March 1739)

<sup>183</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 376. (17<sup>th</sup> February 1739)

<sup>184</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 382. (28<sup>th</sup> March 1739)

<sup>185</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 372. (25<sup>th</sup> January 1739)

<sup>186</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 588.



believe will give more offence.<sup>187</sup> The desire for them to meet separately prevailed and Wesley frequently records for Wednesday evenings, '5.30 Fetter Lane [women]. 8 Fetter Lane [men].'<sup>188</sup>

After the separation of the women's meeting from the men's Wesley wrote to George Whitefield 'On Wednesday at six we have a noble company of women, not adorned with gold or costly apparel, but with a meek and quiet spirit and good works.'<sup>189</sup> Women were afforded leadership amongst the bands, and again, it is John Wesley who records meeting the women leaders. On the 12<sup>th</sup> September 1739, Wesley's *Diary* records, '3.45 The women leaders, necessary talk (religious).'<sup>190</sup>

Charles Wesley was the catalyst for the separation of the women from Fetter Lane. On the 5<sup>th</sup> April, in conference with sister Jackson, he was told most of the women had given up the ordinances, and that sister Munsey had left the Society over the treatment meted out to the Wesleys.<sup>191</sup> The following day, Charles Wesley, in company with Thomas Maxfield<sup>192</sup> and some of the women, were denied entry to Bowers's Society. Charles Wesley and Maxfield went to John Bray's with the women, and Maxfield was allowed to remain, breaching the rules.<sup>193</sup> Wesley, when confronted asked the women what they wished. They asked Maxfield to stay, accepting the breach. Bray was ready to give up his care of the bands, unless Maxfield was excluded.<sup>194</sup>

<sup>187</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 588.

<sup>188</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 393. 13<sup>th</sup> June 1739. See also the entries for the 5<sup>th</sup> September, p. 406. 12<sup>th</sup> September, p. 407. 19<sup>th</sup> September, p. 408. 26<sup>th</sup> September, p. 409. 7<sup>th</sup> November, p. 415.

<sup>189</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 602.

<sup>190</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 407. There are other *Diary* entries that show this was a regular meeting. Wesley also met the male leaders regularly.

<sup>191</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 487.

<sup>192</sup> See H.M McGonigle, 'Maxfield, Thomas', in *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland*, p. 225. Maxfield was converted under John Wesley's preaching in Bristol in 1739.

<sup>193</sup> See Appendix 6, Rules A. After the rule relating to admission of women, the rules state, that 'no men be present except their respective husbands, & the Persons who pray and Expound the Scriptures.'

<sup>194</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 209.

Matters came to a head on the 30<sup>th</sup> April, when Charles Wesley was castigated for the new rule amongst the women 'They fell upon me about the women reading *their* rule for the exclusion of the brethren.'<sup>195</sup> Wesley responded by questioning the Society's authority, and removing them from the oversight of Fetter Lane altogether; 'We answered, "Whence had you your authority over them? We will save you any farther trouble, and do now take them out of your hands."<sup>196</sup> In early 1740, Hutton wrote to Zinzendorf, and referred to the obvious charm which the Wesleys exercised among the women, 'J.W. and C.W., both of them are dangerous snares to many young women; several are in love with them. I wish they were once married to some good sisters, but I would not give them one of mine if I had many.'<sup>197</sup>

**Oversight and Leadership:** From May 1738, John Wesley was largely itinerant, travelling to Germany in July, Oxford later that year, and finally from March 1739, Bristol, which occupied much of his time. Between journeys Wesley assumed a leadership role amongst the bands and Society of Fetter Lane. He also regularly visited other societies.

James Hutton's *Account* describes Wesley's itinerancy, 'Shortly after Wesley and Ingham's return from Germany (Wesley was seldom with us in London, and Ingham went to Yorkshire)'.<sup>198</sup> He also wrote of both John and Charles, 'The brothers Wesley visited us from time to time'.<sup>199</sup> Of the same period however, Wesley gives the sense that he, and his brother were anxious to return to

<sup>195</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 223.

<sup>196</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I. p. 223.

<sup>197</sup> D. Benham, *Memoirs of James Hutton*, p. 46.

<sup>198</sup> J.N. Libby, (translator & editor), 'James Hutton's "Account"', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XV, Part 7, p. 186.

<sup>199</sup> J.N. Libby, (translator & editor), 'James Hutton's "Account"', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XV, Part 7, p. 186.



London from Oxford, 'My brother and I are partly here and partly in London, till Mr. Whitefield or some other is sent to release us from hence.'<sup>200</sup>

The Wesleys constant travelling may have caused the early pastoral and doctrinal problems, and eventually allowed stillness to become a popular doctrine. Hutton stated of the summer of 1738. 'We fell into one confusion after another'.<sup>201</sup> After January 1739, a number of Anglican clergymen could have been called upon for advice.<sup>202</sup> Whitefield was itinerant, but Ingham,<sup>203</sup> Hutchings,<sup>204</sup> Kinchin,<sup>205</sup> Simpson, Stonehouse and Gambold<sup>206</sup> all of whom came to accept Moravian doctrines,<sup>207</sup> could have been consulted.

When in London, the Wesleys were assiduous members of the Society. *Journal* and *Diary* entries show evidence of meeting bands and the Society on the appointed nights (Monday for the bands and Wednesday for the general meeting) and visiting bands on their second meeting night. They also attended love feasts and John Wesley attended the prayer days, usually visiting Fetter Lane three times in the day.<sup>208</sup> This was combined with regular preaching and exhorting at other societies. For the Wesleys, Fetter Lane, whilst important, was not the centre of their activities, implying that they were not careful to maintain the primacy of Fetter Lane.<sup>209</sup>

<sup>200</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 571. The letter is dated October 13<sup>th</sup> 1738.

<sup>201</sup> J.N. Libby, (translator & editor), 'James Hutton's "Account"', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XV, Part 7, p. 186.

<sup>202</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian Church*, p. 47. See also J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 29. Wesley indicates that seven clergy were present at the love feast.

<sup>203</sup> E.A. Rose, 'Benjamin Ingham' in *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730-1860*, Volume I (ed. D.M. Lewis; Oxford: Blackwell. 1995) pp. 590-591.

<sup>204</sup> A. Skevington Wood, 'John Hutchings' in *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730-1860*, Vol. I, p. 587.

<sup>205</sup> Charles Kinchin to Count Nicholas Ludwig Von Zinzendorf. One of the transcripts of the letters read at the Herrnhag Prayer Day on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1740. MCHp43.A3

<sup>206</sup> C.J. Podmore, 'John Gambold' in *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730-1860*, Vol. I, pp. 422-433.

<sup>207</sup> J.N. Libby, (translator & editor), 'James Hutton's "Account"', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XV, Part 7, pp. 145-146.

<sup>208</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 373. (Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> January 1739).

<sup>209</sup> Appendix 7: Rules B; No. 17.

John Wesley was active amongst the Band Leaders at Fetter Lane, meeting the leaders on a regular basis, at his home,<sup>210</sup> and at the Society room.<sup>211</sup> Charles Wesley's *Journal* refers only once to meeting the female Band Leaders' on the 11<sup>th</sup> May 1740<sup>212</sup> He also records meeting the male Band Leaders' once.<sup>213</sup> At that meeting he discovered Fetter Lane were holding meetings contemporaneously with the Foundery to prevent Fetter Lane members attending.

The Wesleys' pastoral and spiritual role amongst the bands can be clearly defined. Their presence at the women's bands was allowed as they would expound the Scripture and lead in prayer. In the final months of the Wesleys' membership at Fetter Lane, Charles Wesley anguished over the women's bands and he removed them from Society control.

Whether John Wesley considered himself leader or 'spiritual counsel' is unclear. He took an active part in speaking against stillness, was consulted about the separation of females from the General Meeting, and the posts of monitor and president which indicate a leadership role. In *The Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained*, Wesley described himself as 'having been "but a single, private member of that Society"'.<sup>214</sup> Podmore states that unlike previous religious societies, Wesley's status did not even afford him the role of 'clerical director envisaged in the rules of the older societies'.<sup>215</sup> This view echoes Martin Schmidt's assertion that John Wesley's role was pastoral over all other things, 'Much time was taken up by correspondence which was of a more pastoral

<sup>210</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 372. (Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> January 1739). Wesley also met with the women leaders on the same day as the men. See p. 407. (Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> September 1739).

<sup>211</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 377. (Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> February 1739).

<sup>212</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 228. (Sunday May 11<sup>th</sup> 1740).

<sup>213</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 229. (Tuesday May 13<sup>th</sup> 1740). Wesley noted 'above twenty of the still brethren there'.

<sup>214</sup> J. Wesley, *The Principles of a Methodist farther Explained*, in J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 172.

<sup>215</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian Church*, p. 45.



nature than it had previously been.<sup>216</sup> Molther however affords a leadership role for John and Charles, 'the society in Fetter Lane had been under the care of John and Charles Wesley.'<sup>217</sup> Martin Schmidt, citing the account of the Moravian Church in England of 1747 and signed by leading Moravians, stated that if Molther had given John Wesley leadership, the separation might not have occurred.<sup>218</sup> Their position within the Society then remains unclear.

The Society lacked a clear leadership structure. Perhaps leadership was collegial. This is implied by Wesley's response to the issue of the exclusion of women from the general meeting, 'I wish it might not be done before we have talked together'.<sup>219</sup> Once the issue was settled, without Wesley's attendance at a meeting, he accepted the decision. Similarly Wesley believed the issue of president needed more thought, 'Would not that [require] more particular consideration?'<sup>220</sup> During Wesley's absence from London in the summer of 1738, James Hutton felt the Society required spiritual direction but not leadership.<sup>221</sup>

Whilst Molther was ill (from April 1740), leadership lay with John Bray, George Stonehouse, John Simpson, Charles Delamotte, William Oxley and Richard Bell. These leaders' were amongst the group of whom Wesley wrote in his *Journal* 'I had a long conference with those whom I esteem very highly in love.'<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> M. Schmidt, *John Wesley*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 16.

<sup>217</sup> D. Benham, *Memoirs of James Hutton*, p. 53. See also *The Life of Philip Henry Molther Moravian Messenger*, 1876.

<sup>218</sup> M. Schmidt, *John Wesley*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 41. See Schmidt's footnote numbered 85 on p. 241. Schmidt states this view was a misjudgement of the real situation, but nonetheless a view held by the Moravians.

<sup>219</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 588.

<sup>220</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 588.

<sup>221</sup> J.N. Libby, (translator & editor), 'James Hutton's "Account"', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XV, Part 7, p. 186.

<sup>222</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 139. (Entry for the 21<sup>st</sup> February 1740).

The German brethren's involvement at Fetter Lane was spiritual rather than temporal, although there were several Germans in London during the life of the Society. Prior to July 1740, Molther, Böhler, Spangenberg, Töltschig, and Cossart visited the society, because they had come to London or Oxford, or because they were travelling to and from the colonies. Richter and Piesch, who were in London for longer periods, devoted their time to the Germans as their English was not good enough to have involvement with Fetter Lane.<sup>223</sup> Böhler left London for America on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1738, and Molther was in London for a protracted period between 1739 and 1740. Podmore states clearly that the Germans were not the final cause of the separation of Fetter Lane.<sup>224</sup> Therefore their influence can be taken as limited.

Ingham's letter to Hutton of the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1739 highlighted the lack of decisive leadership, English, or German.<sup>225</sup> Without a single guiding hand, problems were inevitable. It was not until Fetter Lane was organised and led as the Brethren's German congregations were, that ordered leadership was exercised in a disciplined manner.

**Lay leadership:** The responsibility given to lay people, both male and female in Fetter Lane's organisation was exercised in two distinct areas: band leadership and the admission of members.

The bands met regularly and these were in the care of individuals, charged with the task of ensuring the meeting began punctually,<sup>226</sup> 'interrogating'<sup>227</sup> the other members of the band and collecting the payments towards the 'Common

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<sup>223</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian Church*, p. 51.

<sup>224</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian Church*, pp. 67-71.

<sup>225</sup> B. Ingham, to J. Hutton, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1739. MCHpp88-89A.3 [folder 14], Ingham was concerned that there should be 'somebody at the head'.

<sup>226</sup> *Rules A*; no. 9, *Rules B*; no. 8.

<sup>227</sup> *Rules A*; no. 5, *Rules B*; no. 5. See also *Rules A*; no. 11, *Rules B*; no. 10.



Stock'.<sup>228</sup> Leaders also had the task of admonishing those members who failed to attend their band without good reason.<sup>229</sup> Prior to the Wednesday General Meeting the leaders met to discuss the bands<sup>230</sup> and any action they were to take in connection with them. This action was to be reported back the following week. At this meeting, leaders were appointed to settle new bands and visit them. Originally, the leaders were to meet at 'Mr Bray's',<sup>231</sup> but these meetings often occurred at Wesley's home, or the Society Room. The leader's role was three-fold: functionary, ensuring the regulation of a band; spiritual, hearing others speak of their Christian journey; disciplinary, discussing problems and any action to be taken.

The admission of individuals was the second area in which lay leadership was exercised. This is noted because admission was not subject to a clergyman's veto, as under the rules of the Unitary Societies. There is similarity with the later Poplar Rules, where a majority of members admitted new members. Those who wished to join the Society were mentioned by name at the Wednesday General Meeting and answered set questions,<sup>232</sup> following which objections were raised and the prospective member was questioned. If the Society were satisfied after a period 'on trial', final admission was allowed, but only after opportunity was given to once more raise objections.<sup>233</sup> This gave the lay members of the Society the right to object to any person, lay or ordained, and thereby, deny access to the Society. In discussion of the Methodist classes, I will show that admission into the class 'on trial' was not predicated on interrogation prior to

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<sup>228</sup> Rules A; no. 27, Rules B; no. 31.

<sup>229</sup> Rules A; no. 16, Rules B; no. 18.

<sup>230</sup> Rules A; no. 6.

<sup>231</sup> Rules A; no. 6. This was John Bray. Charles Wesley's *Journal* mentions meeting the male leaders at Brays. See C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 229.

<sup>232</sup> Rules A; no. 19, Rules B; no. 21.

