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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 II**

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

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## Section Three

### Introductory Comments

The following three chapters examine reasons for the decline of the class meeting; moving the thesis to consider the class as a 'cross'. The crowning aspects of the class have been fully discussed above, and I have described how Wesley's spirituality was literally lived in the class meeting in the earliest years of Methodism. All that Wesley took into his system of belief; assurance, good works, perfection, godliness and holiness, the means of grace, primitive Christianity and the need for regular supportive meetings was found in the class meeting.

As a crown, the relationship between faith and life was a dynamic that was attractive and made a difference to a social class of men and women previously excluded from the activity of Christian life. Within the class, people found and exercised leadership, and for men, leadership could increase to local preacher, helper, or assistant. Some women preached, and some notable women, such as Grace Murray, Sarah Perrin, Mary Bosanquet and Sarah Mallet<sup>1</sup> were clearly in leadership roles.

The class meeting also offered a sense of shared purpose within a disciplined, accountable, discipling context. At its best the class offered a new way of being in relationship with others. Neither Methodism, nor the class itself, was a solitary existence, and that relationship gave to those who belonged a way of relating to others in a faith context, and the opportunity to behave differently within society.

As a model for the amendment of life, Methodism was unsurpassed.

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<sup>1</sup> Grace Murray and Sarah Perrin were Housekeepers for Wesley's early properties. Murray at the Orphan House, Perrin at Kingswood. Mary Bosanquet (Fletcher) was active in Madeley. Sarah Mallet was a preacher in the Norfolk area, with Wesley's knowledge. See D. East, *My Dear Sally: The Life of Sarah Mallet One of John Wesley's Preachers* (Loughborough: WMHS Publications. 2003)

With those superlatives, it is easy to avoid the reasons for the decline of the class. Indeed, as some authors, like Henderson,<sup>2</sup> and Matthaei<sup>3</sup> maintain, the class can become a means for discipling new generations, or at least be an element of a new 'Wesleyan Economy of Faith Formation'.<sup>4</sup> These authors assume that the class meeting can be as effective today as an element of faith formation as it was in the eighteenth century. However, none of these assumptions consider why the class meeting is not now the bedrock or centre of the Methodist system.

Others, notably Watson and Hardt, who discuss the class meeting, (Watson concentrating on the classes in England, and Hardt on New York classes), spend little time discussing the decline of the class. Watson views the transformation of Methodism from Society to Church as a symptom of this decline.<sup>5</sup> He also saw a loss of accountability and formalism as significant aspects of the classes decline.<sup>6</sup> Hardt's introduction to his study of early New York Methodism, concludes briefly that early British Methodism's classes declined because,

In the early nineteenth century, after the Methodist "societies" had become the Wesleyan Methodist Church, declining class attendance, the higher expectations placed upon the role of the class leader, and the growing tensions between class leaders and traveling preachers all combined to weaken its earlier dynamism.<sup>7</sup>

Although the Wesleyan Methodists did not style themselves as a church until the later nineteenth century, his single sentence does not address the reasons for class decline. Snyder, in his discussion of patterns of church renewal,

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<sup>2</sup> D.M. Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*.

<sup>3</sup> S.H. Matthaei, *Making Disciples Faith Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> S.H. Matthaei, *Making Disciples*, pp. 166-183.

<sup>5</sup> D.L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, pp. 136-137.

<sup>6</sup> D.L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, pp. 145-147.

<sup>7</sup> P.F. Hardt, *The Soul of Methodism*, pp. 23-24.

addresses class decline. 'Well before 1900 the class system had lost its vitality, however, in most of Methodism. Where it survived, the classes often became legalistic or moralistic; the life had long since departed.'<sup>8</sup> Again, this does not address the reasons for the decline. If the class became legalistic or moralistic; why had this happened? If the life had departed what factors caused this?

Lacey Warner spends one paragraph on the decline of the class, primarily from a North American perspective. His comment however is perceptive and I pick up something of his statement in chapter eight. Warner writes, 'During the nineteenth century, class meetings in British and North American Methodism steadily declined as a result of several cultural and ecclesiological dynamics.'<sup>9</sup>

William Dean's thesis concluded that the class declined because there was a change in its fundamental tasks. This is picked up by Watson in his consideration of the classes decline. The difference between Wesley's understanding of the class meeting and its reality must be distinguished. During Wesley's lifetime the class's purpose was 'recruitment and assimilation of new members.'<sup>10</sup> Beyond that, these functions changed as society changed. Again, I pick this theme up in chapter seven and assert that the changes which Dean ascribes to the nineteenth century occurred during Wesley's lifetime.

A useful argument from Dean's thesis, relating to the loss of the bands and classes, assists the purpose of this final section, and the importance of

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<sup>8</sup> H.A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal*, p. 62.

<sup>9</sup> L.C. Warner, 'Offer Them Christ: Characteristics of Wesleyan Paradigm for Evangelism', in *The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal* (ed. P.W. Chilcote; Nashville: Abingdon Press.2002) p. 171.

<sup>10</sup> D.L. Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting*, p. 137.



assessing why the class meeting ceased to be an effective element of Methodist ecclesiology,

The bands were based on the interaction of disciplined Christians, and had no rationale for existence apart from the quality of the relationships created. As religious fervour cooled and the vision of perfection dimmed and became less urgent, the bands disintegrated. In the class system, where the rationale was disciplinary, the distinction between the "Methodist" and the "world" was a shared value, and the class meeting when faced with declining fervour, simply became an institutionalized ritual which continued to function until the disciplinary rationale faded.<sup>11</sup>

I disagree with Dean's assertion that discipline as a functionary element of the class was as all pervading as he holds it to be, but he picks up a very important factor in the distinction the class engendered between being a Methodist and being in the world. This process, known as homogenisation is discussed in chapter eight, and assists in understanding the theme of that chapter which is outlined below.

In articles published in the *Proceedings*, Rack and Dean discuss class decline in the nineteenth century. Rack assesses decline around the period when class meeting membership was removed as the basis of Methodist society membership.<sup>12</sup> Dean's article discusses class decline in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

For Rack, the major problems for the class in the second half of the nineteenth century were 'the unpopularity of the class as an institution; and the problem of the relationship between class-membership and membership of the church.'<sup>14</sup>

Dean remarked that the classes became 'silent' from the 1830's onwards. 'A

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<sup>11</sup> W.W. Dean, *Disciplined Fellowship*, p. 180.

<sup>12</sup> H.D. Rack, 'The Decline of the Class-Meeting and the Problem of Church-Membership in Nineteenth-Century Wesleyanism', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XXXIX, part 1, pp. 12-21.

<sup>13</sup> W.W. Dean, 'The Methodist Class Meeting. The Significance of its Decline', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XLIII, part 2, pp. 41-48.

<sup>14</sup> H.D. Rack, 'The Decline of the Class-Meeting and the Problem of Church-Membership in Nineteenth-Century Wesleyanism', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XXXIX, part 1, pp. 12-13.

startling and general feature shared by many of these (Methodist autobiographies) accounts is that during the 1830's references to class meetings seem to decline almost to zero.<sup>15</sup> He suggested that decline occurred because 'the web of circumstances that gave the class meeting functional significance in the eighteenth century eroded, leaving an institutional shell without a clearly manifest purpose, except that attendance was the door to membership.'<sup>16</sup>

Through the following section, I will argue that the decline of which Rack and Dean write began during Wesley's lifetime. After Wesley's death, this was discussed openly, and pamphlets and articles were published urging Methodists to continue meeting for the edification and growth of Methodism. In 1797, the anonymous publication *An Address to the Heads of Families on the Necessity of Family Religion*<sup>17</sup> contained the appendix *An interesting Discourse on Weekly Class Meetings*.<sup>18</sup> This appendix quoted Perronet's *Right Method*,<sup>19</sup> and exhorted the reader to rediscover the duty imposed on all Methodists to meet.

The author stated,

where the people are wanting in *piety, simplicity, and freedom*, the true end of these special means is wholly subverted, and the devotion rendered both tedious and unprofitable.<sup>20</sup>

The pamphlet is primarily directed towards leaders, whom the author cited should be 'properly qualified',<sup>21</sup> but who appeared to be unable to work according to Perronet's *Method*. The writer noted, 'this is a *duty* to which I am

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<sup>15</sup> W.W. Dean, 'The Methodist Class Meeting. The Significance of its Decline', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XLIII, part 2, p. 42. Words in brackets mine.

<sup>16</sup> W.W. Dean, 'The Methodist Class Meeting. The Significance of its Decline', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XLIII, part 2, p. 43.

<sup>17</sup> Anonymous, *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)

<sup>18</sup> Anon, *An Address to the Heads of Families*, pp. 13-16.

<sup>19</sup> Appendix 13.

<sup>20</sup> Anon, *An Address to the Heads of Families*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>21</sup> Anon, *An Address to the Heads of Families*, p. 13.

afraid not more than one half of our leaders are equal.'<sup>22</sup> The remedy to this was to read edifying books, especially Scripture. The need for leaders, who might be described as qualified, was a radical shift from Wesley's original appointment of people whom he believed suitable, if not educated or qualified to be leaders.

Of the class member, the author required that they should be 'open, lively, and affectionate.'<sup>23</sup> In the opinion of the writer, such a demeanour would resolve the problems that were serious enough to warrant publication of the pamphlet. The concluding paragraph is written in terms that indicate the benefits of the right conduct that would rebuild the individuals' state with God, and enliven the class to which that person belonged. 'Those who live, or endeavour to live in this happy state, have always something to speak in their class which is animating and instructive, and the people hang on their lips for edification and comfort.'<sup>24</sup>

This addendum to *An Address to the Heads of Families* was published six years after Wesley's death, and is an indication that the class was not functioning well. As Wesley had maintained a tight rein on all publications during his lifetime,<sup>25</sup> this may be the first private pamphlet offering a view of the class which would have otherwise been prevented from publication while Wesley lived due to its contents.

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<sup>22</sup> Anon, *An Address to the Heads of Families*, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Anon, *An Address to the Heads of Families*, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Anon, *An Address to the Heads of Families*, p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> J. Wesley, *Minutes of Several Conversations between the Reverend Mr John and Charles Wesley and Others from the Year 1744, to the Year 1780*, (no publication details) p. 26. 'Q. 39, Ought we to insist upon our Rule, that no Preacher print any Thing without your approbation? A. Undoubtedly. And whoever does it for the time to come, cannot take it ill, if he is excluded from our connection. Let every one take this warning, and afterwards blame not but himself.' See also W. Myles, *A Chronological History*, pp. 279-282.



Thomas Jackson, whose *Recollections* were published in 1873,<sup>26</sup> wrote in relation to articles encouraging attendance at class meetings that

Pamphlets and tracts may be written and circulated without end in favour of these weekly meetings ... but if the people have no religious experience to communicate, they will be urged in vain to meet together for any such purpose. If they feel no sorrowful conviction of sin, they will never seek the sympathy and prayers of those who have passed through the same painful process to the joys of pardon.<sup>27</sup>

The anonymous author of the appendix to *An Address to the Heads of Families* appeared to pre-empt Jackson by almost eighty years in his appeal to leaders and class members to lead and attend their class with the spirit that Wesley envisaged in his *General Rules*.

In the following chapters, considering the decline of the class from its place as the crown of the Methodist schema, the picture of decline must not be understood to be a 'blanket decline'. Whilst the three approaches I outline below are models of understanding the decline that began during Wesley's lifetime, it must be recognised that other classes continued to be formed and functioned well. John Goodfellow's own experience of class membership in 1784 led him to write warmly of it in his diary.<sup>28</sup> However, within three years his experience in his own class and that of a fellow Class Leader was dissension.<sup>29</sup> In the discussion of the class as a one generational model, I shall draw on John Kent's use of primary and secondary periods of Methodism.<sup>30</sup> In the primary period, Methodist life was experiential and immediate. In the secondary period, stated by Kent to begin in the 1760's, Methodist life became more routine, and less experiential. I will show that in part this change occurred because Methodism

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<sup>26</sup> T. Jackson, *Recollections of My Own Life and Times* (ed. B. Frankland; London: Wesleyan Conference Office. 1873)

<sup>27</sup> T. Jackson, *Recolelctions*, p. 496.

<sup>28</sup> J. Goodfellow, *The Diary of John Goodfellow*, after April 1784. MA 1977/236.

<sup>29</sup> J. Goodfellow, *The Diary of John Goodfellow*, entries for the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1786 and 25<sup>th</sup> April 1787.

<sup>30</sup> J. Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2002)



became more accepted within English religious life. Although writing in the middle years of the 1780's, through his conversion narrative, Goodfellow clearly had a primary experience of Methodism. However, those whom he led in classes had a secondary understanding of Methodist life, in which the close unity and fundamentally experiential nature of the class had declined.

Dean noted in his article that in 1791, the year of Wesley's death, Mary Lomas felt herself under the burden of sin, and 'found her way to a Methodist Class Meeting, having a desire to "flee from the wrath to come".'<sup>31</sup> Thomas Jackson's *Recollections* contain a description of Methodism's arrival in his home village of Sancton, East Yorkshire. Until the Rev George Holder was invited to preach in a cottage in the village in 1786, there was no Methodist cause locally. As a result of his preaching a 'Class was formed, of which she (Jackson's mother) became one of the earliest members; and was soon made happy in the enjoyment of God's pardoning mercy and renewing grace, as was her sister, Elizabeth.'<sup>32</sup>

Through the following chapters, evidence will be drawn from Wesley's letters, journal, publications through tracts and pamphlets, letters to friends and leaders, and an open letter of the need to maintain, improve and regulate the classes appropriately. In each of these situations Wesley was addressing a situation before him at that point. This thesis does not set out to prove that Wesley had a sense of the class failing, or its basic functions ceasing to be effective for the leaders or membership.

The following three chapters address three distinct patterns that emerged within Wesley's lifetime and led to the decline of the class meeting. Using the writings

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<sup>31</sup> W.W. Dean, 'The Methodist Class Meeting. The Significance of its Decline', *Proceedings*, Vol. XLIII, part 2, p. 44.

<sup>32</sup> T. Jackson, *Recollections*, p. 24. (Words in brackets mine).

of sociologists of religion, these indicate ways in which the exuberant and experiential class meeting ceased to be so. Each of the chapters takes a key theme associated with the writings of one particular sociologist. It is in this context that each aspect of decline is set. I am taking each idea, as a general theme, and discussing how the decline of Methodism fits within this theme.

Using Weber's, Durkheim's and Troeltsch's theories from the school of the sociology of religion, I will indicate that Methodism could not escape Weber's routinisation, Durkheim's totemism, or Troeltsch's mysticism/sect models. I use Troeltsch to show that the class meeting was a 'one generational' model.

Where appropriate, parallels are drawn to assist the understanding of these themes. Chapter six opens with an example of an American evangelistic meeting which continues to use an approach from some thirty years before. I shall also use the layout of a small Methodist Church building in East Anglia to show how totemism led to the inclusion of a tiny 'Class Room' which was wholly unsuited to the needs of a class in chapter seven. Within that same chapter, a contemporary example of totemism from North Korea will be described.

In chapter eight, Lester Ruth's descriptive account of the early American Quarterly Meeting's lovefeasts, offers a picture of the manner in which only one generation find the real depth of a meeting's purpose. In Troeltsch's mystic/sect descriptor, the transition from mysticism to sect means that those who attach themselves to an organisation or group at a later stage than its inception do not do so for the same reasons as the first generation. This draws on the group processes described in chapter five. John Kent offers Troeltsch's model (without

specifically referring to it) as Primary and Secondary religion.<sup>33</sup> Most helpfully, he sets these models specifically within the context of Methodism.

With the growth of Methodism, classes became difficult to police. Wesley relied on his class leaders, society leaders and ultimately the assistants to act with his authority. These leaders did not possess Wesley's charisma, or gravity, and ultimately, Wesley became distanced from the people he led.

I have already stated that Wesley believed the class to be prudentially ordained.<sup>34</sup> I would also suggest he saw it as the expression of early church community, or primitive Christianity. Those means which are prudential may be used by Christians to assist the Christian journey as each individual saw fit. In the Methodist schema the class, although a prudential means, was by no means merely a meeting that was to be used as and when a person felt it necessary. The class was obligatory for all the Methodist people. In effect, for Methodists the class was the sole means of grace that was 'instituted', not by divine command but by John Wesley. Within this section I will show that throughout Wesley's leadership of the Methodists, his letters and publications contained requests and pleas to the Methodist people to continue meeting, or resume meeting within the class.

To conclude these comments, I quote below a letter Wesley wrote shortly before his death. This letter to Ann (Nancy) Bolton<sup>35</sup> a Class Leader and friend for some 30 years, indicates that even those who knew Wesley well found the

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<sup>33</sup> J. Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans*.

<sup>34</sup> Wesley began to use the term 'prudential' whilst under the influence of the Nonjurors. Such prudential means were those that were not laid down by the canons of the church, but which were nonetheless useful to Christian life and practice. See J.C. Bowmer, *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism*, pp. 233-237. Wesley annotated his handwritten manuscripts of *The Apostolic Canons*, indicating those which were observed by duty, and those observed prudentially. These manuscripts date to around 1736. See p. 234. Wesley used the term 'prudential regulation' in reference to the class in *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*. See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 262.

<sup>35</sup> P. Batstone, 'Bolton, Ann (Nancy)', in *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland*, pp. 35-36.

class difficult, if not burdensome. Wesley wrote with feeling and clearly out of concern for her;

From the time you omitted meeting your class or band you grieved the Holy Spirit of God, and He gave a commission to Satan to buffet you; nor will that commission ever be revoked till you begin to meet again. .... I exhort you for my sake (who tenderly love you), for God's sake, for the sake of your own soul, begin again without delay. The day after you receive this go and meet a class or a band. Sick or well, go! If you cannot speak a word, go; and God will go with you. You sink under the sin of omission! My friend, my sister, go! Go, whether you can or not.<sup>36</sup>

This quotation reflects Wesley's continuing conviction that the class meeting was vital for Methodist spiritual health. The letter also shows Wesley's strong sense of divine and diabolical intervention. Classes and bands were seen as vehicles for God's gracious action while omitting to use them left one open to Satan's influence. In chapter eight I will show that he retained this supernatural understanding of the fluctuations of Christian experience to the end of his life.

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<sup>36</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VIII, p. 246. John Wesley to Ann Bolton, November 4<sup>th</sup> 1790.



## Chapter 6: Routinisation

Randall Balmer's analysis of American Evangelicalism<sup>1</sup> briefly discusses routinisation in the context of a study of the work of Calvary Chapel in Santa Ana, California. Balmer notes that at the outset, a voluntary association, in his study a church, will gather around a 'charismatic leader, who defines the group largely through the force of his personality.'<sup>2</sup> Over time, the force of charisma gives way to a process of routinisation. leading to institutionalisation, and set patterns of behaviour.

The example Balmer uses is an 'Outreach Night'.<sup>3</sup> These evenings for young people end with an opportunity to witness at Balboa Pier in Newport Beach. In the 1970's at Pirate's Cove, a short distance from the pier, hippies, drug users and others came to hear preaching organised by Chuck Smith, pastor of Calvary Chapel, and to be baptised. The scene of thousands of otherwise un-reached people touched by the preaching of Smith, was an indication of the charisma he possessed to lead such a large and inspiring gathering. By the time Balmer undertook his study, the scene at Balboa Pier, whilst reminiscent of Smith's outreach, was a pale imitation of its forebear. Pastor Smith's charisma could not be emulated by a young preacher following a tried and trusted approach to evangelism. Such was his methodology that he told those willing to accompany him,

it's very important that you all pay close attention, that you look at me as if you've never seen me before. That's the key, because people walking by will look at the audience and see how interested they are before deciding whether or not to stop and listen.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. Balmer, *Mines Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America* (New York: Oxford University Press. 1989) pp. 12-30. See especially pp. 26-29.

<sup>2</sup> R. Balmer, *Mines Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> R. Balmer, *Mines Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> R. Balmer, *Mines Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, p. 27.

Balmer outlined two key elements of the routinisation process; first that the charisma of the original leader led to the initial success of the enterprise. In this instance, Pastor Smith picked up on the felt disquiet of many young people and channelled his energy into reaching them appropriately.<sup>5</sup> Second, that the continuation of the enterprise does not possess the leader's charisma and therefore relies on tried and trusted models of work. This is routinisation. The outward form remains, the internal charisma has gone.