<sup>233</sup> Rules A; no's 21-24, Rules B; no's 23-26.

joining, but continuance as a member was subject to showing a developing awareness of sin, awakening or justification.

**Discipline:** Discipline was exercised on two levels. At a routine level, the regularity of the Society's meetings, and the obedience expected of members to meet in band or society as a priority over any other club or society, meant that in Fetter Lane, society members were separated from society in general. The rules drew members away not only from other religious societies, but also from clubs<sup>234</sup> and companies that were not conducive to a Christian life. Fetter Lane's rigorous schedule of meetings separated members from the world, in a manner that Herrnhut achieved through a settled community. Amongst the Fetter Lane membership, regular meetings replaced communal life.

To fail to attend either a general meeting or band meeting was a matter of concern and such behaviour resulted in private and public reprimands.<sup>235</sup> Expulsion from the Society was the final sanction. Charles Wesley was threatened with expulsion from his band by John Bray,

J. Bray asked me whether I should come to my band on Monday. I answered, "No." He modestly replied, "Then you shall be expelled."<sup>236</sup>

Expulsions were dealt with on a Wednesday evening. It was at a general meeting that Fish and Shaw were expelled and at the same meeting, Bray and Bowers' were publicly admonished over their adherence to the French Prophets.<sup>237</sup> At one meeting, Richard Tompson was re-admitted. John Wesley met with him and after 'the scales fell off from his eyes. He gladly returned to

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<sup>234</sup> *Rules A: no 15; Rules B: no 17.*

<sup>235</sup> *Rules A: no 16; Rules B: no 18.*

<sup>236</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 210.

<sup>237</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 153. See also J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 69.



the Church and was in the evening re-admitted into our society.<sup>238</sup> 175

Whitefield's *Journal* gives the impression that those who left the Society over doctrinal issues constituted a 'purging' of the Society.<sup>239</sup>

No prospective member could be in any doubt of the Society's codified expectations.<sup>240</sup> An individual's religious affiliation or state of faith was unimportant as the latter was tested during the 'on trial' period. Rather, the questions asked about sincerity of purpose, openness, honesty and submission to others were important to move from 'on trial' to full membership.

On a deeper level, members were expected to be committed to the Society. Here discipline surrounded the secrecy towards non-members about the matters discussed in band, society meetings and lovefeasts. Confidentiality allowed openness amongst members in every aspect of their life, knowing that even those with whom a member shared a family or working bond, would not divulge to any other person any matter mentioned.

Such closeness and secrecy allowed for antagonists to raise any number of accusations against the Society. Charles Wesley's *Journal* notes the Rev Henry Piers, Vicar of Bexley, ceased meeting 'through fear of the world's threatenings.'<sup>241</sup> Perhaps his inability wholly to explain the proceedings of the Society may have provoked an adverse reaction from his congregation.

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<sup>238</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 71. See footnote 59.

<sup>239</sup> G. Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals*, p. 261.

<sup>240</sup> *Rules A*: no 19; *Rules B*: no 21.

<sup>241</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 134. Henry Piers also closed his pulpit to Charles Wesley.

Fetter Lane always faced the possibility of being termed a conventicle, or Dissenter's meeting. The Wesleys met Bishop Gibson of London<sup>242</sup> and enquired whether religious societies were conventicles. Bishop Gibson's response was "No; I think not: however, you can read the acts and laws as well as I: I determine nothing."<sup>243</sup> Over time, their position became more difficult as neither brother was licensed to a parish. Bullock pointed out that their work amongst the societies was irregular, and he argued that this was one reason for the closure of London pulpits to them.<sup>244</sup> Early in 1740 the Foundery was presented as a 'seditious assembly'<sup>245</sup> to a local court. This society also had rules relating to openness in conversation at meetings.<sup>246</sup> Whilst there was no explicit direction to privacy, it may be assumed that this was expected. The Foundery, like Fetter Lane, laid itself open to accusations of sedition. The main problem was simply whether the societies were public or private meetings. Whitefield believed they were private 'in imitation of the primitive Christians.'<sup>247</sup> Those who allowed societies to meet in private homes were also threatened with prosecution.<sup>248</sup>

Discipline was further exercised by continual fast and continual intercession.<sup>249</sup> No doubt for John and Charles Wesley these repetitive activities, when added to observance of the means of grace, assisted in the acquisition and development of faith. One can only presume that the doctrine of stillness, when

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<sup>242</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 133. John Wesley does not refer to this meeting either in his *Diary* or in the *Journal*. Susanna Wesley's involvement in the 'Evening prayers controversy' in 1711 and 1712 was a cause of concern for Samuel Wesley, as he believed that the prayers at the Epworth rectory might have constituted a conventicle. See S. Wesley, *Susanna Wesley*, pp. 78-83. Note especially Susanna's reply to her husband dated 25<sup>th</sup> February 1711/1712, pp. 81-83.

<sup>243</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 133.

<sup>244</sup> F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 178.

<sup>245</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 236.

<sup>246</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, pp. 77-78.

<sup>247</sup> G. Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals*, p. 202.

<sup>248</sup> G. Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals*, p. 204.

<sup>249</sup> *Rules A*: no's 29 and 30; *Rules B*: no's 29 and 30.



readily accepted amongst the Society members, affected not only observance of the means of grace but also observance of these early rules.

The Fetter Lane Society progressed members' religious life beyond the experience of the Unitary Societies. Societies which had met to deepen personal piety and perhaps advance trade were superseded by a Society that met to create a community of warm hearted Christians whose entire life centred on the Society, and the living of a regulated Christian life beyond the Society's walls.

**Communal living:** A striking development in societal organisation was the 'The House', a 'quasi-Moravian' community in Islington, where 'members could experiment with community life.'<sup>250</sup> Whitefield was initially against this development, believing servants would renounce their employment, and that a new congregation would be formed with no allegiance to the Church of England. He was also concerned that William Seward, who was working with Whitefield in Bristol would be the sole financial support for the venture.<sup>251</sup> Seward wrote that neither he nor Whitefield could 'see the expediency of this House at Islington'.<sup>252</sup> Whitefield later wrote that he hoped the venture would succeed, and commented that as 'Brother Paterson, and Brother and Sister Ansell find are engaged there, so that I now propose, God willing, taking a young man of their profession'.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> C.J. Podmore, *The Moravian Church*, p. 52.

<sup>251</sup> George Whitefield to James Hutton, 14<sup>th</sup> March 1739, (AB106.A3.14.33). Whitefield was also concerned that enemies of the Fetter Lane Society would have good reason to complain about the society, and that the membership might show disaffection to King George III and the Church of England through the leasing of the house.

<sup>252</sup> William Seward to James Hutton, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1738 (1739), (AB101.A3.4.13).

<sup>253</sup> George Whitefield to James Hutton, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1738 (1739), (AB101.A3.4.17).

The House was leased in the Cambridge Road, and named 'Shiloh'.<sup>254</sup>

Joseph Periam, a resident of the House, was apparently unhappy with the rules imposed upon the residents. Whitefield wrote to him:

It is, no doubt, your duty, whilst you are in the house, to submit yourself to the rules of it; but, then, you may use all lawful means to get yourself out. I have just now been with your sister, and will see what can be done further. Watch and pray.<sup>255</sup>

Wesley did not take this aspect of Fetter Lane's life into his own structure, although his early societies at Kingswood, Newcastle and London provided for a 'housekeeper'.

### Chapter Summary:

At the separation from Fetter Lane in 1740, a unique society, which broke the mould of the religious life in England, came to an end. This chapter has traced the development and major emphases of the Fetter Lane Society, and discussed how Fetter Lane offered a deeper experience of faith to men and women, influencing not only contemporaneous societies, but also the later Anglican Societies. Fetter Lane's foundation awakened the need for a fuller experience of faith, based upon the previously unpopular doctrines of New Birth, justification and assurance.

Fetter Lane offered to English religion the warm piety of Moravianism, which was countered both by Wesley's own Anglicanism expressed through the Methodist movement, and by the established Church, who assimilated pietist doctrine without the organisational structure. Although the Unitary Societies survived, the pattern of religious life irrevocably changed with the introduction of

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<sup>254</sup> C.J. Podmore, 'The Fetter Lane Society, 1739-1740', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XLVII, p. 161.

<sup>255</sup> G. Whitefield, *The Letters of George Whitefield For the period 1734-1742* (Chatham: Banner of Truth Trust. 1976) p. 497.



the Moravian Church into England from 1740, and the growth of the Methodist movement.

Section two will chart the development of the Methodist Societies and analyse the distinctive aspects of the Methodist Class meeting. From 1740, once Wesley was free to pursue his own movement without the hindrance of the Established Church, or the indecisive leadership of Fetter Lane, the resultant movement was a unique contribution into English religious life.

This section has mapped the origins of Wesley's theology, doctrine and practice, by grounding the same within the religious and social milieu of his period, his familial background, and the religious associations of which he was aware, or was actively involved with. The context of this section sets into their proper places Methodism and the class meeting in the eighteenth century Evangelical Revival. The uniqueness of the approach I have taken so far, to scrutinise, chronologically and analytically, the precursors to Methodism enables the following sections to be more fully understood, and appraised for their originality and discussion of the class both as *crown* and *cross*.

## Section Two

### Introductory Comments

The following chapter comprises section two of the thesis. Within the chapter is a chronological study of the origins and development of the class meeting. This will show that the class did not begin until 1742, two years after Methodism's inception, and that its initial purpose was financial, rather than pastoral, experiential or affective.

Methodism was as regulated as its earlier counterparts. The chapter contains an original comparison of the Methodist's rules with those of Samuel Walker, who ran a contemporaneous Society with Wesley's in Truro, and with Fetter Lane, the Society Wesley left to form his own movement. Once Wesley recognised that the Class meeting could provide a level of support, discipline and discipling not found in the extant movement, he quickly re-aligned Methodism to include the class as the introductory group to which all aspiring Methodists had to belong.

The subsequent analysis of the purpose of the class, detailed in four subsections: fellowship, conversion and discipleship, financial accountability and discipline, allows the thesis' development and fully assesses the class meeting as the 'crown' of Methodism's life. The meeting was genuinely affective for those who came to faith in the 'first wave' of Methodism's life, or who came to Methodism during periods of dispute or persecution.

A review of the class meeting is followed by a study of Methodism using two approaches within social science; social identity and group processes. The processes that occur within these two methodologies offer further insight into



the success of the class as a 'crown' for Methodism. Through these two aspects of the thesis, I show how prospective early Methodists actively chose to join a local society, having appraised the opportunities which membership offered, and subsequently having joined, how individuals became aligned within the class to hold the same beliefs, values and opinions.

## Chapter 5: The Classes of Methodism

### Context

With the break from the Moravians at Fetter Lane and the Calvinists under George Whitefield,<sup>1</sup> Wesley was free to pursue the development of Methodism without the checks and balances of other individuals or groups. From 1740 he would remain firmly in control of the polity and practice of the Methodist people, not only through his leadership of the later Conference but also through his publications, and regular visitations to societies around the developing Methodist Connexion.

In 1740 the Wesleyan movement ran along an east-west axis between London and Bristol, with the major centres being England's two largest cities of the time, with some societies dotted along the road between them. Once free to pursue his own movement's aims, Wesley lost no time in seeking to expand the movement throughout Britain.

Just as in London and Bristol, Wesley seized opportunities to take over pre-existing societies in the process of expansion. Henry Rack's description of John Wesley is apt, 'Wesley, to put it rather brutally, was a great cannibalizer.'<sup>2</sup> This can be seen in the assimilation of William Darney's Societies in Yorkshire. Darney, a Scot, knew William Grimshaw of Haworth, and in 1747 his Societies were offered to Benjamin Ingham. Ingham refused to take them. Shortly afterwards, when Charles Wesley visited Grimshaw, there was no such reluctance, and Darney's Societies came to the Methodists.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 260. After meeting with George Whitefield on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1742 Wesley decided he would act independently of Whitefield, 'I go on my way, whether he goes with me or stays behind.'

<sup>2</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 214.

<sup>3</sup> F. Baker, *William Grimshaw 1708-63* (London: Epworth Press. 1963) p. 101.



Attention here will be given to the creation of classes and bands and the process of visitation to the Methodist Societies. Personal testimonials and Wesley's own pronouncements through letters, publications and the Conference will help to show how the classes and bands remained the focal point of the Wesleyan movement.

### Emerging Wesleyan Regulation

The geographical rise of Methodism is not within the remit of this thesis, but it is important to note the development of Methodism to the opening of Wesley's northern base, the Orphan House in Newcastle. In May 1742, Wesley visited Donnington Park, home of the Countess of Huntingdon, for the first time. From there, he set out with John Taylor, a servant of the Countess, towards Yorkshire.<sup>4</sup>

In Wakefield, John Wesley met John Nelson, a stonemason who had been converted through his preaching at Moorfields. Nelson returned to Yorkshire, feeling called to do so whilst receiving communion in St Paul's Cathedral.<sup>5</sup> The closeness of the evangelical circle can be seen from Nelson's disappointment that more of his family had not been converted by the Rev Benjamin Ingham.<sup>6</sup>

Nelson's preaching was successful,<sup>7</sup> but he soon fell out with Ingham, whose own religious societies were growing across Yorkshire. It was at one of Ingham's societies that Nelson met David Taylor, John Taylor's brother. Nelson

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<sup>4</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 266. See footnote 66 for a short biography of John Taylor. See also J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, p. 76. Lady Huntingdon described John Taylor as possessing 'a sweet and humble spirit'.

<sup>5</sup> J. Nelson, 'The Journal of John Nelson', in *Preachers*, Vol. I, p. 37. See also J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, pp. 434. (*A Short History of the People Called Methodists*).

<sup>6</sup> J. Nelson, 'The Journal of John Nelson', in *Preachers*, Vol I, p. 37. 'I was greatly disappointed; for I expected to find many of my relations converted, as I understood they attended Mr. Ingham's preaching.'

<sup>7</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 267.

described David Taylor's preaching as a 'dry morsel'.<sup>8</sup> John Nelson's account of an Inghamite society meeting shows that they were very similar to unitary Anglican Societies:

I went afterwards to a meeting of Mr Ingham's, where one read in an old book for nearly an hour; then sung a hymn, and read a form of prayer.<sup>9</sup>

Wesley was not breaking new ground in the evangelical revival, as John Nelson, Benjamin Ingham and David Taylor were all preaching in England, and Ingham at least was forming societies. Howel Harris<sup>10</sup> and Daniel Rowland<sup>11</sup> were preaching in Wales, and Harris would later be active with the Calvinistic Methodists.