I will argue that the class meeting became routinised both within the broader organisation of Methodism, and within its own milieu. It will be argued that, like Balmer's example above, routinisation becomes identifiable within a short period of time. In the case of Calvary Chapel's outreach it was some fifteen to twenty years.<sup>6</sup>

The theory of routinisation was first evinced by Max Weber,<sup>7</sup> who was amongst the first wave of sociologists of religion who sought explanations through social sciences for the manner in which religions operated. His theory, *The Routinisation of Charisma*, stressed the decline in an organisation's initial appeal under a charismatic leader, towards an institution which exists to promote the material interests of the members of the organisation.

Käsler marks this process through the need to maintain an organisation financially. Once this form of routinisation occurs, then the organisation itself exists because of the need to financially maintain it.<sup>8</sup> David Bosch, the South African theologian, offers this critique of routinisation;

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<sup>5</sup> R. Balmer, *Mines Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, pp. 23-25.

<sup>6</sup> Randall Balmer published the first edition in 1989

<sup>7</sup> A comprehensive biography of Max Weber can be found in D. Käsler, *Max Weber An Introduction to his Life and Work*(Oxford: Polity Press. 1988) pp. 1-23.

<sup>8</sup> D. Käsler, *Max Weber*, p. 165.

Either a movement disintegrates or it becomes an institution – this is simply a sociological law. Every religious group that started out as a movement and managed to survive did so because it was gradually institutionalised: the Waldensians, the Quakers, the Moravians, the Pentecostals...<sup>9</sup>

This is true of Methodism through the shift from movement to organisation over the first ten years of Methodism, and through the class meeting, the primary element of the emerging organisation to 1791. The latter will be evidenced by testimony from class members, diaries and publications.

Weber noted that charismatic leadership is unstable, and routinisation acts to stabilise this;

The pure type of charismatic rulership is in a very specific sense unstable, and all its modifications have basically one and the same cause: the desire to transform charisma and charismatic blessing from a unique, transitory gift of grace ....into a permanent possession of everyday life.<sup>10</sup>

Weber stated this desire was to capture the transitory charisma of the leader and turn it into a permanent possession of the organisation. This 'is desired usually by the master, always by disciples, and most of all by his charismatic subjects. Inevitably, however, this changes the nature of the charismatic structure.'<sup>11</sup> This adds insight into the experience of Calvary Chapel's outreach team, who longed for the same charisma as Pastor Smith, and his success, yet who clearly could not emulate this when Balmer witnessed their efforts.

The administrative staff offer insight into the process of routinisation. This level of leadership, subject to the charismatic leader, organises around their own material, or ideal interests: one such interest being the continuation of the organisation:

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<sup>9</sup> D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 52.

<sup>10</sup> M. Weber, *Economy and Society an Outline of Interpretive Sociology: Volume 2* (eds. G. Roth, & C. Wittich; Berkley University of California Press. 1978) p. 1121.

<sup>11</sup> M. Weber, *Economy and Society: Vol. 2*, p. 1121.



the great majority of disciples and followers will in the long run “make their living” out of their “calling” in a material sense as well. Indeed this must be the case if the movement is not to disintegrate.<sup>12</sup>

This is not necessarily paid employment, but is a bureaucratic office. Staff are not trained but appointed by the leader who notices their own charismatic qualities, yet they are limited in their functions. These staff may be friends of the leader, who are gathered to offer support, friendship and the execution of the leader's ideas.<sup>13</sup> William Dean addressed this point, ‘These men (class leaders) were literally physical extensions of his (Wesley's) own ministry and purpose. Their authority was held by delegation from him and they were personally responsible to him in the exercise of it.’<sup>14</sup> White, in his discussion of class decline noted how Wesley's personal appointment of class leaders was frequently delegated to others as Methodism grew.<sup>15</sup> In the early years of Methodism, as Wesley was visiting the classes of Gateshead, he recognised that meeting with the leader of each class rather than each member could achieve the aim of regulating the class. In visiting Robert Peacock, a class leader, the close questioning Wesley made of him about each member of his class would enable a previously ‘one to one’ regulatory process to be undertaken through the individual who represented Wesley's authority, and who would have to remove any disorderly walkers on Wesley's behalf.<sup>16</sup> Through this method, a society of 800 was halved.

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<sup>12</sup> M. Weber, *Economy and Society an Outline of Interpretive Sociology*: Volume I (eds. G. Roth., & C. Wittich; Berkley: University of California Press: 1978) p. 249.

<sup>13</sup> J. Finney, *Fading Splendour? A New Model of Renewal* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd. 2000) p. 31.

<sup>14</sup> W.W. Dean, *Disciplined Fellowship*, p. 227. (Words in brackets mine).

<sup>15</sup> C.E. White, ‘The Decline of the Class Meeting’, in *Methodist History*, Volume XXXVIII, Number 4, (ed. C. Yrigoyen; New Jersey: United Methodist Church. 2000) p. 259.

<sup>16</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 20, pp. 162-163.



However, as Methodism grew, Wesley had little control over the appointment of local leaders. Samuel Bradburn's *Memorandum Book*<sup>17</sup> indicates that in some places there were no society leaders and by implication no class leaders. In Dublin in 1771, Wesley had to deal with problems in the society which affected preachers, stewards and leaders. After meeting with them, Wesley addressed the society and laid before them in strong terms the purpose and authority of those in leadership of the society. Amongst those leaders were the class leaders, whose position is the first to be addressed by Wesley. In his exhortation, Wesley had to reintroduce their authority, along with the authority of other leaders. The people of the Dublin society had for some time not recognised the class leader's authority as stemming from Wesley personally.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in a letter to Joseph Benson in 1776, Wesley advised Benson to remove any class leader who failed to 'watch over the souls committed to their care'.<sup>19</sup> At that point in Methodism's existence, some class leaders were not exercising their role as if their authority was from Wesley himself. This raises questions in relation to Dean's strong assertion.

Finally elective affinity needs discussion. Weber examined a link between Calvinism and capitalism to show this affinity. Essentially, Weber argued that Calvinists became drawn towards social achievement to counter any uncertainty felt by the doctrine of election. This tension arising from predestination 'results in the 'interests' of Calvinists in *knowing* whether or not they are among the elect.'<sup>20</sup> Thus capitalism arose as Calvinists sought to effect their salvation through work. Elective affinity is the appropriation (or election) of those points of the original idea with which there is affinity. As Hill points out,

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<sup>17</sup> See Bradburn S. *A Memorandum Book Containing a List of the Places I Have Been in and the Texts of Scripture I Have Preached on, With the Times of Preaching in Each Place: Since May 31 1774* (Handwritten, unpublished diary), MA 1977/296.

<sup>18</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 22, pp. 267-269.

<sup>19</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol VI, p. 208.

<sup>20</sup> M. Hill, *A Sociology of Religion* (London: Heinemann Educational Books. 1973) p. 121.

once a religious movement begins, its adherents begin to select those parts of the core message that have greatest relevance.<sup>21</sup>

In Methodist terms some of those parts related to the change in an individual's life leading towards holiness, which might also mean an improvement in social status, and the acquisition of wealth, whilst maintaining a policy of giving to the poor. Noting that Wesley saw Methodists becoming rich as early as 1760 Henry Rack writes of Methodism and capitalism,

Methodism appealed to the industrious middling and artisan classes. It certainly taught an industrious and frugal life, and its rules strongly discouraged conspicuous consumption or adornment.<sup>22</sup>

Weber noted that the acquisition of wealth occurred in Methodism. Although his theory of the rise of capitalism applied to Calvinism, he wrote of Methodism,

The mighty "revival" of Methodism, which preceded the rapid development of English industry ....can, - if the comparison is taken with a pinch of salt! - be very aptly likened to such a reform of the monasteries. Those mighty religious movements, whose significance for the economic development lay primarily in the ascetic *education* they provided, only developed their full *economic* effect after the pinnacle of purely religious enthusiasm had been left behind, ...(when) religious roots were beginning to die and give way to utilitarian earthly concerns.<sup>23</sup>

Rack asserts that by 1760, Wesley noticed the tendency for those Methodists who lived regulated and frugal lives to become financially better off.<sup>24</sup> In his journal for October 1760, Wesley wrote, 'As many of them increase in worldly goods, the great danger I apprehend now is their relapsing into the spirit of the world. And then their religion is but a dream.'<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See M. Hill, *A Sociology of Religion*, p. 108.

<sup>22</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 366.

<sup>23</sup> M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism*, p. 118. (Word in brackets mine).

<sup>24</sup> See H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 366. Rack suggests that Wesley adopts a 'Weberian strain' in some of his later sermons. See note 113 to p. 366.

<sup>25</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 21, p. 284.

One other point needs attention, arising from the study of group processes in the previous chapter; homogeneity. This is discussed by Rupert Brown,<sup>26</sup> and has two strands to it; first, the homogeneity of those outside a group – that the group perceives those who do not belong as having the same description: and secondly, the homogeneity of the group itself – that those within the group possess common values, attributes and goals. This is made more complex when the group studied is small. In this instance a greater degree of homogeneity is apparent.

A homogenous unit is as liable to routinisation as any other, and the class meeting of around 12 people falls directly into the category of small units whose homogeneity is more easily identifiable, and therefore a barrier to new members. John Munsey Turner admirably describes homogeneity among the nineteenth century Primitive Methodists. In this period, rural villages and recently industrialised centres became a boom area of growth, with the majority of the congregation 'composed of labourers with the leading lay man often enough a shopkeeper.'<sup>27</sup> This homogenous unit of Methodists stood against the prevailing changing world, which was in turn seen by them as homogenous in itself.

William Dean is dismissive on the matter of routinisation. Quoting from an unpublished PhD thesis,<sup>28</sup> and recognising the strength of the argument, he dismissed it,

The weakness of the routinization hypothesis is that once the change has been described, the description itself becomes the explanation of the change. The logic runs thus: This is what happened; it happened because it happened. To describe a situation, however, is very different from explaining it; to confuse explanation with description is

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<sup>26</sup> R. Brown, *Group Processes*, pp. 287ff.

<sup>27</sup> J.M. Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation*, p. 85.

<sup>28</sup> The thesis referred to is B. Turner, *The Decline of Methodism: An analysis of Religious Commitment and Organisation* (Unpublished PhD dissertation: University of Leeds. 1970) pp. 25-26.



to introduce an element of determinism. Such a hypothesis seems to postulate some sort of hidden natural law which determined the course of change. I accept the description as valid, but I reject the determinism. We are not dealing with an irresistible (or in this context, psychological) process. There is evidence in the history of American denominations which suggests that such routinization can be addressed and overcome.<sup>29</sup>

I disagree with Dean. It is true that describing routinisation is not the same as explaining it, but the experience of early Methodism supports the theory. Dean's assertion that routinisation might be overcome does not in this instance negate the point I am making through this chapter. I am offering an explanation as to why the class meeting began to decline within a relatively short space of time.

A useful place to begin is the diaries of early Methodist leaders. These diaries record widely varying spiritual temperatures. Authors describe experiencing the buffets of Satan just as frequently as hearts enlarged after holiness. From one day to the next, or even within the same day's entries it is not unusual to note that a writer swings from extreme contentment to a deep sense of sinfulness.

This morning I was exceeding happy and more and more confirmed in the truth of my experience: yet afterwards was very much striped and stripped exceedingly; Satan casting his fiery darts like a flood into my soul.<sup>30</sup>

This careful personal searching extended to the company one kept,

I feel my heart too easily affected by the company I happen to be in. Hence lightness of spirit often carries me I know not whither, and makes me ashamed to go to prayer.<sup>31</sup>

These diaries share the same purpose as John Wesley's exacting *Diary*, and earlier Puritan diaries. According to Ted Campbell, journals and diaries served in a similar manner to the Catholic confessional, and the earlier practice of spiritual direction in that they were not solely private documents, but were read

<sup>29</sup> W.W. Dean, *Disciplined Fellowship*, p. 363.

<sup>30</sup> W. Holder, *The Diary of William Holder, who was Born in Painswick (Glos) and Died in London January 17<sup>th</sup> 1810 aged 70*, entry for 25<sup>th</sup> October 1768. MA 1977/238.

<sup>31</sup> S. Bradburn, *A Memorandum Book: Vol. 1*, entry for May 1775. MA 1977/296.



to family, friends and the minister.<sup>32</sup> This practice continued within Methodism as William Holder used extracts of his diary to encourage others. 'After breakfast I read some things of my *Journal* to them, particularly how I was before, at the time, and after my deliverance'.<sup>33</sup> One might properly expect that the class was a mutual confessional and it was so, but not a confessional of temptation and sinfulness as much as an opportunity to describe the previous week's experience of daily life.

The diary records of class meetings are numerous, but rarely give detailed information of a meeting's events. John Goodfellow allows an insight on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 1784, 'At Class, but discomforted by the actions of a person making much ado there: O God grant I pray that I may not judge rashly or condemn others'.<sup>34</sup> It is more common to read of the reproof or encouragement of a class member outside the class meeting, as in William Holder's<sup>35</sup> and John Goodfellow's diaries.<sup>36</sup>

The manner in which diarists refer to the effects of the class meeting upon themselves, and by extension to other members, is difficult to assess. Whether the language used by these leaders to describe a class meeting was routinised is difficult to claim definitively. If it is, then the terms used may have been understood or accepted by others who may have read or heard extracts of the leader's diaries, as representing an experience expressed in recognised or common terms. If not, then these terms must be allowed to stand alone as representative of the felt need met at the meeting.

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<sup>32</sup> T. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart*, p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> W. Holder, *The Diary of William Holder*, entry for 29<sup>th</sup> September 1768. MA 1977/238.

<sup>34</sup> J. Goodfellow, *The Diary of John Goodfellow*, entry for 28<sup>th</sup> September 1784. MA 1977/236.

<sup>35</sup> W. Holder, *The Diary of William Holder*, entry for 15<sup>th</sup> November 1768. MA 1977/238.

<sup>36</sup> J. Goodfellow, *The Diary of John Goodfellow*, Entries for the 19<sup>th</sup> September and 27<sup>th</sup> December 1787. MA 1977/236.

The language or terminology used in the diaries of William Holder, John Goodfellow, Bennet Dugdale and Samuel Bradburn ranges from 'sweet opportunity', 'found it very good', 'peace in my own soul', 'peace flowed as a river', 'greatly blessed', 'I find my spirit greatly united', 'abundantly strengthened and refreshed' and 'melting time'. Goodfellow used the phrase 'melting time'<sup>37</sup> twice. This term, or variations of it were not uncommon in the period covered by his diary. George Whitefield recorded in his journal that his 'heart was melted down'<sup>38</sup> at his ordination by the Bishop of Gloucester in 1736. Charles Wesley described himself 'melted down' after preaching at Newgate in November 1738.<sup>39</sup> John Valton considered that those who heard him exhort and pray 'melt and weep' as he spoke.<sup>40</sup> He also wrote on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1766, that whilst at breakfast he felt that his soul 'melted into tears of joy.'<sup>41</sup> John Wesley used the term 'melted down' in his journal having met the society in Norwich. On meeting them at seven, he informed them that they were 'the most ignorant, self-conceited, self-willed, fickle, untractable, disorderly, disjointed society'.<sup>42</sup> In speaking to the society in these terms, he was by default, chastising the classes and leaders for not functioning in a manner which would prevent the need for such an address. On the same day (9<sup>th</sup> September 1759) he met them again at ten, and this time, following his earlier discourse, 'many stubborn hearts were melted down.'<sup>43</sup> There may therefore be a mimetic quality to these phrases, used by leaders in a manner which was representative of their felt experience,

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<sup>37</sup> J. Goodfellow, *The Diary of John Goodfellow*, entries for the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1785 and 11<sup>th</sup> May 1787. MA 1977/236.

<sup>38</sup> G. Whitefield, *George Whitefield's Journals*, p. 69.

<sup>39</sup> C. Wesley, *The Journal of Charles Wesley*, Vol. I, p. 134. Entry for the 7<sup>th</sup> November 1738.

<sup>40</sup> J. Valton, 'The Life of John Valton', in *Preachers*, Vol. VI, p. 28. (21<sup>st</sup> November 1764). See also D.B. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, p. 83. Hindmarsh writes of the experience of Joseph Humphrey's, and early associate of the Wesley's. In his personal diary, he too writes of being 'melted down'.

<sup>41</sup> J. Valton, 'The Life of John Valton', in *Preachers*, p. 50.

<sup>42</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 21, p. 227. For an interesting discourse on Wesley's use of English, through his writing, both private, and public, see G. Lawton, *John Wesley's English A Study of His Literary Style* (London: George Allen & Unwin. 1962).

<sup>43</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 21, p. 227.

and which would be understood by others. This usage of language may therefore be 'routine', but not without depth.

Of the four diarists, three frequently took a common diary style when writing of meeting a class. Dugdale,<sup>44</sup> Goodfellow<sup>45</sup> and Holder<sup>46</sup> each described their feelings or emotional state during the course of the day, and carried those feelings to the meeting. Thus, Dugdale wrote on the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1786, 'the greater part of the day felt much heaviness and inactivity accompanied with heaviness so that I would have shunned meeting my class.'<sup>47</sup> He attempted to find a person to take his place, but failed. Having to lead the class, his record of the meeting exceeded his expectation 'glory be to God who was better than my hopes and greater than my fear.'<sup>48</sup> William Holder was similarly exercised. 'I have been much buffeted (sic) all this day by the enemy'.<sup>49</sup> In the evening, after meeting his class his emotional state changed, 'I met my Class, & was exceedingly strengthened thereby. I believe it was a time of refreshing to all.'<sup>50</sup> The same prose style was used by John Valton to indicate to the reader of his biography that despite his feeling lifeless and forlorn, and his resolution not to go to his class, his subsequent attendance resulted in a 'refreshing time.'<sup>51</sup>

Unlike his fellow diarists, Samuel Bradburn wrote sparingly of the class meeting. Travelling from 1774<sup>52</sup> and stationed in Pembroke, Wales in 1775, he noted in

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<sup>44</sup> B. Dugdale, *The Diary of Bennet Dugdale*, see the entries for the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1786, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1786 and 13<sup>th</sup> August 1786. MA 1977/216.

<sup>45</sup> J. Goodfellow, *The Diary of John Goodfellow*, see the entries for 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1785, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1786 and 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1787. MA 1977/236.

<sup>46</sup> W. Holder, *The Diary of William Holder*, see the entries for 13<sup>th</sup> October 1768, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1768, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1769, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1769, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1769, 25<sup>th</sup> May 1769, 29<sup>th</sup> June 1769, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1769, 17<sup>th</sup> August 1769, 31<sup>st</sup> August 1769, 21<sup>st</sup> September 1769, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1769. MA 1977/238.

<sup>47</sup> B. Dugdale, *The Diary of Bennet Dugdale*, entry for the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1786. MA 1977/216.

<sup>48</sup> B. Dugdale, *The Diary of Bennet Dugdale*, entry for the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1786. MA 1977/216.

<sup>49</sup> W. Holder, *The Diary of William Holder*, entry for the 29<sup>th</sup> June 1769. MA 1977/238.

<sup>50</sup> W. Holder, *The Diary of William Holder*, entry for the 29<sup>th</sup> June 1769. MA 1977/238.

<sup>51</sup> J. Valton, 'The Life of John Valton', in *Preachers*, p. 37. This is the entry for the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1765.

<sup>52</sup> W. Myles, *A Chronological History*, p. 299. Myles places Bradburn in the 'second race of Methodist Preachers.'



his first month that meeting the classes was useful for his preaching, 'by frequently meeting the Classes, I find my Spirit greatly united to the people. It likewise furnishes me with many useful hints for preaching.'<sup>53</sup> However in a reflective moment, he noted that he had not grown in grace and had a tendency to self sufficiency.<sup>54</sup> Bradburn did not write about the classes again until he was stationed in London in 1786, when he was contemptuous of their state.<sup>55</sup>

As I have indicated already and will show elsewhere, the diaries and journals of class leaders were not intended as wholly private documents. These entries were therefore of assistance in convincing, or encouraging others to meet, or continue meeting in class, particularly if the reluctant individual was expressing a similar emotive state prior to the regular scheduled class meeting. These diarists, rather like other first hand accounts illustrate that there was not an even picture of class life. Elsewhere in this thesis I have used these diarists as they write of the class failing to operate as the Methodist system required. As I noted in the introduction to this section, the class functioned well in some places, whilst proving to be a cross in others.