Benjamin Ingham remained in contact with the Moravians and Peter Böhler came to minister in Yorkshire in Ingham's absence. Böhler did not initially espouse stillness, appearing, according to Nelson, to preach 'Wesley's doctrine'.<sup>12</sup> It was only later that Böhler began to advise Ingham's followers to be still. At Ingham's invitation the Moravians moved into his societies.<sup>13</sup> 'The Moravians themselves, who had commissioned workers to go to Yorkshire in May 1742 and sent them off a few weeks later, were going in a response to an invitation from Ingham to take over a group of societies he had founded.'<sup>14</sup> That journey concluded in Bristol in late June 1742.

Wesley's ministry centred as much on 'putting out fires' as on evangelism. The return to Bristol was marked by disputes and he spent five days<sup>15</sup> resolving

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<sup>8</sup> J. Nelson, 'The Journal of John Nelson', in *Preachers*, Vol. I, p. 38.

<sup>9</sup> J. Nelson, 'The Journal of John Nelson', in *Preachers*, Vol. I, p. 39.

<sup>10</sup> See G. Tudur, 'Howel(I) Harris', in *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland*, pp. 149-150.

<sup>11</sup> See G. Tudur, 'Daniel Rowland', in *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland*, pp. 301-302.

<sup>12</sup> J. Nelson, 'The Journal of John Nelson', in *Preachers*, Vol. I, p. 48.

<sup>13</sup> J. Nelson, 'The Journal of John Nelson', in *Preachers*, Vol. I, pp. 50-57.

<sup>14</sup> H.D Rack H.D, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 216.

<sup>15</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 282.



those disagreements before travelling to a society in Cardiff and later returning to London. Whilst in London, Wesley's mother Susanna died. John's letter to his brother informing him of his mother's death is almost matter of fact. After briefly describing his mother's last moments, he asks his brother, 'Now, I would have you send me word immediately, whom I shall take into the house, to keep the accounts .... And what [[woman, young or old, in the place of Betty Brown]]? I wait your answer.'<sup>16</sup> The letter concludes, 'She is to be buried tomorrow evening. Adieu!'<sup>17</sup>

In early August, Wesley was again journeying to Bristol, having removed some from the London societies who did not 'show their faith by works'.<sup>18</sup> Wesley records an incident with one Mr Graves who had repudiated any allegiance to the Methodists, and who subsequently 'recanted' of the repudiation. Wesley 'regulated'<sup>19</sup> the Kingswood society and returned to London. Once again in London, problems arose with the Foundery Society, in the form of stillness which despite the separation from the Moravians had not been overcome.<sup>20</sup>

At this time, Lucy Godshall, an early member of the bands at Fetter Lane, died. Wesley had removed her from the bands after about two years, as he believed she was 'weary and faint in her mind'.<sup>21</sup> This action caused her to reappraise her state and she was eventually readmitted. Her experience is highly charged. She felt Satan was sifting her as wheat, which led to her whole being coming under 'darkness and heaviness'.<sup>22</sup> She eventually found peace and died.

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<sup>16</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, p. 82. See also J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, pp. 282-291. This is the *Journal* account of his mother's death, and burial and is followed by two letters Susanna had written to her son.

<sup>17</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, p. 83.

<sup>18</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 291.

<sup>19</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 294.

<sup>20</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 296. See the entry for September 8<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 296.

<sup>22</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 296.

Wesley's defence of Lucy Godshall's experience led to an accusation of enthusiasm.<sup>23</sup>

The charge of enthusiasm was not unusual in Wesley's experience, and neither was the report to him a few days later from a woman (probably Mrs Sparrow) who accused him of being a papist. In a conversation with another woman (Miss Gregory), Mrs Sparrow was told that Wesley had rocked the cradle on Christmas Eve, and had taught Miss Gregory whilst she was in the bands to pray to the saints and the Virgin Mary. Mrs Sparrow's response was to enquire why no other members of Miss Gregory's band accepted the same teaching and believed Wesley to be a papist. Miss Gregory stated that Wesley's religion was a 'secret yet'<sup>24</sup> and that one had to belong to the bands for a while before this was made clear.

The growth of the societies was hindered by personal accusations made against Wesley, which clearly left some uneasy, despite being attracted to the movement. Notwithstanding the clear prejudice levelled against Wesley and the early Methodists, it is clear that many found an experience of God which was personal and life-changing. On travelling to Bristol in September 1742, Wesley received notes from society members who wanted to thank God for mercies they had received through faith.<sup>25</sup> These thanksgivings range from a new understanding of the love of God, to a sense of personal forgiveness. It is surely in these simple personal testimonies that one of the keys to the structure of Methodism lay. Within a close and watchful system where each individual is personally accountable, and where the experience of others is publicly known

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<sup>23</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 296. See footnote 76.

<sup>24</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, pp. 298-299.

<sup>25</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, pp. 297-298.



(and possibly seen), faith was not merely cerebral but a warmed heart experience.

Similar experiential accounts can be found in the *Early Methodist Volume*.<sup>26</sup> These accounts, primarily from the early 1740's were written to Charles Wesley.<sup>27</sup> In part, they are intended to be used as encouragement for other society members: 'I doubt not that you will allow this written admission into the close band. I have no doubt'.<sup>28</sup> The testimonies also provided anecdotal evidence to rebut arguments in favour of stillness. It is also clear that the writers have much from their personal experience to thank God for. The death account of Joanna Barber shows how her faith was assured, 'When the time came that the Lord was about to take her to himself...being asked if she had anything that burthen'd her mind she answer'd no, she knew that Christ had taken away all her sins'.<sup>29</sup> The phrase used by Wesley of his conversion experience: 'A brand plucked from the burning', was used by others of their conversion.<sup>30</sup> For Samuel Webb, the thanksgiving, which he owed to God for his salvation, translated into a desire to evangelise others:

I believed in the witness of the Spirit accordingly I declared it to brother Cooper in Band and from that time for 3 months (to the best of my remembrance) I had such a glowing a bigness in my breasts that I thought it my duty to invite all men to seek the Lord.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> The *Early Methodist Volume* is part of the Special Collection at the John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

<sup>27</sup> See also the personal testimonies contained within K. Morgan, 'Methodist Testimonials for Bristol Collected by Charles Wesley in 1742' in *Reformation and Revival in Eighteenth-Century Bristol (Bristol Record Society's Publications, Volume XLV)* (eds. J. Barry, & K. Morgan; Stroud: Bristol Record Society. 1994)

<sup>28</sup> Testimonial: Joseph Carter to Charles Wesley, November 1741. *Early Methodist Volume*, p. 17. See also the note to Mary Fletcher regarding Rebecca Lloyd's sanctification in *The Fletcher Tooth Collection* at the JRULM. MA Fl. 38.1 The note was intended to be read publicly.

<sup>29</sup> Testimonial: Account of the death of Joanna Barber to Charles Wesley, February 1752, p. 22. Joanna Barber had been a follower of John Wesley before the split from Fetter Lane. From the *Early Methodist Volume*.

<sup>30</sup> Margaret Austin, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1740, p. 1. Catherine Gilbert, 1740, p. 6. Both are from the *Early Methodist Volume*.

<sup>31</sup> Samuel Webb to Charles Wesley: 20<sup>th</sup> November 1741, p. 18. *Early Methodist Volume*

In November 1742 John Wesley visited the young Newcastle Society. The period spent in Newcastle from 13<sup>th</sup> November to 30<sup>th</sup> December,<sup>32</sup> gives a picture of the method which Wesley used to encourage and evangelise. Days were spent field preaching, preaching to the society, meeting with the Society and individual members, preaching at the local hospitals and travelling around the surrounding area of Newcastle to preach and meet with other societies.

Wesley reported the people of Newcastle to be less convinced of sin than in other places where the Methodists were at work, but declared the work which was underway to be 'evenly and gradually carried on. It continually rises step by step.'<sup>33</sup> However, there was one instance of enthusiasm, when John Brown<sup>34</sup> rode through town, declaring he had received a revelation from God. Wesley's response was to rebuke him and send him home.<sup>35</sup> The building of the Orphan House began on the 20<sup>th</sup> December<sup>36</sup> and provided a base in the north of England.

Wesley's practice of regularly examining the spirituality of society members is seen through the few days spent in February 1743 in the London Society. With Charles, John Wesley met with the members to examine their spiritual state: 'My brother and I began visiting the society together, which employed us from six in the morning every day till near six in the evening.'<sup>37</sup> Charles Wesley's *Journal* gives a fuller account of this visitation, and he seems to have been stricter in examination than his brother; for he writes of one woman who told

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<sup>32</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, pp. 301-309.

<sup>33</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 303.

<sup>34</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, pp. 303-304. See footnote 3. Brown became an evangelist and began societies.

<sup>35</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 304.

<sup>36</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 305.

<sup>37</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 314.



John Wesley that she had a 'constant sense of forgiveness'.<sup>38</sup> Charles' deeper questioning of her led to the startling admission that she despised a fellow member. The remedy in this instance was prayer, but Charles makes the comment 'I fear we have many such believers among us.'<sup>39</sup>

By now, the organisation of Methodism as a distinct group within the evangelical revival needed structured guidelines. Wesley had already published the *Rules of the Band Societies* in December 1738. In Newcastle in early 1743 Wesley published *The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies in London, Bristol, Kings-wood and Newcastle upon Tyne*.<sup>40</sup> The *Rules* were first read on the 6<sup>th</sup> March 1743 to the Newcastle Society. Wesley's intention in publishing them was to stir the Society in that he 'desired everyone seriously to consider whether he was willing to conform thereto or no. That this would shake many of them I knew well'.<sup>41</sup> The next day, Wesley began visiting the classes to reinforce his intention that these rules should be followed.

There is a degree of apologetic within the preamble to the *Rules* setting out the rise of Methodism and the purpose of the *Rules* themselves. Once published, the *Rules* became a public document, and therefore Wesley may have been anxious to preface his own, quite distinct organisational rules with a statement outlining the need for them.

It is quite obvious from the preamble that Wesley's creation of societies was in his view the result of a few individuals coming to him.<sup>42</sup> This is not wholly true. However, the reason for the desire to create these societies was far different

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<sup>38</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 305.

<sup>39</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. I, p. 305.

<sup>40</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, pp. 67-75. See Appendix 10.

<sup>41</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 317.

<sup>42</sup> Appendix 10: Paragraph 1. See also J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 69.

from the Anglican Church's reasons to create societies. Methodists had to actively seek Christ and salvation, and pursue a holy life.

For Wesley, entry into a society was open; men and women, young and old could meet together and seek to become holy through personal piety and communal meeting, prayer, worship and study. Growth as a Christian in the Methodist Society was not accomplished alone, rather it was to be a mutual experience through regular meeting, and as the preamble states, members were to 'watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation'.<sup>43</sup> The first subdivision of the society according to the 1743 *Rules* was the class, and in this small group it could be 'more easily discerned whether they are indeed working out their own salvation.'<sup>44</sup>

There was a single reason for admission. 'A desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins'.<sup>45</sup> The corollary to such an open membership policy was that those who wanted to remain in membership should be 'doing no harm',<sup>46</sup> 'doing good',<sup>47</sup> and 'attending upon all the ordinances of God'.<sup>48</sup> Membership of a class was the way in which these rules were worked out in daily living. In case there were any questions however, the subdivisions of each of the three 'rules' were highly prescriptive, covering everything from 'buying or selling spirituous liquors; or drinking them'<sup>49</sup> to regularly attending 'The Supper of the Lord'.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Appendix 10: Paragraph 2. J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 69.

<sup>44</sup> Appendix 10: Paragraph 3. J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 69.

<sup>45</sup> Appendix 10: Paragraph 4. J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 70.

<sup>46</sup> Appendix 10. J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, pp. 70-72.

<sup>47</sup> Appendix 10: Paragraph 5. J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 72.

<sup>48</sup> Appendix 10: Paragraph 6. J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 73.

<sup>49</sup> Appendix 10: Paragraph 4. J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 70.

<sup>50</sup> Appendix 10: Paragraph 6. J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 73.



## Methodist Rules and Walker's Rules Compared

Wesley's *Rules* contrast with the rules of the Rev Samuel Walker's Truro Society.<sup>51</sup> However both sets of rules envisage that members should affect a particular behaviour. Rule 9 of appendix 5 is the single rule dealing with personal, social conduct. In the longer rules of appendix 4 the entire preamble<sup>52</sup> is concerned with the manner in which members behave, and these are similar to the Methodist rules of 1743. The rules also deal with personal conduct, but from a more disciplinarian stance.<sup>53</sup>

Samuel Walker's Truro Society accommodated women, but the rules in both appendices ensured that single men and women were in separate societies, and Walker did not have classes or bands on the Methodist pattern. In the Methodist Societies, men and women were together at society meetings, and in classes but segregated in the band.

Walker's rules contain the written prayers that are prescribed for use by society members at meetings. One can assume that Walker wanted to ensure there was no place for extempore prayer. Wesley's societies allowed extempore prayer in society, class and band meetings. The Methodists were also intended to form an interdependency not envisaged by Walker. Walker's presence was required for all matters of society discipline. This was not so for the Methodist Societies. Rule 7 of the *General Rules* show a form of dependence that allows for one to speak to a 'rule breaker' and ultimately to a leader so that action may be taken.<sup>54</sup> This rule shows an accountability that was not seen in any other

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<sup>51</sup> See Appendices 4 and 5.

<sup>52</sup> See Appendix 4: pp. 389-393.

<sup>53</sup> See appendix 4: rules 7 and 8

<sup>54</sup> Appendix 10: Rule 7. 'If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any one of them, let it be made known unto them who watch over that soul, as they that must give account. We will bear with him for a season. But if then he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls.'

society. Members are not merely watching each other for disciplinary purposes, but for salvific reasons: an individual's salvation may rest upon your speaking or remaining silent. The member who errs is given the opportunity to repent and rejoin the society. It was mutually important for each member to ensure his or her neighbours were walking in an orderly manner, for this ensured each member did so.

Walker sought exclusivity for his Society, refusing his members' involvement with any other society. Rule 4 details stringent entry requirements, and confined membership to inhabitants of Truro. Fetter Lane<sup>55</sup> had a similar rule, although this was not as prescriptively written. Walker wanted to ensure his Society remained Anglican, as he saw the Methodists as a threat to the stability of his parish and his congregation. Samuel Walker referred to the earliest Unitary Society rules, which had exactly the same prescriptive membership requirement.

### Methodist Rules and Fetter Lane's Rules Compared

What are the differences between the 1743 rules, which Wesley introduced, and the earlier rules of Fetter Lane, rules to which Wesley acquiesced? As there are three sets of rules, I shall compare the Methodist rules with the longest set of Fetter Lane rules.

Of primary interest is the difference in the method of rule creation. The leaders at Fetter Lane created their rules in an *ad hoc* manner. Initially consisting of rules 1 and 2,<sup>56</sup> later the growing Society was sub-divided into bands, and Leaders appointed. At that time 3 further rules were added. On September 26<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> See Appendix 7: Fetter Lane Rules; Rule 17.

<sup>56</sup> See appendix 7. These two rules set the standard for the earliest admissions to the Fetter lane Society. Later arguments over stillness were not envisaged.



1738,<sup>57</sup> a further 28 rules were added,<sup>58</sup> governing the time and nature of band meetings, and the other associated meetings of the Society. Some rules dealt with the operation of the bands.<sup>59</sup>

Wesley's rules were handed to the United Societies in a completed form. The only names which appear at the end of the rules are his own and his brother's. Here is a complete system of organisation and discipline delivered to a new and growing organisation, which needed some definitive regulations to govern the organisation not simply in one place but in four distinct centres; London, Bristol, Kingswood and Newcastle upon Tyne. Wesley carried into his Societies some of the aims of Fetter Lane, and abandoned others. In 1743 he established rules asserting his leadership and authority over the United Societies, an opportunity he did not have in the more 'egalitarian' leadership of Fetter Lane.

In paragraph 2 of Wesley's *Rules*, the sentiments of the Fetter Lane Rules (appendix 7: rules 1 and 2) are picked up. The earlier 1738 attitude, which allowed members to meet in a spirit of openness and honesty, to confess sins and pray for one another, continued into Methodism. From that point it becomes a little more difficult to correlate the rules with each other as Fetter Lane subdivided into bands, and the Methodists in 1743 were initially subdividing into classes.<sup>60</sup> However, some general points can be made.

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<sup>57</sup> This date is incorrect and should be the 25<sup>th</sup> September (a Monday) as shown in Wesley's *Journal*.

<sup>58</sup> The shorter Fetter Lane Rules, (Herrnhut: 30 rules) have an additional insert on the 20<sup>th</sup> September which appointed the society leaders to meet with the Leaders of the Bands and discuss each band member and to decide what else might need to be undertaken to ensure the running of the society and appoint a leader for and create female bands. This is rule 6 in the shorter rules. Despite John Wesley's name appearing in that rule, he was not present when it was created.

<sup>59</sup> See appendix 7: Rules, 12, 13, 14, 15 & 16.

<sup>60</sup> The Fetter Lane Rules lie more closely with the earlier Band rules drawn up by Wesley in December 1738.

Fetter Lane members, like the Methodists, made regular financial contributions. At Fetter Lane these contributions were for the 'general charge of the bands'.<sup>61</sup> Monetary contributions paid to class leaders were used for a variety of purposes, and are mentioned only in the duties of class leaders.<sup>62</sup>

Wesley's openness towards lay leadership of the classes (and the bands) began at Fetter Lane. Rule 5 of the Fetter Lane Rules<sup>63</sup> allowed laymen and women to have an active part within the leadership. The *Hermhut Rules* indicate Band Leaders were under the direction of the society leaders.<sup>64</sup> Wesley maintained a strict control over his leaders, meeting them frequently.

As the only rule of admission to the Methodist Society was 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins',<sup>65</sup> the way in which this desire was evidenced was through the life of the Society and class as the first sub division of the Society. The earlier Fetter Lane rules have only one rule for admission,<sup>66</sup> which Wesley appears to expand throughout his *General Rules* into a series of behavioural rules covering social, personal, spiritual and commercial conduct.<sup>67</sup>

The notable difference between Wesley's 1743 *Rules* and the Fetter Lane rules of 1738 is the clear prescription to attend 'upon all the ordinances of God',<sup>68</sup> included here as an 'antidote' to stillness which had spread through Fetter Lane and eventually brought about division. John Wesley also included a reference to

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<sup>61</sup> Appendix 7: Rule 31.

<sup>62</sup> Appendix 10: Rule 3, paragraph numbered 2.

<sup>63</sup> Appendix 7: Rule 5 The person placed in charge of the small group was the Band Leader.

<sup>64</sup> Appendix 6: Rule 6.

<sup>65</sup> Appendix 10: Rule 4.

<sup>66</sup> Appendix 7: Rule 21.

<sup>67</sup> Appendix 10: Rules 4 to 6.

<sup>68</sup> Appendix 10: Rule 6.



the need for good works.<sup>69</sup> In 1740, he had written to Zinzendorf and the Herrnhut Church a long letter outlining his grievances against Moravianism.<sup>70</sup>

He protested:

Hence lastly you undervalue good works (especially works of outward mercy), never publicly insisting on the necessity of them, nor declaring their weight and excellency. Hence when some of your brethren have spoken of them they put them on a wrong foot, viz. If you find yourself moved, if your heart is free to it, then reprove, exhort relieve. By this means you wholly avoid the taking up your cross in order to do good;<sup>71</sup>

This grievance for Wesley was as fundamental a failing as stillness, and is set right explicitly within the *General Rules* where good works are an evidence of salvation. The mutual reproof and instruction which Wesley envisaged for the good of a brother or sister could be given in the class, band or privately.

### Wesley's Rules and Perfection

Alongside the *General Rules* stood the earlier *Rules of the Band Societies* drawn up in 1738. Once the *General Rules* were published, the earlier *Rules of the Band Societies* became subservient to the *General Rules* and governed the conduct of the sub division of the class into a smaller, more intimate group, the band. The class or rather the class leader touched with the membership on the individual's spiritual state<sup>72</sup> within a communal meeting where reproof or congratulation was shared equally among the group as encouragement or warning. The band meeting took this mutual accountability deeper in the quest for perfection, or perfect love (also called sanctification).

The rules show that the band was an egalitarian meeting with each person able to question and speak to others (although there was a band leader). Prior to

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<sup>69</sup> Appendix 10: Rule 5.

<sup>70</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, pp. 24-31.

<sup>71</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, p. 30.

<sup>72</sup> Appendix 10: Rule 3, paragraph 1.

admission each person was asked the questions which set the nature of the Band Meeting before the prospective member.<sup>73</sup> There were a series of standard questions asked of each member at each meeting. These questions required honest and full answers and were a part of the process of sanctification. Again, members learned from one another's experience and supported one another in a close fellowship striving for the same ultimate experience, having begun the journey from the same place, often a moment of crisis conversion. In 1744 further *Directions*<sup>74</sup> were issued to the band societies.

The *Directions* have overtones of Wesley's turn to seriousness of 1725, and his quest for primitive Christianity between 1735 and 1737. His quest for a holy life led him to keep a detailed record of his actions and thoughts across each day, and to live in an ascetic manner. Whilst these *Directions* do not have quite the same requirement to document the use of time, section II<sup>75</sup> (rules 1, 2 and 3) indicates a turning away from anything that might be considered as lightness towards a defined lifestyle, which would be noticeably different to the majority of a community and possibly noticeable even amongst society members. In this lifestyle, a practical, outward piety was envisaged, experienced by Wesley from 1725. In some respects, Wesley was creating for others a practical piety, which he had developed having read à Kempis, Taylor and Law.

In the *Directions* Wesley is laying down a simple and effective method of living; ascetic, devoted and useful. These three elements were surely the very things for which Wesley strove as a younger man in Georgia as he sought out the life, worship and practices of the very earliest apostolic Christians, and longed to recapture this primitive Christianity for himself.

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<sup>73</sup> Appendix 12: Rules 1-11. (Second section).

<sup>74</sup> See Appendix 12.

<sup>75</sup> Appendix 12: Directions to the Band Societies.



The journey towards entire sanctification or perfection can be found through the *Directions*. If these *Directions* are seen as a codification of John Wesley's turn towards a serious life, his reflection and assimilation of the authors who brought it about, and the experience of Georgia, the underlying strand of the need for perfection (or perfect love) runs through each of the three sections.

Despite Wesley's feeling that the mystics had almost caused him to flounder spiritually,<sup>76</sup> he never denied the doctrine of perfection which they espoused, and integrated the need for growth towards perfection into the bands. Whilst the class was not specifically for those actively seeking perfection, those made perfect were members of classes

By rejecting the mystics' insistence upon the spiritual life as an introverted journey, yet maintaining the importance of perfection, Wesley wove together a form of communal and personal life that promoted the need for the means of grace and good works. Perfection was, for Wesley, the end result of the process of sanctification, and it was a state that each believer could attain following justification. Watson describes perfection thus; 'it was no more than the corollary of his distinction between the process of sanctification and the immediacy of justifying faith.'<sup>77</sup> Rack is clearer of the importance Wesley placed on love for God, as the key to being perfect. 'To be a "perfect" Christian is to love God with one's whole heart, mind, soul and strength.'<sup>78</sup>

Perfection could be achieved, and the *Directions* and the earlier *Rules of the Band Societies* were intended to help Methodists achieve this state. If this

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<sup>76</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 487.

<sup>77</sup> D.L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, p. 68.

<sup>78</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 397

doctrine of perfection, which often found Wesley embroiled in controversy with his opponents, seems impossible to achieve, Wesley's understanding of sin helps to illuminate how a believer might achieve it. Perfection for Wesley was not to be entirely sinless. Certainly voluntary transgressions (as Wesley termed sin) would mean a believer was not perfect; however, committing involuntary transgressions (breaking a divine law) did not mean a person was not perfect in this life. For that reason Wesley shied away from the term 'sinless perfection', for that would mean that neither voluntary nor involuntary sins were committed. Wesley justified his position in *A Plain Account*. He did not accept that involuntary transgressions were sin in the sense that voluntary transgressions were.<sup>79</sup>

Perfection was more than freedom from voluntary sin; it was the whole of the Christian life. In *A Plain Account*, Wesley refused to allow that those who do not attend the means of grace could claim perfection:

We not only allow, but earnestly contend, that there is no perfection in this life which implies any dispensation from attending all the ordinances of God; or from doing good unto all men while we have time though 'especially unto the household of faith.'<sup>80</sup>

The societies, classes and bands also acted as collegial bodies where one learned from his or her peers how to live the Christian life, and journey towards perfection. This learning and experience could be found in attending all the means of grace

We believe that not only the babes in Christ, who have newly found redemption in His blood, but those also who are "grown up into perfect men," and indispensably obliged, as often as they have opportunity, to "eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of Him," and to "search the Scriptures," by fasting, as well as temperance, "to keep their bodies under, and bring them into subjection"; and, above

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<sup>79</sup> J. Wesley, *A Plain Account*, p. 45.

<sup>80</sup> J. Wesley, *A Plain Account*, p. 28.



all, to pour out their souls in prayer, both secretly, and in the great congregation.<sup>81</sup>

*A Plain Account*, written in 1766, is a retrospective of Wesley's views and there was an element of personal experience for Wesley had travelled the Societies and witnessed the Christian growth of others. Equally, he was offering an apologia for perfection following the perfection controversies of that decade.

Throughout the *Plain Account* he refers to his sermon on *The Circumcision of the Heart*. In it, Wesley sets out his understanding of Christian living. At an early point in the sermon he writes that circumcision of the heart is 'a right state of soul, a mind and spirit renewed after the image of him that created it'.<sup>82</sup> This is evidenced for Wesley by only one thing: love. It is love to God and to neighbour which led an individual to perfection; and as Wesley wrote in conclusion of the sermon 'Here, then, is the sum of the perfect law; this is the true circumcision of the heart.'<sup>83</sup> In the Methodist societies, this love could be expressed in a community of faith. This ideal of love coupled with his understanding of the doctrine of perfection gave to the bands in particular, but to the whole societal structure a dynamic, which was interconnected in a way that no other society could achieve.

### The Class Meeting and Band Meeting Compared

The class and band need some differentiation to understand fully their relationship. As a continuation of Moravian practice, the band was used in Methodism from 1740. The bands were small groups for earnest Christians. This meant that enquirers after faith joined a society, and later were allocated to a band.

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<sup>81</sup> J. Wesley, *A Plain Account*, p. 28.

<sup>82</sup> J. Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions, First Series* (London: Epworth Press. 1944) p. 152. See paragraph 3.

<sup>83</sup> J. Wesley, *Sermons*, p. 161. See paragraph 10.

From 1742, the class became a compulsory group, relegating the band to a meeting for serious believers, and continuing to receive members who were justified. The class however, welcomed enquirers, and class members were placed 'on trial' for a period of three months before membership of the Society was offered. The sole condition of membership of the class was the desire to flee from the wrath to come, and actively seek faith.

The emphasis of the movement changed from society focussed to class focussed. Every society consisted of the total class membership, and every society began as a class. The band took on significance as the group for those pressing after perfection, with the class acting as an introductory and discipling group. The band was further sub-divided into select bands, for those who had attained perfection, and penitential bands, for those who had slipped from the state of perfection.

#### The Formation of the Class meeting

The class began in Bristol, as a means of settling the outstanding debt on the 'New Room' which stood at £150.<sup>84</sup> Wesley carried this debt personally from 1739 to February 1742. At a meeting specifically called to discuss means of discharging it, the suggestion was put forward to divide the Society into groups, and make each member responsible for a penny each week towards settling the debt. A leader was put over each class, charged to visit house to house to collect the money and deliver it to the stewards.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 56.

<sup>85</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 251.