The process of routinisation meant that following the same routine of prayer, hymn, inquisition with response and prayer had led to a routine language and perhaps expectation of experience that is codified by the descriptive language of the class meeting's events.

In the earliest period Wesley's own providential phrase, 'a brand plucked from the burning' was used by early Methodists of their conversion experience.

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<sup>53</sup> S. Bradburn, *A Memorandum Book*, entry for September 1775. MA 1977/296.

<sup>54</sup> S. Bradburn, *A Memorandum Book*, entry for September 1775. MA 1977/296.

<sup>55</sup> S. Bradburn, *A Memorandum Book*, entries for December 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> 1786. In London he filled his role as an Assistant, and was responsible for regulating the classes. MA 1977/296.

Catharine Gilbert<sup>56</sup> and Margaret Austin<sup>57</sup> both use the term, albeit with their own phraseology. Elizabeth Sayce used the phrase 'my chains fell off',<sup>58</sup> reminiscent of Charles Wesley's hymn, 'And can it be?' to describe her assurance. These phrases may have been used in testimony to Charles Wesley as they had heard the term in preaching or Band Meetings, or through singing and in order to describe their movement from sin to faith, this term aptly described their present state. The language was borrowed, and in some way routine for a description of the journey to faith, a journey that was often tortuous.

Similarly, the experiences of seeing Christ at the Sacrament or hearing voices giving an assurance of forgiveness are remarkably similar.<sup>59</sup> A note of caution however should be added in that the earliest testimonials were written around the period of the stillness controversy, which was not confined to Fetter Lane. The highly charged visions of Christ at the Sacrament may have been elicited by Charles Wesley to counter the exponents of stillness.

Routinisation of language occurred in the class meeting as those who maintained journals were unable to give particular detail, and wanted to express something of the meetings events, as they understood them. The early testimonials had a similarity of language, which is to be expected, but described an individual's personal experience. The later journals described the meetings of later Methodists for whom the ecstatic experience of the early testimonies

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<sup>56</sup> Catharine Gilbert to Charles Wesley, 19<sup>th</sup> May 1740, p. 1. *Early Methodist Volume*.

<sup>57</sup> Margaret Austin to Charles Wesley, 1740, p. 6. *Early Methodist Volume*.

<sup>58</sup> Testimonial of Elizabeth Sayce to Charles Wesley from K. Morgan, 'Methodist Testimonials for Bristol Collected by Charles Wesley in 1742', in *Reformation and Revival in Eighteenth-Century Bristol*, p. 97.

<sup>59</sup> See T. or J. Cowper to Charles Wesley, 1741, p. 16. Sarah Middleton to Charles Wesley, May 1740, p. 5. Both letters are from the *Early Methodist Volume*. See also K. Morgan, 'Methodist Testimonials for Bristol Collected by Charles Wesley in 1742', in *Reformation and Revival in Eighteenth-Century Bristol*, testimonial of Elizabeth Downs 13<sup>th</sup> April 1742, p. 87. In addition see the testimonial of Elizabeth Sayce, undated, p. 98.

was predominately historical and reported the communal experience of the class meeting which no longer held the ecstatic as a common occurrence.

Hindmarsh skilfully relates the place of testimony and autobiography as a means of expressing the experiences of the individual. Early testimony was written to Wesley, later autobiography was written for the Methodists. The accounts published in the *Arminian Magazine* were drawn from personal journals and diaries and offer a less personal account of the routine of life than the testimonies. The journals and diaries from which the above accounts of class meeting business are drawn represent the first hand, contemporary journaling of Leaders whose language is, to say the least not highly expressive of personal experience, but rather fettered.

John Atlay's life, recorded in the *Arminian Magazine* of 1778, stands sharply against this. Atlay, drawing on his own conversion experience to encourage his class, is able to write that his fellow class members came to the same experience in a short time,

from that hour I never had a moment's doubt of God's love to me. ...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>60</sup>

A similar account is given by Benjamin Rhodes, who became a class leader in the early 1760's. He led several classes, and recounted in his autobiography, 'I found those meetings were both solemn and profitable to my self and others. The first quarter several found a sense of forgiveness; and others were greatly

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<sup>60</sup> J. Atlay, 'Account of Mr John Atlay', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. I, p. 579. In the 1780's Atlay was in dispute with John Wesley, and left the Connexion having attempted to begin his own circuit. Hindmarsh notes that from that point he was expunged from the Methodist memory. See D.B. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, p. 239.



stirred up.’<sup>61</sup> Likewise, the *Account* of Robert Wilkinson, a class member in 1767, shows that at that point the class was functioning sufficiently well to enable him to receive verbal assurance from his leader that his Christian life was not without merit. Wilkinson’s *Account* is rare in that he gives a brief, but vital insight into the inquisitorial nature of the class:

After the first prayer was over, it was with difficulty I rose from my knees. When the Leader asked how I found the state of my soul, I answered, I am left without one spark of hope that God will ever have mercy on me. No, he said, you are not; for if you were, you would not now be using the means of grace.<sup>62</sup>

John Wesley, in a letter written to Charles in 1748, reported the experience of two individuals who openly pronounced their state. Tellingly, Wesley comments of one. ‘Had it been desired, he would have explained before them all.’<sup>63</sup> This indicates that the classes in Dublin were functioning as experiential confessionals, with the added function of small communities for faith development.

Wesley’s letter to his brother was intended to encourage the Methodists in England. The letter, written on April 16<sup>th</sup> 1748, is an extract from the *Journal*.<sup>64</sup> I contend the letter would have been read out publicly by Methodists and non-Methodists alike. This contrasts sharply with later accounts and diaries that leave the reader with little doubt that the class was a routine element of the Methodist pattern, rather than a foundation of the path to faith.

Samuel Bradburn offers a personal insight into the malaise of the classes in London in 1786. Appointed by Conference to London, his first attempt at regulating the classes occasioned this entry, ‘Regulating the Classes, which I

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<sup>61</sup> B. Rhodes, ‘Account of Benjamin Rhodes’, in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. II, p. 364. See also J. Mason, ‘A Short Account of the Life of John Mason’, in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. III, p. 653.

<sup>62</sup> R. Wilkinson, ‘A Short Account of Mr. Robert Wilkinson’, in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. V, p. 181.

<sup>63</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, p. 306.

<sup>64</sup> See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 20, p. 217.

seriously think is mere loss of time, as people will not meet but where they profit. Why should they?'<sup>65</sup> He had previously been in Wales (1775) where there were no classes. He began his own 'divisions' which later became classes.

Bradburn also highlights another possible cause for routinisation: the transition to society consciousness. In this the role of John Wesley himself was diminished, and the leaders of the society took greater power to themselves. In 1779, whilst in Ireland, Bradburn noted that members with money considered they should have precedence in the society. Bradburn remarked, 'Owing to two or three persons, who think to rule everybody in the Society, because they have got money.'<sup>66</sup> It was no longer possible to control the leaders from a distance as it had been. Bradburn had been told by Wesley himself to dismiss one of the leaders. The leader refused to leave his post, or hand back the money or books he held.<sup>67</sup> Disaffection from the Society also plagued his work in Ireland.<sup>68</sup>

These changes in societal understanding were a form of routinisation as local leaders took responsibility for that which was previously under the direct authority of John Wesley, the charismatic leader. This routinisation permeated throughout the society's groups, including the class, moving the group away from its experiential, accountable, disciplinary, close pietistic fellowship of the early years of Methodism. Gareth Lloyd, writing about the place of early female preachers after Wesley's, succinctly evidenced the progression of routinisation as the male leadership actively assisted the Methodists to leave their more distinctive early characteristics in their history;

As the Methodists completed this transition from revival movement to denomination, they quietly shed important aspects of their early identity. Open-air preaching for example had largely died out even

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<sup>65</sup> S. Bradburn, *A Memorandum Book*, Vol. I, entry for December 1786. MA 1977/296.

<sup>66</sup> S. Bradburn, *A Memorandum Book*, Vol. I, entry for July 1779. MA 1977/296.

<sup>67</sup> S. Bradburn, *A Memorandum Book*, Vol. I, entry for December 1779. MA 1977/296.

<sup>68</sup> S. Bradburn, *A Memorandum Book*, Vol. I, entry for January 1780. MA 1977/296.

before Wesley passed from the scene, while the more charismatic brand of Christianity that had once been so distinctively Wesleyan was fast losing favour with the national leadership.<sup>69</sup>

A similar situation can be seen in the first American Quarterly Meetings. These Meetings were entirely different to the British meeting founded by John Bennet in 1748 at Todmorden.<sup>70</sup> The American model was a weekend camp, at which preaching, teaching and liturgical services, including, baptisms, weddings and funerals were shared, and business transacted. They attracted large crowds of members and adherents and the itinerant preachers of the locality. In *A Little Heaven Below* Lester Ruth discusses these meetings and notes that in the late eighteenth century crowds of six to ten thousand people were recorded.<sup>71</sup>

By the middle years of the nineteenth century the crowds had died away and worship, revivalist preaching and liturgy had been replaced by a shortened weekend dominated by business. The American Methodist way of worship had graduated to the local church and the needs of a settled 'churchy' congregation were now met by a settled ministry. This change led those who recalled the earlier revivalist period to lament the loss of what they saw as a fundamental building block of American Methodism. Lester Ruth quotes an itinerant preacher, David Lewis.

Methodists would go forty and fifty miles to quarterly meetings. These were our great festivals. Here we renewed our covenants with God and his people, obtained encouragement and strength in our souls, and rejoiced together in the salvation of God.... Truly our fellowship was with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> G. Lloyd, 'Repression and Resistance: Wesleyan Female Public Ministry in the Generation after 1791', in *Proceedings*, Vol. 55, part 3, p. 102.

<sup>70</sup> S.R. Valentine, *Mirror of the Soul*, p. 179. See the entry for October 18<sup>th</sup> 1748. The Rev William Grimshaw presided at the meeting.

<sup>71</sup> L. Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below. Worship at Early Methodist Quarterly Meetings* (Nashville: Kingswood Books. 2000) p. 32.