The person responsible for this revolutionary suggestion was Captain Foy, thought to be a mariner from Bristol, whom Wesley mentions only once by name in his *Thoughts upon Methodism* of 1786,

A year or two after Mr. Wesley met the chief of the society in Bristol, and inquired, 'How shall we pay the debt upon the preaching-house?' Captain Foy stood up and said, 'Let everyone in the society give a penny a week and it will easily be done.'<sup>86</sup>

Foy was unwittingly responsible for the close and careful system of accountability that was to sweep through the Methodist movement, replacing the band as the primary small group meeting, and becoming the place at which every Methodist began their Christian life in fellowship.

Captain Foy might properly be described as 'elusive'. He received little credit from Wesley for his idea and has become a footnote in Methodist folklore. The most detailed investigation into Foy's background can be found in a 1902 article of the *Proceedings*, although that article is entirely inconclusive.<sup>87</sup> My own attempt at tracing him using a maritime researcher<sup>88</sup> proved equally inconclusive.

Frank Baker stated that the class filled a position of pastoral oversight within the Methodist framework, an oversight that was not possible with the system of bands and society alone,

With very large societies such as those at Bristol and London adequate pastoral oversight by visiting necessitated some delegation of responsibility, and something much more definite than expecting the band members in general to keep their eye on the peripheral members of the society.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 528.

<sup>87</sup> H.J. Foster, 'Bristol Methodist Notes. V.-Who Was Captain Foy?', in *Proceedings*, Vol. III, pp. 64-65.

<sup>88</sup> The firm were Tim Hughes & Associates of Twickenham.

<sup>89</sup> F. Baker, 'The People Called Methodists 3: Polity', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. 1, p. 222.

Wesley related the development of the class in his *Thoughts*,<sup>90</sup> and in a letter of 1748 to Vincent Perronet, commonly called, *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*. In short, the leaders found visiting from house to house onerous<sup>91</sup> and also discovered that Methodists were not behaving as if they were indeed on the path to perfection, 'In a while, some of these informed me, they found such and such an one did not live as he ought.'<sup>92</sup>

From Wesley's viewpoint, at this early stage it appears the class was a disciplinary tool. Those who were disorderly, or failed to live out their faith, could be disciplined more simply if there was a means of closely following members' behaviour. Some would be put out of the society, others reproved, and the remainder of the class were no doubt suitably chastened, and urged to pray for their erring brothers and sisters. ...

Although the class quickly became the point of entry for all Methodists, John Evans a soldier under the command of Captain Desagulier in Brussels, was not aware of the class in 1744. He belonged to a society of soldiers;

(the) United Society is divided into Bands. Our manner of meeting at Ghent is this: we hired two rooms, one a small one, wherein the bands do meet every day, at One o'Clock; and another large one for Public Meeting, where we meet twice a day, at Nine in the Morning, and Four in the Afternoon.<sup>93</sup>

Baker however notes that once classes 'were established there was a strong tendency for the classes to oust the bands from their key position'.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>90</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, pp. 528-529.

<sup>91</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 261.

<sup>92</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, pp. 260-261.

<sup>93</sup> Letter: John Evans to John Wesley, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1744, in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. I, p. 277. Evans was killed at the battle of Fontenoy (word in italics mine).

<sup>94</sup> F. Baker, 'The People Called Methodists 3: Polity', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Britain and Ireland*, Vol. I, p. 223.



Once the class became the entry point, possession of a class ticket enabled entry to the society meeting. Entry restrictions were carefully maintained, as Thomas Olivers discovered. Despite attending the public service, he was ejected before the society meeting began, 'When the public preaching was over on a Sunday evening, and I, along with the multitude, was shut out from the Society, I used to go to a field at the back of the preaching-house, and listen while they sang the praises of God.'<sup>95</sup> Sarah Perrin, who had been a follower of the Wesleys since 1740, found herself in the same position in 1743 as she had not been baptised, and was therefore excluded from membership, but not the open meeting:

My trouble is deepened since I spoke to thy brother (Charles Wesley) for I had let it into my mind from the Rules you Publish'd that I was to be excluded the Society but he tells me we that do not think the same way may be of the united society and so far as you will admit me so far will I join with you.<sup>96</sup>

The class was not universally well received. Wesley noted that some felt the class was simply a means of regulation and restraint, others that it was something new in the Methodist system and others that there was no Scriptural warrant to allow for it.<sup>97</sup> For Wesley the class was a prudential<sup>98</sup> means of grace: that is a tool which assists the Christian in their journey towards sanctification. In the *Large Minutes*, the following question is asked, 'Q. Do we sufficiently watch over our helpers?' In the response, a discussion of instituted and prudential means, the answer is made under the prudential means, '*Prudential Means* we may use, either as common Christians, as Methodists, as

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<sup>95</sup> T. Olivers, 'The Life of Thomas Olivers', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. II, p. 85.

<sup>96</sup> Letter: Sarah Perrin to John Wesley. June 9<sup>th</sup> 1743. From: *Letters Chiefly to the Wesley's Volume II*. JRULM (words in brackets mine).

<sup>97</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, pp. 262-263.

<sup>98</sup> See J. Wesley, *Minutes of the Methodist Conference*, Vol. I, pp. 548-554. The questions and answers in relation to the means of grace first appeared in the *Large Minutes* of 1763.

Preachers, or as Assistants ... 2. As Methodists, do you never miss any meeting of the Society? Neither your Class or Band?<sup>99</sup>

Objections were raised to the suitability of the class leaders, as none were specifically trained for the role. In *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*,<sup>100</sup> Wesley displays something of his pragmatism, accepting the criticism. However, he argued that God would give leaders the grace and abilities they need; that meeting regularly with the minister would enable them to improve; and any who were unsuitable could be removed.<sup>101</sup>

Finding sufficient class leaders must have been difficult for Wesley. Grace Murray, at one time matron at the Orphan House in Newcastle led extremely large classes, 'I had a full hundred in Classes, whom I met in two separate meetings; and a Band for each day of the week.'<sup>102</sup> Leaders also had care of more than one class, as Benjamin Rhodes accounted. 'I was desired to lead several classes'.<sup>103</sup> Youth was not a bar to leading classes. Mary Bosanquet<sup>104</sup> and Judith Land became class leaders at only 18.<sup>105</sup> Mary Bosanquet was appointed by Wesley.<sup>106</sup>

In March 1742 classes were introduced in London, and Wesley proposed an alternative purpose;

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<sup>99</sup> J. Wesley, *Minutes of the Methodist Conference*, Vol. I, pp. 552.

<sup>100</sup> See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, pp. 254-280.

<sup>101</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, pp. 263-264.

<sup>102</sup> S.R. Valentine, *John Bennet and the Origins of Methodism and the Evangelical Revival in England* (Lanham: The Scarecrow Press. 1997) p. 207.

<sup>103</sup> B. Rhodes, 'An Account of Benjamin Rhodes', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. II, p. 364.

<sup>104</sup> Z. Taft, *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of Various Holy Women, Whose Eminent Usefulness and Successful labours in the Church of Christ, Have Entitled them to be Enrolled among the great Benefactors of Mankind: In Which are Included Several Letters from the Rev J. Wesley never before Published: Volume I*, (London: Mr. Kershaw. 1825) p. 19. [Facsimile reproduction – Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House. 1992]

<sup>105</sup> Z. Taft, *Biographical Sketches*, Vol I, p. 201.

<sup>106</sup> Z. Taft, *Biographical Sketches*, Vol I, p. 19.



I appointed several earnest and sensible men to meet me, to whom I showed the great difficulty I had long found of knowing the people who desired to be under my care. After much discourse, they all agreed there could be no better way to come to a sure, thorough knowledge of each person, than to divide them into classes like those at Bristol, under the inspection of those in whom I could most confide.<sup>107</sup>

Appointed leaders acted as Wesley's 'deputies', reporting on the spiritual state of class members to allow progress and discipline to be noted. As Methodism developed, Wesley's role was taken over by the assistant. Baker argues that all others in the Society were under the authority of the assistant in Wesley's place.<sup>108</sup>

Further development came as class leaders began to meet their class together and the introduction of rules for class leaders and members set the pattern for their meetings. These rules were made known to prospective members, 'I took an opportunity of asking one of them, Robert Anderton, "What were the terms of admission among them?" He told me, "These:" putting the rules of the Society into my hands, and desiring me to read and consider them.'<sup>109</sup> The rules were mass produced and made available to the Societies for prospective members, 'Pray send with the next magazines, 100 *Rules of the Society* and 6 *Spiritual Hymn Books*'.<sup>110</sup>

The class itself was regulated by the leader through weekly meeting of the class, weekly meeting with the Society leaders, and quarterly visitation by John or Charles Wesley, or in later years the assistant. At any point in the weekly visitation process a person could be received into the class on trial, and then

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<sup>107</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 258.

<sup>108</sup> See F. Baker, 'The People Called Methodists 3: Polity', in *A History of The Methodist Church in Britain and Ireland*, Vol. I, pp. 225-226.

<sup>109</sup> J. Oliver, 'An Account of Mr. John Oliver', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. II, p. 419.

<sup>110</sup> J.C. Bowmer, & J.A. Vickers, *The Letters of John Pawson (Methodist Itinerant, 1762-1806)*, Volume I: *To the Conference of 1794* (Peterborough: WMHS Publications. 1994) p. 28.

received as a member at the quarterly visitation. It was at this time that lapsed or 'disorderly walkers' were removed.<sup>111</sup> Richard Viney's *Diary* records meeting Wesley with the Foundery class leaders in 1744 from which he understood the meeting's primary function as fund raising and poor relief,

Mr. Westley had a meeting with y<sup>e</sup> leaders of y<sup>e</sup> classes, men and women, who bring in every Monday y<sup>e</sup> money collected in each class for y<sup>e</sup> poor, and at y<sup>e</sup> same time as much of it as is found needfull by y<sup>e</sup> majority present is given to such who want it.<sup>112</sup>

The disciplinary function of the class through visitation can be seen in a letter from Joseph Sanderson, then in Scotland to Samuel Bardsley in Berwick. In 1782, attendance was far from universal, and gave cause for concern. 'There are numbers of them meet their Class once or twice a quarter. I told them the other day I would have no such Members amongst us'.<sup>113</sup> He believed that the use of discipline had been lax, and he had decided to 'put our rules in execution here more than usual'.<sup>114</sup> The system of class paper notation was enough to cause him little short of heartache.<sup>115</sup> In reading these papers, he was aware that class attendance was poor, and that instituting more strongly the known discipline, would reduce numbers making 'our small number still smaller'.<sup>116</sup>

Wesley was asked to regulate the Newcastle Society by letter. 'Through the earnest requests of Brother *Nelson*, I am constrained to stay, and visit the Classes with him. By the return of the Post, we should be glad of your Advice, whom to put out and whom to take in'.<sup>117</sup> Sarah Perrin invited the Wesleys to Bristol in 1744 to regulate the classes there. She thought that this would be an 'unspeakable blessing'. 'I am fully persuaded we have many choice members

<sup>111</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VI, p. 208. John Wesley to Joseph Benson February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1776. See also J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. IV, p. 273. John Wesley to the Bristol Society October 1764.

<sup>112</sup> M. Riggall, 'Richard Viney's Diary. 1744', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XIV, p. 52.

<sup>113</sup> J.S. Simon, 'The Letters of Joseph Sanderson', in *Proceedings*, Vol. X, p. 148.

<sup>114</sup> J.S. Simon, 'The Letters of Joseph Sanderson', in *Proceedings*, Vol. X, p. 148.

<sup>115</sup> J.S. Simon, 'The Letters of Joseph Sanderson', in *Proceedings*, Vol. X, p. 148.

<sup>116</sup> J.S. Simon, 'The Letters of Joseph Sanderson', in *Proceedings*, Vol. X, p. 148.

<sup>117</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, p. 121.



amongst us but believe if you could spend some time with us they w<sup>d</sup> increase in number and stature.<sup>118</sup>

A simple system of annotating class papers was devised to denote the state of each member, and this annotation could be altered by the class leader. These papers became a method for the quarterly visitor to assess a member's progress.<sup>119</sup> Some of these shorthand codes<sup>120</sup> are undecipherable, but no doubt allowed a means of assessing an individual's spiritual state whilst retaining the confidence of the class.<sup>121</sup>

As the title of this thesis suggests, I am arguing that the class meeting, which became a cross to Methodism within Wesley's lifetime, was also the crown of the scheme of salvation that Wesley gave to the Methodist Movement. As the introduction stated, the Wesleyan *movement* existed until 1749 when the first Quarterly Meetings were held. After that date, Wesleyan Methodism was established as an *organisation* that would not be altered until after Wesley's death.

### The Class Meeting: The Crown of Methodism

The class as a 'crown' was established in four distinct, yet interrelated aspects of operation. These were fellowship; conversion and discipleship; financial accountability and discipline. This chapter will now turn to examine these individually using personal testimony and published work on the class system.

The class held a vital function for Methodism's period as a movement and early

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<sup>118</sup> Sarah Perrin to John Wesley: June 1744. *Letters chiefly to the Wesley's*: Volume II, JRULM.

<sup>119</sup> J.S. Simon, 'The Letters of Joseph Sanderson', in *Proceedings*, Vol. X, p. 148.

<sup>120</sup> For a list of these coded letters see F. Baker, 'The People Called Methodists 3: Polity' in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. 1, p. 224. See also J. Crowther, *A True and Complete Portraiture of Methodism*, (London: Richard Edwards. 1811) p. 228. Crowther reprints the form that class papers took.

<sup>121</sup> See E.H. Sugden, 'A Wesley Class', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XII, pp. 75-77. See also F.F. Bretherton, 'Mrs Fletcher's Class Paper', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XXI, pp. 197-198.

organisation, a function which became outdated before Wesley's death in 1791. Later in this chapter it will be indicated just how different the class was from any earlier small group structures, and the spirituality encapsulated within it.

### *Fellowship*

Class fellowship was of paramount importance to Wesley. In his letter to Edward Perronet, Wesley indicated that once the classes were meeting weekly, fellowship was the vital ingredient that gave them purpose. This was enhanced by class member's 'intimate acquaintance' which gave them 'more endeared affection for each other.'<sup>122</sup> Baker assesses the fellowship of the class to be of a 'less searching kind'<sup>123</sup> than the bands, but regulation of both band and class was applied equally to any who were unwilling to be open with their neighbour.

The primary aim of the band was fellowship for those seeking, or who had attained perfection, whilst the class member was growing in grace and holiness, with perfection as a long term rather than immediate goal. The nearest that one can come to accept Baker's argument is through a careful examination of the *Directions Given to the Band Societies* in 1744. However, whilst these rules are clearly intended to guide the band member through life, it should also be noted that there was a need to differentiate the band from the class in purpose. These rules accomplish this aim.

Fellowship was engendered because as Watson suggests class members were on 'a common journey.'<sup>124</sup> Watson argues that fellowship was born from a mutual accountability to each other through the discipleship process. A detailed

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<sup>122</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 262.

<sup>123</sup> F. Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, p. 78.

<sup>124</sup> D.L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, p. 116.



study of fellowship in early Methodism was made by Leslie Church who unfortunately affords the class a rather homely 'fireside'<sup>125</sup> setting, although he does consider the class to be Methodism's crowning glory. To restrict the class to this level of operation romanticises the class and its purpose.

Church asserts the purpose of the class was fulfilled when the leader took their position seriously as a charge over the souls of others in their care, and recognised that they too were accountable. Wesley encountered slack leaders<sup>126</sup> and removed them from command of the souls of a class. John Bennet noted in 1744 that leaders were not always reliable,

In my way called of Thomas Hallom a young man at Smalldale who had for sometime seemed slack in meeting and was a leader of that Class. He went with me, but alas! He was drowned with the pleasures of this world etc.<sup>127</sup>

Not all leaders were slack, and Church cites instances of leaders who faithfully carried out their duties, imbuing their class members with a desire to seek fellowship with them. James Field, who in old age reduced his classes from five to four, (effectively eighty four people), continued to visit and meet with his classes.<sup>128</sup>

The leaders facilitated or damaged the opportunity for fellowship. Joseph Barker's experience at a class meeting in 1822 shows how a leader's obsequiousness towards the rich, and contempt of the poor prevented any form of fellowship. Barker concludes his bitter attack, 'I wonder how we could bear

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<sup>125</sup> L.F. Church, *The Early Methodist People* (London: Epworth Press. 1948) pp. 149-150.

<sup>126</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VI, p. 208. John Wesley to Joseph Benson, February 22<sup>nd</sup> 1776.

<sup>127</sup> S.R. Valentine (ed.), *Mirror of the Soul. The Diary of an Early Methodist Preacher, John Bennet: 1714-1754* (Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House. 2002) p. 82.

<sup>128</sup> L.F. Church, *The Early Methodist People*, p. 167.

with such a shallow worthless person for a leader; but we knew no better, I suppose, then?'<sup>129</sup>

Close fellowship was occasioned by the routine of the meeting, offering order and familiarity. Meetings began with a hymn and prayer followed by interrogation of each member with appropriate advice and admonition, concluding with a prayer and hymn. James Lackington described in his *Memoirs* the proceedings of a class meeting;

When they met together, the Leader first gave out and hymn, which they all sang: after the hymn they all kneeled down, and their leader made an extempore prayer: after which they were seated, and when the leader had informed them of the state of his own mind, he enquired of all present, one after another, how they found the state of their souls. They then sang and prayed again. This lasted about one hour.<sup>130</sup>

Within the regular pattern of meeting, new members could experience the same careful examination as more experienced peers in a regulated but supportive group.

As the class was a private group, there is little extant material pertaining to the interrogation and responses of members. Usually, a biography or diary will simply refer to class membership. However, there are clear examples of the effect that fellowship had on individuals, and some of the most expressive can be found in the period of the early bands. Prior to the classes, the band's function was the closest parallel, and therefore any band material provides helpful information about the close functioning of the small group. Elizabeth

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<sup>129</sup> D.M. Thompson, *Nonconformity in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) pp. 48-50.

<sup>130</sup> J. Lackington, *Memoirs of the first forty-five years of the Life of James Lackington* (W. Bulgin: Bristol, 1791) pp. 62-63. See also D. Alexander, *Reasons for Methodism Briefly Stated in Three Letters to a Friend* (J. Nicholson & Co: Halifax, 1795) pp. 39-40. Contained in *Polemical Tracts: Methodist Apology Volume II*, Wesley College Archives, IC3?D6/5.



Baddiley had ceased to meet because she found the interrogation intolerable.<sup>131</sup> Her experience of such questioning took place prior to the removal of the bands to a meeting for those pressing towards perfection after the creation of the class meeting:

I do not meet my band the reason is this time after time being told I had not a spark of sincerity in me which was the truth tho I could not bear it thus far for it stopt my mouth that I could not speak my mind then I was charged with not never being open.<sup>132</sup>

The reception of the assurance of faith was a common experience in the class as was a deeper feeling of personal faith. Samuel Webb received the witness of the Spirit and declared that openly in band.<sup>133</sup> Sarah Barber found comfort from band membership, and waited for faith, 'I was admitted upon tryall and then I was most time in great doubts but then hearing the Lord justifieth the ungodly then I knew I was ungodly ... then I hoped and found great comfort and indeed the band was of great service to me for I was never sent away without some comforts.'<sup>134</sup>

Elizabeth Collett's biography shows just how deeply the fellowship experience could be felt.

When she was about sixteen, her circumspect walk attracted the attention of some members of the Methodist Society, who invited her to attend a class-meeting; this she accordingly did, and was most agreeably surprized (sic) to hear others speaking of religious enjoyments, similar to thos she had experienced for the last two years. ... She now began to experience the great benefit arising from the fellowship of saints, having that eminent Christian, the late Mrs. Ann Gilbert for her class leader.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> See appendix 11. The close questioning of each band member was set out in the *Rules of the Band Societies* drawn up in 1738.

<sup>132</sup> Letter: Elizabeth Baddiley to John Wesley. Bristol, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1741. Wesley College Archives: D5/69/2.

<sup>133</sup> Letter: Samuel Webb to Charles Wesley. 20<sup>th</sup> November 1741. *Early Methodist Volume*.

<sup>134</sup> Letter: Sarah Barber to Charles Wesley. May 1740. *Early Methodist Volume*.

<sup>135</sup> Z. Taft, *Biographical Sketches of the Lives and Public Ministry of Various Holy Women, Whose Eminent Usefulness and Successful Labours in the Church of Christ, Have entitled them to be enrolled among the great benefactors of Mankind: In which are included Several Letters from the Rev J. Wesley never before published: Volume II* (London: H. Cullingworth. 1828) pp. 120-121. [Facsimile reproduction – Peterborough: Methodist Publishing House. 1992]

The openness of the fellowship was exhibited in the manner in which members spoke to each other. Margaret Austin<sup>136</sup> was accused of 'self' by a band sister for meeting Charles Wesley privately after he preached. Elizabeth Sayce was interrogated in her band by Charles Wesley, an experience that was shared by her band sisters in their close fellowship.<sup>137</sup>

Personal accounts are early relative to Methodism and the class meeting. It appears that as time progressed, and the meeting's business became confidential, little was written about what was actually said. Later testimonials and biographies of Local or itinerant Preachers concentrate on a broader life and ministry. However, in some accounts, the activities of the classes are noted, as is the depth of feeling between members. Mary Holder was distressed to leave her class after her marriage to an itinerant preacher, 'I felt *much* at leaving a large *class of young women*, whom I had met ten years or more – with my *band sisters*. We had been united in bonds of love, ever glad to meet – but not very willing to part – though sure we were one in heart.'<sup>138</sup>

### *Conversion and Discipleship*

The class became the centre of Methodist life, the group into which searching or awakened individuals were introduced. Membership on trial for three months preceded admission to the Society. During that time, it was expected that some growth in understanding or faith was made plain to the class leader. Part of the on trial period was to readjust to a new manner of living.

William Green's biography shows how joining a class and entering the process of conversion meant leaving former friends behind. 'My dear mother, by much

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<sup>136</sup> Letter: Margaret Austen to Charles Wesley. 19<sup>th</sup> May 1740. *Early Methodist Volume*.

<sup>137</sup> K. Morgan, 'Methodist Testimonials for Bristol Collected by Charles Wesley in 1742', in *Reformation and Revival*, p. 97.

<sup>138</sup> Z. Taft, *Biographical Sketches*, Vol. I, p. 19.



persuasion, prevailed upon me to meet in a Class. From this time my chains began to fall off. I think I had not met above three times, before all my outward sins left me, and I shook off all my old companions.<sup>139</sup> In a space of three weeks, Green not only re-orientated his spiritual direction, but he gave up his previous lifestyle. John Atlay also gave up his previous 'trifling company'<sup>140</sup> following his religious awakening.

Ann Whitfield was justified at a class meeting. 'I went to a class-meeting at my father's house, and there the Lord pardoned all my sins'.<sup>141</sup> Commonly, personal accounts describe a period of searching, or mourning, which is brought to a conclusion by a momentous or instantaneous revelation. Sarah Cox's biography shows this to be her experience. Her soul was 'sinking beneath the pressure of unpardoned guilt', and after meeting in class two or three times, she heard Jesus speak to her, and was 'presently filled with love to God and all mankind'.<sup>142</sup> Further, she recounted this heartfelt moment through Charles Wesley's hymn, *Let earth and heaven agree*.<sup>143</sup> This experience became a personal testimony to share and encourage others. Robert Wilkinson also found faith whilst a hymn was being sung. For Wilkinson, the hymn *All ye that pass by* led to a decisive moment of forgiveness

Then, all within me cried out,  
The sinner am I  
Who on Jesus rely,  
And come for the pardon, God cannot deny.<sup>144</sup>

John Atlay<sup>145</sup> was moved at the singing of *Come, Lord! The Drooping sinner cheer*. Over time, his sense of being awakened was challenged, until walking

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<sup>139</sup> W. Green, 'An Account of the life of Mr. William Green', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. III, p. 252.

<sup>140</sup> J. Atlay, 'Account of the life of Mr. John Atlay', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. I, p. 577.

<sup>141</sup> Z. Taft, *Biographical Sketches*, Vol. I, p. 266.

<sup>142</sup> Z. Taft, *Biographical Sketches*, Vol. I, p. 71.

<sup>143</sup> This hymn was published in 1742 in *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love* (2<sup>nd</sup> series). See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 7, pp. 121-123.

<sup>144</sup> R. Wilkinson, 'A Short Account of Mr. Robert Wilkinson', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. V, p. 182. The hymn appeared in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* in 1749 in the section *Invitation to Sinners*.

alone he heard a voice speaking to him. This turned his awakening into assurance. Atlay used that experience as a testimony to his class,

From this Time, I was exhorting every Company wherein I was; and God continually confirmed what was spoken: but especially to the Class whereof I was Leader, most of whom were justified in a few months.<sup>146</sup>

The distress and searching of others affected class members so deeply that they were justified, as Sarah Ryan's biography shows,

Being one night at class, with my sister, who was in great distress, I felt the burden of her soul laid upon mine in an inexpressible manner: and while I was exhorting her to believe, the power of God overwhelmed my soul, so that I fell back in my chair, and my eyesight was taken from me: but in the same moment the Lord Jesus appeared to my inward sight ... a little after, my leader asked me, "Do you now believe?" I faintly answered, "Yes."<sup>147</sup>

Benjamin Rhodes' careful leadership of several classes brought members to faith or to a 'stirring up',<sup>148</sup> (presumably awakening or questioning). The support of a class leader could assist the searching individual in the quest for belief, as Robert Wilkinson testified, who felt there was no hope of mercy for him. His leader's response that his attendance to the means of grace meant his hope was not unfounded gave him encouragement.<sup>149</sup>

The public confession of an individual's spiritual state could adversely affect another class member, with potentially fatal results. John Oliver recounted how another's testimony caused him to become suicidal. He had experienced assurance, but the open testimony of one who felt wicked caused him to reflect on his state and he threw himself into a river and almost drowned.<sup>150</sup> This uncertainty extended to class leaders. John Mason felt leadership of a class

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<sup>145</sup> J. Atlay, 'Account of the life of Mr. John Atlay', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. I, pp. 577-578. The person exhorting in the Society was Hannah Harrison.

<sup>146</sup> J. Atlay, 'Account of the life of Mr. John Atlay', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. I, p. 579.

<sup>147</sup> S. Ryan, 'Account of the life of Sarah Ryan', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. II, p. 302.

<sup>148</sup> B. Rhodes, 'An Account of Benjamin Rhodes', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. II, p. 364.

<sup>149</sup> R. Wilkinson, 'A Short Account of Mr. Robert Wilkinson', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. V, p. 181.

<sup>150</sup> J. Oliver, 'An Account of Mr. John Oliver', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. II, p. 420.



was a great trial, but the experience itself confirmed his own faith as he encouraged others. 'While I prayed for my brethren, and laboured to help them forward in the way to the kingdom, he gave me great consolation in my own soul.'<sup>151</sup>

The class was not the meeting for those who were explicitly pressing towards perfection, although Lackington<sup>152</sup> noted that those in a state of perfection continued to meet in class. Perfection was not easily achieved or maintained, and as early as 1744, Wesley was cautioning his preachers in regard to the acceptance of a believer's claim to this spiritual state.<sup>153</sup> When this thesis considers reasons for the decline of the class as the central constituent of Wesleyan ecclesiology, the decline of the band with its central tenet of perfection will also be briefly noted.

Before leaving this section, some account of the place of hymnody in Methodism must be given. From the outset, hymns played an important part in the spiritual devotion of every Methodist. Charles Wesley's hymns were used in every small group meeting, at the preaching service and society meeting, as well as field preaching. Thomas Langford asserted that 'hymns were to eighteenth century England what stained glass windows were to medieval Europe – a medium for teaching.'<sup>154</sup>

Through hymnody, Methodists learned their theology as they sang publicly and meditated on their hymn books privately. This gave rise to the Wesleyan

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<sup>151</sup> J. Mason, 'Short Account of the life of Mr. John Mason', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. III, p. 653.

<sup>152</sup> J. Lackington, *Memoirs*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>153</sup> W. Myles, *A Chronological History of the People Called Methodist of the Connexion of the Late John Wesley from their rise on 1729 to their Last Conference in 1802*, (Wesleyan Conference Office. 1803) pp. 28-29. This is the question and answer on the subject of sanctification from the Conference of 1744.