<sup>72</sup> L. Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below*, p. 183.



Ruth states that for Lewis this reminiscence contains 'a note of sadness ... quarterly meetings were great festivals, but they are no longer.'<sup>73</sup> Ruth continues his account of the decline of the Quarterly Meeting, and quotes Henry Boehm, who had travelled with Francis Asbury. 'What would we do if we could witness such a scene (of revival) at a modern quarterly meeting?'<sup>74</sup> Time engendered a shift in emphasis in the priorities of the American Methodists and the Quarterly Meeting's role was subsumed by other meetings for worship and business as the revival died away, and the routine life of discipleship took over.

The class could be revitalised by some outside events causing the membership to seek strength in their meeting together. In 1786, John Goodfellow noted that two Calvinist preachers were decimating his Society, such that 'they are so pleased with this novelty, that they cannot be happy in our meetings, nor can they endure the class meeting!'<sup>75</sup> Their preaching led him to conclude. 'This doctrine mightily (sic) please many of our lukewarm brethren, who are so safe that they have no need of class meetings'.<sup>76</sup> The problem became so severe that neither band, nor class members were attending their meetings.

The remaining class members regrouped and found within themselves another gust of charisma, and within a year, Goodfellow's account of class meetings had changed, such that there was a sense of purpose that his previous *Journal* entries did not possess,

I met my Class, it was a melting time to all, one who came with the determination to give up her ticket (sic), & be struck out of the paper, was so melted down by the power of God, that she publicly declared her intention in coming this evening; but departed with ...a determination to live more to God than ever, and never to forsake his cause, or people.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> L. Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below*, p. 183.

<sup>74</sup> L. Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below*, p. 184.

<sup>75</sup> J. Goodfellow, *The Diary of John Goodfellow*, entry for 20<sup>th</sup> March 1786. MA 1977/236.

<sup>76</sup> J. Goodfellow, *The Diary of John Goodfellow*, entry for 21<sup>st</sup> May 1786. MA 1977/236.

<sup>77</sup> J. Goodfellow, *The Diary of John Goodfellow*, entry for 11<sup>th</sup> May 1787. MA 1977/236.

The routinisation and comfort of the class was shaken by an alternative doctrine, thus causing over time a rediscovery of the charisma of Wesley's purpose of the class as a body for mutual edification and perseverance.

Low attendance also occurred simply because people did not meet; a problem Wesley was to regularly exhort the Methodists to overcome in his later life. William Holder, who otherwise seldom gave much detail of his class meetings, noted in his *Diary* two occasions of poor attendance, 'in the evening I met my Class, we was (sic) but few but it was a good opportunity.'<sup>78</sup> 'Likewise he wrote, 'I met my Class, we were but few, but I believe it was a time of good things to all.'<sup>79</sup>

Low attendance broke the rule that class attendance was a vital sign of acceptance of the Wesleyan system of organisation. If the *General Rules* had any force, the leader's duty was to see members in class weekly,<sup>80</sup> and this was not happening within Holder's class. Other diaries omit non-attendance, possibly for fear of being considered a poor leader.

By 1764, Wesley was clearly contending with non-attendance, just twenty two years after the inception of the class. His correspondence begins to be peppered with exhortations to ensure class attendance is maintained,

Whoever misses his class thrice together thereby excludes himself, and the preacher that comes next ought to put out his name. ...Meet the brethren or leave them. ...Never miss your class till you miss it for good and all.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> W. Holder, *The Diary of William Holder*, entry for 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1769. MA 1977/238.

<sup>79</sup> W. Holder, *The Diary of William Holder*, entry for 11<sup>th</sup> January 1770. MA 1977/238.

<sup>80</sup> See Appendix 10: Rule 3(1).

<sup>81</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. IV, p. 273.

In 1788, Wesley wrote to Edward Jackson commending him for denying tickets to all who failed to attend class, as a means of encouraging others to attend regularly. Vitally, Wesley suggests, however unknowingly, that the class might not have the same evangelistic appeal that it did: 'the grand means of revival of the work of God in Sheffield was the prayer-meetings. There were then twelve of them in various parts of the town every Sunday night. Keep up these, and you will keep up the flame.'<sup>82</sup> Whilst Wesley did not explicitly state the class no longer held pre-eminence, he recognised the value that the prayer meeting developed in Methodisms economy. Routinisation had affected the class meeting's status and vitality. Certainly the prayer meeting was being used in other places; John Pawson, who was himself converted at a prayer meeting,<sup>83</sup> was clear about its benefits in his Birstall appointment.<sup>84</sup> James Rogers<sup>85</sup> also felt the prayer meeting useful, as did John Mason.<sup>86</sup>

At Darlaston in 1759, Alexander Mather discovered that the prayer meeting was bringing people to faith. 'Some of these coming over to the prayer-meetings at Wednesbury, and hearing (what they thought they had never heard before) that they were to believe now; that they might come to Christ now, without any other qualification than a sense of their own sinfulness and helplessness ... Presently a prayer-meeting was set up at Darlaston. And in a little time many souls were set at liberty.'<sup>87</sup>

The prayer-meeting was a recent innovation, and there was opposition to the move, such that Mather eventually ceased holding them. Whether this was

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<sup>82</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VIII, pp. 98-99.

<sup>83</sup> J. Pawson, 'The Life of Mr John Pawson', in *Preachers*, Vol. IV, p. 20. His conversion took place on the 16<sup>th</sup> March 1760.

<sup>84</sup> J. Pawson, 'The Life of Mr John Pawson', in *Preachers*, Vol. IV, p. 47.

<sup>85</sup> J. Rogers, 'The Life of James Rogers', in *Preachers*, Vol. IV, p. 321.

<sup>86</sup> J. Mason, 'The Life of John Mason', in *Preachers*, Vol. III, p. 310.

<sup>87</sup> A. Mather, 'The Life of Alexander Mather', in *Preachers*, Vol. II, pp. 178-179.



because Mather's wife was leading them or because it was simply a novel move is not clear. However, the cessation of these meetings meant that 'immediately the work began to decay, both as to its swiftness and extensiveness. And though I continued to insist as strongly as ever upon the same points, yet there was not the same effect, for want of seconding by prayer-meetings the blow which was given in preaching.'<sup>88</sup> Preaching followed by attendance at a prayer meeting was at best unusual. Under Methodist polity, it was the class, portal to the society in which a searching individual heard the call to faith through experiential testimony of his or her peers.<sup>89</sup>

In a letter to Hannah Ball on the 13<sup>th</sup> April 1786, Wesley commended her society, and indicated that it would prosper as long as 'the prayer meetings are kept up'.<sup>90</sup> He then issued a caveat, 'without interfering with the classes and bands.'<sup>91</sup> Writing on the decline of the class in the nineteenth century, William Dean noted the class was the single group in which people were recruited and assimilated into Methodism. Yet this role was lost to the prayer meeting. 'It was during the first generation of the nineteenth century that the evangelistic function of the class meeting was lost to the prayer meeting'.<sup>92</sup> The examples above, point towards an earlier date for the decline of the class as the place in which people were awakened, or converted.

In part this must be related to the activities of the classes as the Class Leaders recorded them. Each diary is as much a record of personal spirituality, as it is a record of events. The events of the past week were shared in class, and with

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<sup>88</sup> A. Mather, 'The Life of Alexander Mather', in *Preachers*, Vol. II, p. 181.

<sup>89</sup> See also H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 492. Rack discusses the prayer meetings associated with the revivals in the 1780's.

<sup>90</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VII, p. 324.

<sup>91</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VII, p. 324.

<sup>92</sup> W.W. Dean. 'The Methodist Class Meeting: The Significance of its Decline', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XLIII, part 2, p. 43.

such a variation in temperature and state this must have given the class a very complex milieu. Many Methodists were unable, or unwilling, to unburden themselves in this manner, and as the class was a mutual confessional it is not surprising that the proceedings of the class became routine. Bennet Dugdale wrote on visiting a dying class member that his death was a 'sifting'<sup>93</sup> as he had 'stayed away a few times and then was ashamed to come'.<sup>94</sup> Could it rather be that the class no longer had any elective affinity for him, or that he found the routine too irksome to attend? When John Goodfellow met the members of another leader's class, he discovered little harmony, and ready blame of neighbour by neighbour for the situation.<sup>95</sup>

Charles Perronet's long document relating how class leaders' should operate details the manner of running either a class or band and was roundly endorsed by Wesley as an acceptable method for running class business. Perronet's document is more than merely a support to Leaders: it is prescriptive, detailed and routine.

Mary Tooth left no room for spontaneity in her classes as she prepared a catechism for class members with sufficient material for 124 meetings.<sup>96</sup> Another paper in the Fletcher Tooth Collection is a children's catechism, again intended to leave little or no room for personal testimony.<sup>97</sup> These routinised meetings bear no resemblance to the ideal of Wesley's meeting of early Methodism.

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<sup>93</sup> B. Dugdale, *The Diary of Bennet Dugdale*, entry for 16<sup>th</sup> May 1786. MA 1977/216.

<sup>94</sup> B. Dugdale, *The Diary of Bennet Dugdale*, entry for 16<sup>th</sup> May 1786. MA 1977/216.

<sup>95</sup> J. Goodfellow, *The Diary of John Goodfellow*, entry for 25<sup>th</sup> April 1787. MA 1977/236.

<sup>96</sup> JRULM: *Fletcher Tooth Collection*. MA F1 38.1

<sup>97</sup> JRULM: *Fletcher Tooth Collection*. MA F1 38.9

In Perronet's document, routinisation is obvious. The work of the class leader is simply to maintain the status quo, rather than to be open to the Holy Spirit's sifting and encouraging. The paper relates to behaviour within and without the society, and sets a standard of behaviour that veered towards respectability (or godliness) rather than developing spirituality (holiness). In many ways, it reflects an organisation that had become homogenous, as the piece understands that all Methodists will believe and behave in a manner different to the world.

Perronet's article reflects the discussion relating to group processes of chapter five, especially the section considering homogeneity. I consider homogeneity to have parallels with Weber's consideration of elective affinity mentioned earlier in this chapter. Michael Hill helpfully describes this elective affinity:

As soon as a group of adherents is attracted to a particular idea or ethical system, which in origin is purely concerned with problems of salvation and ultimate meaning, they will begin to 'elect' those features of the original idea with which they have 'affinity' or 'point of coincidence'. Thus there is the paradox that as soon as a new religious idea gets under way in the form of a religious movement, its members will have already begun the process of selection from the core of the message of those elements that are particularly relevant to the social location of those who have joined the movement.<sup>98</sup>

If it is shared values and understanding, including modes of dress, language and behaviour that make a group homogenous, and it is the appropriation of points from the founder's teaching, or doctrine (including dress, language and behaviour) that assist elective affinity, then there is a clear parallel between the two models.

Idealist and material interests also merge through elective affinity. On the surface there is divergence between the homogenous unit principle and elective affinity, as homogeneity does not require a merging of material interests into the

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<sup>98</sup> M. Hill, *A Sociology of Religion*, p. 108.



ideals held by the group. In Methodism however, it is fair to state that material interests became an element of the organisation's *raison d'être*, and were so from the outset, as seen through the *General Rules* of 1743.<sup>99</sup>

Perronet's *Right Method* was written 34 years after the classes first appeared, and published 39 years after. In that period, the initial charisma and excitement of belonging to a class had given way to the set routine and practice of meeting a class as the gateway into society membership. It is unsurprising that homogeneity and elective affinity can be discerned in his writing.

A brief comparison of the 1743 *General Rules* and the later *Right Method* of 1776 highlights the effect of homogeneity and elective affinity as elements of routinisation. Wesley's rule required the class leader to visit the class weekly, receive financial contributions and act as a spiritual director.<sup>100</sup> Perronet however is highly prescriptive in the expectation placed on the class leader.<sup>101</sup> The expectancy ranged from knowing who was a member of the Society, to knowledge of each member's spiritual understanding and personal development.

That a process of elective affinity and homogenisation had occurred within the process of routinisation is indicated by Wesley's own endorsement, 'I earnestly exhort all Leaders of classes and bands to consider the preceding Observations, and to put them in execution'.<sup>102</sup> By the second half of the 1770's, a more prescriptive stance was required to ensure that the classes functioned in a manner that was helpful and effective to the class members. From the

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<sup>99</sup> See Appendix 10.

<sup>100</sup> Appendix 10: Paragraph 3(1).

<sup>101</sup> Appendix 13.

<sup>102</sup> Appendix 13.

discussion above, using class leaders' diaries and journals, rules, such as these written by Charles Perronet, would have been useful regulatory tools.

To assist in understanding the place of homogeneity and elective affinity in early Methodism, the experience of John Goodfellow's Society, after the conviction for theft of one of their number, shows that each Society member was brought into disrepute through one person's behaviour:

May 12<sup>th</sup> This was a day of great trial; one of our Society was convicted of theft, so that the name of ~ Methodist is in everyones mouth as a reproach to us all, because one has been overcome by the enemy of souls, in an unwatchful moment.<sup>103</sup>

This disrepute was shared as the *whole* were disgraced by one person. The shared values and even material interests of the Society had been severely tried as their homogeneity; that which they shared in common, and their elective affinity; those primary material and spiritual interests within their collective life, were laid open to ridicule by people who were in their terms outside the group, and who were by definition spiritually inferior.

Though Goodfellow does not describe how his society and classes dealt with the situation, this event may have temporarily broken the routinisation process while members searched themselves once more and rebuilt their Society's reputation, putting life into otherwise moribund classes. If a Methodist could be convicted of theft the class was not fulfilling its role in the believer's life.

Samuel Bradburn offers a sign of the types of people who were joining the Methodist classes by 1787;

There are three sorts of people among them:- the Truly spiritual:- the regularly sincere, who live much below their privileges:- and the

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<sup>103</sup> J. Goodfellow, *The Diary of John Goodfellow*, entry for May 12<sup>th</sup> 1786. MA 1977/236.

scarcely awakened outward court worshippers, who just conform to the rules enough to be kept in connexion.<sup>104</sup>

It can barely be imagined that there could be such a definition of the Methodist people in the earliest period of Methodism when to belong to the Methodists brought scorn, ridicule, and even personal danger. This description leads to the tentative conclusion that Methodism was far more respectable than it had been, and the deeply experiential process of belonging to a class had faded to a routine of weekly meeting with little purpose.

This is a cross to Methodism, which required the class to act as a life-changing portal into the full life of the society, yet obviously served only to function as a custom of the Methodists, somewhat as a totem, which will be discussed in the next chapter. The experience of the work of Calvary Chapel, Santa Ana, and the early American quarterly meetings, shows that routinisation was not confined to the experience of the Methodist class meeting from 1742.

In the previous chapter, the place of the class as a crown to Methodism was discussed, and I showed how the class required a particular type of religious experience to enable it to function. The class operated as a confessional and was only functional when the group were prepared to engage fully in the experiential life of the meeting. The early entry requirement of Methodism, a desire 'to flee from the wrath to come', lost its urgency over the years of Methodist development, and as will be shown in chapter eight, second generation Methodists did not feel this burning desire. It was inevitable that the class would suffer a form of routinisation which left the appearance of the experiential class in place, but in reality operated as a shell of its former being.

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<sup>104</sup> S. Bradburn, *A Memorandum Book*, Vol. I, entry for May 1787. MA 1977/296.



To have maintained a high spiritual temperature amongst the classes, Wesley, or an appointed person with his authority, would have been needed to constantly visit the classes around the emerging Connexion and purge them. This purging however would then need new recruits who had recently been awakened or converted. The class routinised, not because of a failing on Wesley's part, nor because of the quality of the leaders, but because of familiarity with other members, and a deepening sense of religious consciousness as a Methodist identity beyond the Anglican Church grew.

The decline of the class meant that the four 'pillars' that underpinned the classes; fellowship, conversion and discipleship, financial accountability and discipline, declined too. Likewise the life of the class as a centre for spiritual growth and development as a 'Methodist' declined too. The life of the Methodist people centred more on the society meeting and the settled Ministry which provided the entire spiritual needs of the people.

From routinisation, I shall discuss the class as a totem in Methodism. Totemism meant that when the class may have required reformation, even in Wesley's lifetime, it was impossible to amend or alter it, as it embodied all that Wesley desired for his people. The class as a totem meant that its purpose could not be altered or its function changed. Once the earliest generation who required a wholly experiential group meeting, moved into leadership as class leaders, preachers or assistants, then they became a part of the reason for its totemism, as much as Wesley's view that the class was immutable.

## Chapter 7: Totemism

In 1886, the Wesleyan Methodists in Caister-on-Sea, Norfolk, opened their new chapel in Beach Road, just a few hundred yards from the sea. Facing the chapel, and looking at the façade, it is possible to see the foundation stones, and date stone above the door bearing the year 1886. Inside the chapel today, even though the original high central pulpit has been replaced by a large, low platform, the interior still bears many of the original features.

Looking towards the front, to either side of the recent platform, are two doors, both original to the construction which lead the visitor to the rear rooms of the small complex. One, to the left, bears the word 'Vestry', and leads into a room intended for the Preacher or Minister prior to the Service. To the right, the door bears the words 'Class Room' and leads visitors into a tiny room, measuring 8'10" by 5'7",<sup>1</sup> hardly large enough to hold a meeting of two or three people, and certainly not of a sufficient size to hold class meetings of ten to twelve people. The class meetings at Caister-on-Sea Wesleyan Methodist Chapel were unlikely to be held in the designated Class Room. This small village Methodist Chapel was experiencing a phenomenon by then common across the Connexion and which from 1887 onwards was exercising the minds of those at Conference. By 1889, the link between class attendance and society membership, a link that had been maintained since 1742, was de facto severed.

This pressure for detaching class attendance from membership which had become evident in debates and pamphlet controversies during the nineteenth century was now openly recognised.<sup>2</sup> When the issue of the separating class

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<sup>1</sup> In metric dimensions the room measures 2.7metres by 1.7metres

<sup>2</sup> See H.D. Rack, 'The Decline of the Class-Meeting and the Problem of Church-Membership in Nineteenth-Century Methodism', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XXXIX, part 1, pp. 12-21. See also W.W. Dean, 'The Methodist Class Meeting, The Significance of its Decline', in *Proceedings*, Vol. XLIII, part 2, pp.

attendance from membership was put forward at the Wesleyan Methodist Conference in 1887, the idea was commuted to a Conference appointed committee. A.J. French, author of a paper initially read to the 1889 Liverpool Ministers' Meeting, noted that the committee given the task to examine the issue of class attendance and membership, did so because of a 'decrease in our societies; and also, generally, into our mode of Church-membership.'<sup>3</sup> The major point of disagreement was a recommendation to introduce a 'communicant's ticket, for those who were regular in worship, but did not go to class meeting.'<sup>4</sup> When the Conference committee report was presented to the 1888 Conference, 'a warm debate ensued, more particularly with reference to Recommendation X. Ultimately the whole business was sent down to the May District Meetings, whose suggestions were to be considered by the Committee and reported to the Conference of 1889'.<sup>5</sup>

The Conference committee report recognised the difficulties experienced by local societies in ensuring class attendance, thus fulfilling the sole duty for membership. However the report equally reads as a document that shows the unwillingness of the committee members who compiled the report to allow this long standing conjunction of attendance and membership to be separated. Much of the language of the report indicated a totemic understanding of the class' purpose, and place in the Methodist schema,

It is not merely a gateway of entrance into membership; it is not merely a gauge by which fitness for continuing in membership with a living and spiritual Church may be tested. It is all this, but it is more.

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41-48. I have addressed the manner in which Rack and Dean discuss class attendance and society membership in the introduction to Section Three in this thesis.

<sup>3</sup> A.J. French, *The World in the Church; A Contribution to the Class-Meeting Question* (London: T. Woolmer. 1889) p. 3. The contentious proposal of the Conference committee was contained in Recommendation X.

<sup>4</sup> A.J. French, *The World in the Church*, p. 4. This was the main point of recommendation X.

<sup>5</sup> A.J. French, *The World in the Church*, p. 4. At the time the Wesleyan Methodists were considering this change, the United Methodist Free Church Conference directed that each church should decide whether to adopt the communicant or class meeting system. The result, French noted, quoting Dr. Rigg was that, 'In some circuits they are completely gone, and in many others they are slowly dying.' p. 9. The Primitive Methodist Church retained the condition of class attendance to membership. See the Footnote on p. 24.