<sup>154</sup> T.A. Langford, 'Charles Wesley as Theologian', in *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian* (ed. T. Kimbrough Jr; Nashville: Kingswood Books.1992) p. 98.

tradition, a warm-hearted Arminianism, which encompassed both social and personal piety and the rigours of regular meetings and the observance of the means of grace. The usefulness of the group was enhanced by hymns which identified a common experience of awakening, conversion and discipleship. Tore Meistad recognised the purpose of hymns. 'Charles Wesley's hymns popularised Methodist ideas and probably spread them more widely than the preaching did.'<sup>155</sup>

John Wesley recognised the value of hymnody in the preface to the 1780 collection of hymns, as a means of increasing devotion, confirming faith and enabling a deeper love for God and neighbour.<sup>156</sup>

Joseph Nightingale's *Portraiture of Methodism* indicates there were hymns, which were of importance to the class, reproducing five specimen hymns.<sup>157</sup> They are revealing: praying for repentance; a mourner convinced of sin; a mourner brought to the birth, rejoicing, a believer groaning for full redemption. The hymn for rejoicing overflows with superlatives and offered to the assembled class hope and potentially assurance. Any within the class might experience these sentiments in an instant and declare them to his or her peers:

True pleasures abound in the rapturous sound;  
 And whoever hath found it hath paradise found:  
 My Jesus to know, and feel his blood flow,  
 'Tis life everlasting, 'tis heaven below!<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> T. Meistad, 'The Missiology of Charles Wesley and its Links to the Eastern Church', in *Orthodox and Western Spirituality*, p. 205.

<sup>156</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 7, p. 75.

<sup>157</sup> J. Nightingale, *A Portraiture of Methodism being an Impartial View of the Rise, Progress, Doctrines, Discipline and Manners of the Wesleyan Methodists in a Series of Letter Addressed to a Lady* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme. 1807) pp. 185-188.

<sup>158</sup> J. Nightingale, *A Portraiture of Methodism*, p. 187. This hymn is also contained in J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 7, p. 328. This hymn is number 197 and entered in the section 'For Believers Rejoicing'.



The word 'feel' is used to mean 'experienced'. What is 'felt' (experienced) through faith is explained in the following line: eternal life in heaven, and the practice of heaven now.

The use of Wesleyan hymns changed over time. The hymn *Come wisdom, power and grace divine!* is a useful example of this. In 1814 it was allocated to a section for use in band, class or society meetings. However, it first appeared in 1767 in 'Family Hymns', and in 1780 appeared in the section 'For the Society, Praying'. Over time, its place and purpose was reassigned as its use was more specifically identified.

### *Financial Accountability*

The class functioned as a body of people accountable to each other both spiritually and financially. The spiritual element of this accountability has been noted under fellowship, and will be further discussed in relation to discipline.

Financially, the class began as a means of paying a building debt, and there can be little doubt that had the class remained only a means of paying building debts,<sup>159</sup> it would not have survived at all. Further class leaders would have to have been drawn from a relatively wealthy section of the movement. If Captain Foy's suggestion had been followed strictly, leadership would have been limited to those who were able to make up any weekly financial shortfall.

Class monies continued to be paid by members after the class had become distinctly pastoral, and this financial accountability between members gave the

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<sup>159</sup> Until the Conference of 1779, some Class monies were used towards the cost of building new preaching houses. See W. Myles, *A Chronological History*, p. 138.

class the means through each society to support the poor<sup>160</sup> and discharge building debts. Wesley noted in his *Journal* for October 15<sup>th</sup> 1743 that the monies collected to that date had paid the New Room debt.<sup>161</sup> This fund later supported the work of the itinerant preachers and other expenses.<sup>162</sup> Lackington offers an insight into the financial life of the class,

In these classes each made a weekly contribution towards the general support of the preachers &c. Such as were very poor contributed a penny a week, others two-pence, and some who could afford it sixpence. This money was entered in a book kept for that purpose, and one in every class called the Steward, had the care of the cash.<sup>163</sup>

He also gives some vital detail about the social structure of each class. Each class consisted of a disparate group of people, who in the social order of the period would have the minimum of dealings with each other. In the class, social divisions were set aside and equality in faith was raised up. The fact that some could afford more than others meant that a mutual accountability in matters of finance was shared across the individual class and indeed all classes so that no intolerable burden fell upon the poorest members.

### *Discipline*

William Dean's 1985 thesis<sup>164</sup> held discipline to be the primary function of the class meeting. Dean asserted that this function had a higher priority than fellowship, and was a character of life modelled by Wesley himself;

Discipline was a hallmark of Methodism. Eighteenth-century Methodists were expected to live carefully, frugally, and in accordance with strict rules of conduct. The source of these expectations was John Wesley himself, who assumed that the rigorous discipline which marked his own lifestyle should be copied by those around him.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> See Appendix 10: Rule 3(1).

<sup>161</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 343.

<sup>162</sup> See J. Crowther, *A True and Complete Portraiture of Methodism*, p. 256.

<sup>163</sup> J. Lackington, *Memoirs*, p. 63.

<sup>164</sup> W.W. Dean, *Disciplined Fellowship: The Rise and Decline of Cell Groups in British Methodism* (Unpublished PhD Thesis. University of Iowa. 1985).

<sup>165</sup> W.W. Dean, *Disciplined Fellowship*, p. 51.



Dean understood discipline to be a means of cohesion as well as control; that group experience gave rise to a sense of belonging as well as a particular pattern of behaviour. More will be written about the nature of group experience below in relation to the success of the class.

For Dean, fellowship was a by-product of discipline, for only discipline enabled the conditions to create a sense of fellowship. This demeans the class meeting's purpose as the crown of the Methodist movement; for if fellowship, conversion and commitment and accountability arise only from a disciplined group then the purpose of the group itself was merely as a form of policing.

Dean is right to maintain that discipline was an important element of class membership, but wrong in his singular application. Wesley realised that to meet together in a regular pattern broke old habits, and cultivated a new outlook on living that was shared by the whole local Methodist body. Discipline was also important to maintain a specifically Methodist identity. Perhaps too, aware of the problems the doctrine of stillness had caused in Fetter Lane, Wesley was keen to ensure that only his doctrines were espoused in any meeting. However, as an itinerant leader, there were moments when his disciplinary leadership was exercised after damage had been caused, as was the case in Wednesbury. 'Wed. 3 I made an end of visiting the classes, miserably shattered by the sowers of strange doctrines.'<sup>166</sup>

Dean understands 'discipline' predominately in the form of a rule for corporate shared living, stemming from Wesley's own disciplined lifestyle. Discipline in this form was by no means unique to Methodism. The earliest Anglican Unitary

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<sup>166</sup> See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 20, p. 382.

Societies, were disciplined units which met together under a rule<sup>167</sup> of living intended to promote a model of holiness, and an allegiance to the Anglican Church. Fetter Lane also had stringent disciplinary processes.

Local class leaders acted on behalf of John Wesley once Methodism became too large for him to easily itinerate, and when meeting together weekly, exercised a 'collegiate episcopacy' over the entire society, as it was divided into classes. Class leaders were responsible for ensuring that discipline within the classes was adequately maintained, and this was done by reproof, encouragement or dismissal. Reproof or encouragement always took place within the hearing of others. This ensured that the discipline of life could be regulated. It also ensured that good order, using discipline in its active sense could be maintained. An example of this is shown by John Bennet's *Diary*. In 1747,<sup>168</sup> Bennet reproved a male class leader and band member who was unmarried but living with a woman as husband and wife. He had infringed Methodist discipline as a rule for holy living, breaching the disciplinary code.

At leaders' meetings, or when Wesley or an itinerant Preacher regulated the classes, expulsion was always a disciplinary option. In Norwich in 1759, despite the society numbering 500 people, 150 did not meet in class. These Wesley stated 'hang on but a single thread.'<sup>169</sup> Such a *Journal* entry was made after he had declared to the entire society the purpose of the class, that is, as part of the Wesleyan schema of holy living. To those who were wavering over society membership Wesley wrote an open letter in 1764, answering many common objections. He makes plain that to belong to a class is to enter into a disciplinary

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<sup>167</sup> Examples of these rules can be found at appendices 1 to 5.

<sup>168</sup> S.R. Valentine (ed.), *Mirror of the Soul*, pp. 133-134.

<sup>169</sup> See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 21, p. 226.



arrangement: that there is a discipline in meeting, and that discipline may be exercised within it.<sup>170</sup>

Discipline was exercised through regulation even if it meant the local society was severely depleted. In Newcastle in 1743,<sup>171</sup> Wesley noted that sixty four members had been expelled because their lifestyle did not match that required by Wesley. Almost forty years later, he wrote to John Valton,<sup>172</sup> expelling a class leader whose behaviour was clearly not acceptable. Wesley allowed that twenty of his class might leave with him, but that such loss maintained the proper regulation of the whole. This use of discipline was intended to ensure classes remained lively places where Christian growth could be nurtured, and ensured the Society as a whole was not brought into disrepute.

At the earliest point of the Methodist movement, any possible reason for the authorities to arrest preachers or disrupt meetings was seized upon, and the need for a disciplined and organised meeting became all the more vital. Later, disaffected Methodists caused problems for Methodism as John Pawson's letter to Matthew Mayer indicates. Mr Requit, a former Bristol Methodist, was preaching at the Foundery and abusing the Bristol Society 'by telling the whole (Foundery) congregation that he knew there were whores and Baudes, even in the Bands'.<sup>173</sup> Pawson was clear; more discipline amongst them might prevent others from having such accounts to pass on. Discipline was a tool for personnel regulation, and was useful to ensure the smooth running of Methodism, especially after its expansion across England. It was not, however,

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<sup>170</sup> See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 21, pp. 478-479.

<sup>171</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 318.

<sup>172</sup> J. Wesley, *Journal [SE]*, Vol. VII, pp. 100-101.

<sup>173</sup> J.C. Bowmer, & J.A. Vickers, *The Letters of John Pawson: Vol. 1*, p. 15. Baudes is an obsolete form of 'bawd'. Word in brackets mine.

in my view, the tool that Dean suggests, overarching all other aspects of organisation life.

### The Class Meeting Reviewed

The regulated and holy life that Wesley envisaged through the class system reflected his personal theology detailed in previous chapters. I will now examine how this theology was expressed through the class, using the four areas of class life mentioned above, and then consider the nature of the group experience. Through this, I will contend that the class meeting is the crown of Methodism's organisation.

I have already mentioned that John Wesley synthesised disparate Christian doctrine and theology. Ted Campbell has skilfully shown how the seventeenth century desire for an affective faith spread through Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox traditions, and I argue that its most affective form was through the warm-hearted pietism of the class meeting.

Wesley's rather unusual hybrid of doctrine flourished, as he was able to encourage his people to accept non-juring teachings, just as easily as he could command their allegiance to the Church of England. Thus he was able to encourage a lifestyle for the classes that broadly reflected his own. As Wesley held a high regard for the means of grace, so too did his people, and as often as the sacrament was celebrated at the parish church, Methodists were to receive it, and when the Sunday Service was Morning Prayer, they were to attend the parish service. Charles Wesley, meeting three classes in Manchester in 1756, had to persuade the members to attend the parish services, and receive the sacrament. They had ceased as the preachers were not



recommending attendance, and were not attending themselves. All but the Dissenters among the classes agreed to go.<sup>174</sup>

The class had four distinctive aspects, and these were affective in the lives of the Methodists. To share fellowship was to continue something of the Holy Club and the bands of Fetter Lane; to experience conversion and continue discipleship was a distinctly Moravian practice, but Wesley ensured this was channelled through a regulated group, similar to that of the unitary societies. To be accountable to one another, personally and financially, maintained the tradition of the unitary societies in their regular collections and also picked up something of work of the Halle Pietists who engaged in social action.

Most importantly for Wesley, the meeting of individuals in class was an opportunity to continue together the path to entire sanctification and the journey of a holy life. Here there are overtones of Bishop Jeremy Taylor's works, *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*, which set out for the earnest Christian a pattern for living well and ultimately dying a good death. The difference in Wesley's life, and the Methodist experience was that such a life was experienced corporately, not individually as Taylor expected. There are also nuances of an earlier Puritanism which urged the Christian towards holiness, centred in a personal relationship with God.

A 'background' Puritanism can be sensed through the Wesleyan reliance on using time wisely, part of which was shown through the class and other Methodist meetings, and through living a careful, even frugal life in society. The detailed instructions of the 1743 rules<sup>175</sup> show how important the use of time

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<sup>174</sup> C. Wesley, *Journal*, Vol. II, p. 134.

<sup>175</sup> Appendix 10: Rules 5, 6 & 7.

was. Whilst these rules are laid out for the societies, each class member was expected to adhere to them, and failure to do so could result in expulsion, as occurred in Newcastle in the same year. Abraham Jones wrote to Wesley in 1742, shortly after the classes were introduced and noted that his role as a class leader was to ensure they all 'walk orderly, and keep close to the Word, and the means of grace.'<sup>176</sup> Charles Wesley also noted that personal life was to include good works.<sup>177</sup>

Another mark of Methodism, which made the class a crowning point of Methodism, was Wesley's Arminianism. This set Wesley apart from the majority of his evangelical contemporaries in England, and gave him an unrivalled platform from which to begin his ministry. Through field preaching, Wesley was able to declare the nature of the gospel as he interpreted it. Those hearers who filtered from the open air, to the public preaching services, and from there to the society meeting and class meeting, would become immersed in a teaching which offered through God's prevenient grace, the opportunity to become Christians, not by works, nor by election, but through faith alone.

In the class the first stirrings of faith, which were often dramatic and accompanied by emotional or ecstatic experiences could be nurtured, secure in the Wesleyan understanding that any who professed faith through justification had received faith. In the class, faith was not uncertain and reliant upon election but open to all. This Arminianism led to the continuing path of holy living towards perfection, In this Wesley was picking up the tolerant Puritan piety of Richard Baxter, and the teaching of his parental high church background.

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<sup>176</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, pp. 94-95.

<sup>177</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, p. 96.



Arminianism meant a Methodist could feel the assurance of salvation, free from the uncertainty of Calvinism's election only for the few. Such a doctrine appealed to those classes of society otherwise excluded from society. What was denied in life; acceptance, was available in the society and made perfect in death.

The class was the central feature of the Wesleyan movement, and remained so when the movement became a distinct organisation, with a carefully structured ecclesiology of its own after 1749. Wesley declared that Methodism was a rediscovery of primitive religion, a religion he had travelled to Georgia to find. In the class the primitive nature of that religion was most clearly expressed as small groups met to learn, grow and develop a Christian faith that could be lived effectively in society.

The class meeting created a distinct identity amongst the Methodist people ensuring the class was the crown of Methodism. This thesis will now consider some of the issues surrounding small group purpose and identity.

### The Class Meeting: Social Identity and Group Processes

Social psychologists have developed social identity and group process theories, and these can inform our understanding of the eighteenth century class meeting, and elucidate reasons for its success as a group. Simply put, groups are fundamental to human identity as people, consisting of 'people in *face-to-face interaction* with one another'.<sup>178</sup> Groups are essentially public entities and belonging means that a person's social identity becomes bound up with that group in the understanding of others. An individual will join a group having

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<sup>178</sup> R. Brown, *Group Processes* (Oxford: Blackwell. 1988) p. 3.

reconnoitred it prior to making a commitment to it. Questions asked of the new group include the benefits group membership will offer, and commitment level demanded by the group. Through this process a redefinition of the personal identity occurs, and an initiation takes place.

A common dependence is formed between members and any common goals are shared interdependently. Tensions that arise in the achievement of those goals must be addressed and released, and emotions fully dealt with. Group norms are created; values that are held corporately and developed. These norms give the individual and the group a particular way to view and respond to the world. Such normative values offer a frame of reference for acceptable behaviour and set apart those who *do not belong*.

Understandably, individuals compare themselves socially and through that process evaluate how good they are as individuals, and who they are in the group. This takes place by assessing peers within the group. As Brown states, 'the achievements of others who are similar to us in ability act as a guide to our own likely achievements'.<sup>179</sup>

Within every group certain distinctive features can be seen; language, ethics, dress, for example. These features offer a social categorisation, as well as a social identity. Some distinctive features may be described by those outside the group, a process known as 'priming'. This leads to homogeneity within the group through the sharing of common ideals and values.

Social identity is that which gives an individual an identity amongst others through the groups to which he or she belongs. There are three characteristics

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<sup>179</sup> R. Brown, *Group Processes*, p. 79.



of this, cognitive, evaluative and emotional, or affective.<sup>180</sup> A means of assessing self worth is to compare the group(s) to which an individual may belong with other groups. To feel that 'my' group is superior to another adds to self esteem. If however, 'my' group is inferior to another, an attempt may be made to become upwardly mobile, and to join the 'better group'.

The eighteenth century was a period of association. Clubs and organisations were formed that gave rise to modern political parties, drinking clubs, societies for the reformation of public morals, and religious groups added to the diversity of an associational age. In each of these clubs and groups social identities and categorisations were created.

The Methodist class was a relative latecomer to this associational age, but was born out of Wesley's previous personal experience with the Holy Club, Unitary Societies and Fetter Lane. Throughout his adult life, Wesley constantly fought to be recognised as an Anglican and a clergyman, against those who argued he had abandoned the Church of England. For him, his social identity and social category was that of an Anglican. He fought with equal strength to ensure that his own Methodists were understood to be Anglicans too, despite the fact that they would also identify quite distinctly as Methodists.

He achieved the former by insisting that those who belonged to his societies regularly attended the parish church, and were communicant members of it. He would not allow Dissenters to belong fully to a society unless they were baptised according to the rubric of the Church of England.<sup>181</sup> The latter was

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<sup>180</sup> The use of 'affective' comes from M.A. Hogg, & D.J. Terry, *Social Identity Processes in Organizational Contexts* (Philadelphia: Psychology Press, 2001) p. 104.

<sup>181</sup> See the correspondence between Sarah Perrin and Charles Wesley in *Letters Chiefly to Wesley's*, Volume II. See also J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 318. Here Dissenters had left the society as their

achieved by the distinctive groups of Methodism to which every Methodist belonged, the society and the class.

For those who came to join the class, the realignment of the individual in relation to society was not as great as it would be in the twenty first century. The individual did not have a developed sense of personal social identity, so the group would have an added importance for that person in their own eyes, and the eyes of those outside the class. Joining the class was a vital period of assessment as to whether what was offered was worthwhile. The 'on trial' period of Methodism which demanded some personal change was the point at which evaluation of the class occurred, and those who found the class too demanding did not join. In the same vein, the leaders of the society also had the ability to refuse to admit the individual who had not accepted the discipline and rigour of the class.

John Wesley's *Journal* entry for 12<sup>th</sup> March 1743 gives a clear early picture of the cost of membership. The evaluative process led one individual to leave because those who were not Methodists were rude in the street, nine people to leave because they were laughed at and a further five because uncomplimentary remarks were made of the society.<sup>182</sup>

For those who became and remained Methodists, the admission to membership and receipt of a class ticket was the recognition of membership of a group which offered a distinct identity. Every potential class member had to be aware of what was demanded, evaluate whether that was worthwhile, and emotionally

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own ministers refused them Communion. The corollary to this is that Wesley would not allow them to fully participate whilst they remained Dissenters.

<sup>182</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 318.



or affectively attach to the group. This cohesion gave to the class a shared purpose and shared values.

Each justified class member was in community on the path towards entire sanctification; each person could be made perfect. This gave a distinct social categorisation, and along with behaviour, dress and language made the class unlike any other religious group. The printed rules show just how a Methodist was to dress and behave, socially and in business. The distinct language of Methodism can be seen in testimony and biography associated with the language of Charles Wesley's hymns, and Wesleyan pietistic phraseology usually used to describe the pre and post conversion state. One woman described herself as a 'publican'.<sup>183</sup> Another, after receiving faith testified, 'I was a brand plucked from the fire.'<sup>184</sup>

The distinctive features of being a Methodist, fellowship; conversion and discipleship; financial accountability and discipline, offered to the Methodist in the class a structure for social identity and a social category that marked him or her out within any community. These features were also lived outside the group's regular meetings, making the Methodist recognisable in the street, in business or in the social context. This stands in contrast to the Anglican Unitary Societies, which whilst giving to young single men a form of piety, did not have such a strong or distinctive ethos about their regulations. The primary aim of the Unitary Societies was retention of young men within the Anglican Church. The primary aim of class membership was growth in grace and holiness.

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<sup>183</sup> Letter: Sarah Barber to Charles Wesley. May 1740. *Early Methodist Volume*.

<sup>184</sup> Letter: Margaret Austen to Charles Wesley. 19<sup>th</sup> May 1740. *Early Methodist Volume*.

Membership of a class was not segregated by sex or status as the Moravian style bands of Fetter Lane were, or the Unitary Societies, which were open only to young men. This gave to the class a unique dimension in that the business and purpose of each meeting was shared with people with whom an individual might not usually frequent, due to social status or sex. For the women especially this gave a social categorisation that was inclusive, and also admitted them to class leadership, even over men. Only the Methodist bands retained the earlier segregation.

After Methodism's model, Anglican clergymen attempted a similar organisational structure for their parishioners, particularly Henry Venn, vicar of Huddersfield, who was sympathetic to Wesley's aims, and Samuel Walker who began a religious society with bands in Truro with the aim of outwitting the Methodists. Both Venn and Walker intended their small groups to remain under the clear authority of the parish Minister. Methodists had no parish affinity, despite Wesley's insistence on regular attendance at the parish church. This allowed Methodists, one step removed from Anglican parochial authority, to compare their group, the class with their nearest rival, the parish, and consider their self esteem in the light of that comparison. Over time a sense of self esteem that gave rise to self worth was created. I will discuss this more fully in following chapters.

Overall then, the use of social identity and social categorisation theories have assisted in understanding the process of joining and belonging to the class. These theories explain the manner in which disparate individuals became united with a common purpose, sharing attributes and goals and beliefs that tended in varying degrees to mark them out with a distinctive identity. W. Ferguson's experience led him to note in his *Account* in the *Arminian Magazine*



of 1782, that Methodists were markedly different in their demeanour, 'I saw an abundance of people going along who seemed remarkably serious. I asked a man, "Pray, who are all these?" He answered, these are all Wesleyites; they are coming from the preaching. This was the first time I saw or heard of them.'<sup>185</sup> Ferguson's *Account* also indicates they used distinctive terms of address, 'the sailors that came into our shop, did not curse or swear at all. But several of them took my Master by the hand, and said, "How do you do, Brother?" I asked, "Pray, Sir, are all these your Brothers?" He said, "We are all brethren in Christ."<sup>186</sup> John Valton,<sup>187</sup> who returned to a former society in Purfleet<sup>188</sup> in 1775, met with an officer who remarked that his dress had altered since his initial time in the Purfleet area. The officer, noting Valton's plain black attire remarked. 'What, is this the little gentleman that came to us in a cocked hat, and gold-laced waistcoat?'<sup>189</sup> Valton's changed style of dress signalled the difference that accepting Christ and subsequently joining the Methodist itinerancy had made in his life. In response to the officer, Valton stated, 'It is, sir .... But the Lord, since that time, has done something under the waistcoat.'<sup>190</sup> Valton's change of dress style reflected the rules of the Methodists,<sup>191</sup> and indicated his choice to identify himself as a Methodist.<sup>192</sup> In early 1764, Valton had written to Wesley an anonymous letter concerning his state of mind. Wesley replied to this, but also dispatched a Methodist, who was a carpenter to find him. Valton's reaction to the Methodist was to shame him, but he also noted

<sup>185</sup> W. Ferguson, 'Account of the Life of Mr. W. Ferguson', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. V, p. 298.

<sup>186</sup> W. Ferguson, 'Account of the Life of Mr. W. Ferguson', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. V, p. 298.

<sup>187</sup> See W. Myles, *A Chronological Account*, p. 305. Valton began his itinerancy in 1775. He is numbered by Myles amongst 'the Second Race of Methodist Preachers'.

<sup>188</sup> J. Valton, 'The Life of Mr. John Valton', in *Preachers*, Vol. VI, pp. 10-12. Valton, a clerk in the Office of Ordinance, was in Purfleet from December 1763 onwards.

<sup>189</sup> J. Valton, 'The Life of Mr. John Valton', in *Preachers*, Vol. VI, p. 96.

<sup>190</sup> J. Valton, 'The Life of Mr. John Valton', in *Preachers*, Vol. VI, p. 96.

<sup>191</sup> See Appendices 10 and 11. See also J. Wesley, *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, from the First, Held in London by the Late Rev. John Wesley A.M. in the Year 1744*, Volume I (London: Conference Office. 1812) p. 12.

<sup>192</sup> See also T. Olivers, 'The Life of Mr. Thomas Olivers', in *Preachers*, Vol. II, pp. 53-54. Although acquainted with Methodism, whilst in Bridgenorth with a companion, he lodged with a woman who was a Methodist. This was 'soon discovered by her conversation' p. 53. Olivers *Life* first appeared in the *Arminian Magazine* for 1779. See T. Olivers, 'The Life of Mr. Thomas Olivers', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. II, pp. 77-89.

that accepting the carpenter's message, would mean that he would 'apply his chisel and mallet to cut off my ruffles, and hair that was tied back.'<sup>193</sup>

The class gave identity, purpose and meaning within the context of a close Christian fellowship, and enabled Wesley's affective pietism to become deeply rooted in the Methodist psyche. When a new member was received on trial into the class, a process began towards entire sanctification. This process could only fully be possible if it was shared with like-minded Christians.

### Chapter Summary

The class was the crown of Methodism, as it was only in the small, regulated and sometimes highly charged group that the Methodist identity was truly forged. The class meeting was the zenith of eighteenth century piety, unlike anything that preceded it.

Unlike the mystics, whose quest for piety would often lead to an annihilation of the will, the class enabled the will to be subjected to God, yet turned towards works of mercy in community: unlike the Puritans who used the diary as a means of personal confessional, the class engendered a shared confessional, and made the class leader a spiritual director: unlike the Unitary Societies that offered advancement in trade as much as a tie to the Anglican Church, the class offered the opportunity to quest for a Christian life, regardless of age, sex, or marital status: unlike the Moravians, who were concerned with stillness and refused to engage in works of mercy, the class actively encouraged each member to participate fully in the means of grace, alone and corporately, and to be actively concerned with the well-being of neighbours.

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<sup>193</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. I, p. 28. (undated entry). MA 1977/293.



The class was the Methodist incarnation of Wesley's spirituality. Wesley's quest to find faith and then systematise that into a personal piety woven through many traditions, from which he took those elements that appealed to him, or which offered him some means of reviewing and disciplining his life. The class is representational of a personal piety, yet expressed within a group. Wesley could never have hoped to impose the model of faith he had created for himself on individual men and women, but he was able to do so with a carefully regulated group, that was subject to inspection and discipline.

Methodism was a reflection of Wesley's own journey to, and discipleship in, faith. Ted Campbell describes this as 'an epistemology of religious experience'.<sup>194</sup> Everything that John and Charles Wesley considered relevant, they passed on to the body of people known as Methodists, who met in classes. Wesley expressed this epistemology in *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*<sup>195</sup> of 1743. Through the *Appeal*, Wesley sets out the way of awakening, justification and sanctification in the Methodist pattern. As Heitzenrater notes for Wesley, 'Methodism moves beyond a lifeless, formal religion to one worthy of God, and that is love – love of God and love of neighbour, seated in the heart and showing its fruits in virtue and happiness.'<sup>196</sup>

Section two has discussed in an original manner why the class became vital to the success of the early Methodists, and why the earliest Methodist people found their spiritual needs met within a small interrogatory group that placed responsibility on each class member for their own, and their peers' spiritual development.

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<sup>194</sup> T.A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart*, p. 121.

<sup>195</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 11, pp. 45-94.

<sup>196</sup> R.P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, p. 130.

I now turn in the following chapters to the reasons for the decline of the class meeting. I will argue that decline began before Wesley's death, and indeed the class contained the seeds of decline from the outset. The class meeting, in every way the crown of Methodism was unable to survive over time as the religious experience and system of faith on which it thrived passed from Methodism's way of being (despite the retention of distinctive language). The group experience model which the class relied upon was unsustainable. The homogenous group, who chose to be different to the rest of society, eventually came to be respected within society and group purpose radically changed.