..... It is an organized form of Christian fellowship which is enjoined by the New Testament upon all believers. .... Such a system, moulded for us by the hand of providence, hallowed and sanctioned during a century and a half by the manifest and abundant blessing of God upon its continual use.<sup>6</sup>

However, the report accepted that the reality of Methodist experience was rather different to the ideal expressed above.

It has indeed been said by some that this vital and essential element of Methodism has lost its former hold upon the attachment of our people. In some parts of the country this is lamentably true. Too many persons attend the Class-meeting very irregularly. In other cases, membership is very lightly estimated, so that absence for any reason during a few weeks leads to a quiet abandonment of it. Often through carelessness, sometimes of set purpose, removal to another place becomes the occasion of ceasing to meet.<sup>7</sup>

The report recognised that these motives were not confined to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but had an earlier origin. 'Complaints of this character are by no means new in Methodism. They are indeed as old as the days of Wesley.'<sup>8</sup>

The report also noted that for some time the reality across the connexion had been to allow that non-attendance at a class did not constitute grounds for exclusion from the society. In effect, the system instituted by Wesley, was amended to permit a nominal class membership for Methodists who were actively engaged in the life of Methodism, but not the class.<sup>9</sup> This recognition

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<sup>6</sup> See the 'Report of the Committee On Church-Membership, as Adopted by the Conference of 1889, Having Special Reference to the Class-Meeting', in *Minutes of Several Conversations at the One Hundred and Forty-Sixth Yearly Conference of the People Called Methodists, in the Connexion Established by The Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M., Begun in Sheffield, On Tuesday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1889.* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book-Room. 1889) pp. 405-406.

<sup>7</sup> See 'Report of the Committee on Church-Membership, as Adopted by the Conference of 1889, Having Special Reference to the Class-Meeting', in *Minutes of Several Conversations*, pp. 406-408.

<sup>8</sup> See 'Report of the Committee on Church-Membership, as Adopted by the Conference of 1889, Having Special Reference to the Class-Meeting', in *Minutes of Several Conversations*, p. 408.

<sup>9</sup> See p. 296. See also footnote 2 on p. 297. Here I show that during Wesley's lifetime there were those who received class tickets and yet did not attend class.

was noted, but it was recommended by the committee that the traditional basis of membership; attendance at class, was to remain.<sup>10</sup>

By the final quarter of the nineteenth century, that which Wesley had responded to publicly and privately, was more openly debated. This led the Wesleyans to consider carefully the relationship between class attendance as the condition of membership and regular attendance at the public preaching with a desire to receive the Sacrament without attending a class. Undoubtedly the situation facing the Wesleyan Methodists was different to that of Wesley's era. For Wesley, the Methodist people were subordinate to the Church of England; the later Methodists owed no allegiance to Anglicanism and sought to define their membership status as a church.<sup>11</sup> Whether such status was to remain firmly locked to a revivalist meeting or hold to a moment of public recognition was the issue that exercised the mind of Conference.

The theory of totemism was advanced by Emile Durkheim. His major work *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, exploring totemism was written in 1913. Durkheim viewed all religion as a human construct which existed to understand the human need at the root of the religion or belief system. Religion in Durkheim's opinion was fundamental to the prevailing conditions of civilisation, and should be seen by sociologists as a priority in the study of society.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See H.D. Rack, 'The Decline of the Class Meeting', in *Proceedings*, Vol. 39, p. 20. See also 'Report of the Committee on Church-Membership, as Adopted by the Conference of 1889, Having Special Reference to the Class-Meeting', in *Minutes of Several Conversations*, pp. 412-413. Those who were not members by class attendance could seek a 'special note of admission' or Communicant's Ticket to the Lord's Supper, Lovefeasts and Covenant Services.

<sup>11</sup> By the time this report was adopted, Methodism considered itself a church, separate from any other ecclesiastical body. This is shown in the issue of exclusion. See the 'Report of the Committee On Church-Membership, as Adopted by the Conference of 1889, Having Special Reference to the Class-Meeting', in *Minutes of Several Conversations*, p. 409. The report stated 'in the independent ecclesiastical position into which Methodism has been led by the Providence of God since the death of Wesley, exclusion from membership in the Class-Meeting involves, for the time being, excommunication from the visible Church.'

<sup>12</sup> See D. La Capra, *Emile Durkheim Sociologist and Philosopher* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 1972) pp. 246-247.

Durkheim made no value judgement upon religion, considering no religion to be false. For Durkheim, religion was a distinction between the sacred and the profane;

The division of the world into two comprehensive domains, one sacred, the other profane, is the hallmark of religious thought; Beliefs, myths, gnostic<sup>13</sup> spirits and legends are either representations or systems of representation that express the nature of sacred things, the virtues and powers attributed to them, their history, their relations with each other and with profane things.<sup>14</sup>

Every society imbues objects with a sacred status, known to the members of that society, with an appropriate manner of approaching and treating those objects. Durkheim assessed the gathering of people around the sacred to be 'one single moral community called a Church'.<sup>15</sup>

Durkheim's example of this collective experience rested on primitive Aboriginal Australian society. In indigenous Aboriginal society the use of symbol as a totem is highly developed, and objects which are crafted or painted, or even natural formations, are separated from the profane (world) by a sacred significance. The totem, however, is more than mere symbol for it is recognised by the society and reflects 'that group in the religion it creates.'<sup>16</sup> From this Durkheim reasserted his view that all religion was a social phenomenon. In addition to the totem, a god or gods are created over time, which become representative of the sacred. Allied to the separation of the sacred totem from the profane world and the development of a deistic system is the development

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<sup>13</sup> A definition of gnostic can be found in J. Pearsall, 'Gnostic', in *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (ed. J. Pearsall, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1911) p. 606. Gnostic is defined thus, '1. in the form of short, pithy maxims or aphorisms, 2 enigmatic, ambiguous. It is the second of these definitions that is relevant to Durkheim's description.

<sup>14</sup> E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (St Ives: Oxford University press. 2001) p. 36.

<sup>15</sup> E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, p. 46. This phrase is drawn from Durkheim's definition of religion.

<sup>16</sup> R. Bierstedt, *Émile Durkheim*, p. 201.



of rituals which enhance the 'solidarity of the group.'<sup>17</sup> These rituals form a regular element of the process of collective belief.

This development of totem, god and ritual is well described, although unknowingly, in an article in *The Independent* of the 17<sup>th</sup> September 2004, in a discussion by Anne Penketh of the deific status accorded to Kim Il Sung, President of North Korea until 1994. The article describes how Sung's person has become a totem through the erection of statues and portraits as well as representations of him in murals as the rising sun. This former leader, now a totem to the North Koreans of the embodiment of the state, has recently become godlike as he has been incorporated into a trinity comprising his mother, Kim Jung Sook, and his son, Kim Jong Il, referred to as Juche (self reliance).

As part of the respect shown to Kim Il Sung, in a park in Pyongyang, a statue of the president is revered as a totem might be by Aboriginal Australians. 'Throngs of young couples made their way to the statue on the way to their weddings'.<sup>18</sup>

This reverence even extends to folding his image so that no crease falls across the face,

"You must not fold the Great Leader's face." The stewardess was not joking when she sternly addressed the passenger on the Air Koryo flight out of Pyongyang, as he creased a special issue of a magazine devoted to the achievements of the late leader of North Korea, Kim Il Sung, to place it in his bag.<sup>19</sup>

Rituals have emerged, including the placing of wreaths at the foot of statues to the Great Leader. This chapter outlines the manner in which the class became

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<sup>17</sup> See A. Giddens, *Durkheim*, p. 95.

<sup>18</sup> A. Penketh, 'God is dead. Long live Kim Il Sung', in *The Independent* (Watford: Independent News & Media Ltd: 2004) p. 32.

<sup>19</sup> A. Penketh, 'God is dead. Long live Kim Il Sung', in *The Independent*, p. 32.

a totem for the Methodist people, and particularly for John Wesley, and the way in which the interrogative nature of the class became ritualistic.

As totemism is a theme in this chapter, I shall concentrate on the two most relevant points to this thesis; the class and its activity. Allied to this however, is the place of the class ticket as a symbol of the totem (class meeting) and indeed perhaps in its own right a totem, allowing as it did entry into the society meeting. There was also ritual associated with the ticket in that the offering or withdrawal of the same afforded either status or exclusion from the intimate meetings of the Methodists. In part I shall use the Minutes of Conference from 1744 to show Wesley's view of the class meeting, and also his writings in which aspects of Methodist organisation are defended, among them, the class meeting.

The class was an 'accident' of invention, arising out of a suggestion to settle the debt on the building of the New Room in Bristol. Each Methodist was expected under the scheme put forward by Captain Foy to pay one penny per week in order that the building debt could be paid off. Foy however offered to have the eleven poorest in his group so that any who could not pay would have their subscription met by him. The Society was divided into classes, each with a leader who went from home to home collecting the money.

John Wesley saw the benefit that could be gained in collecting pastoral information on each member, and over time classes began to meet together under the leadership of one of the members, ostensibly to hear personal testimony, regulate wrongdoers and receive new members. *Wesley's Journal* gives the nearest contemporary personal account of the creation of the Class

System.<sup>20</sup> This account is short and matter of fact, simply describing what was agreed. The same system was quickly introduced to the Foundery. In 1786 however, Wesley's recollection of the class meeting's foundation is far more descriptive and offers the reader of *Thoughts upon Methodism* the sense that the class was divinely inspired,<sup>21</sup> and from that inspiration, the class became the most effective long term means of pastoral care and discipline.

Given the lapse of time between those two accounts, some reflection of the circumstances is to be expected. However, only six years after they began, Wesley wrote of them in a similar manner to his 1786 description. In *A Plain Account*, his open letter to the Rev Vincent Perronet, Anglican Priest and Methodist supporter, the rise and development of Methodism to that date is laid out.

Commenting on the rise of the class meeting he wrote. 'While we were thinking of quite another thing, we struck upon a method for which we have cause to bless God ever since.'<sup>22</sup> Omitting the original purpose of raising monies, Wesley described their purpose, and he wrote of the class as a tool for spiritual growth and discipline. Wesley's account of the class's purpose and rise is glowing.

Allowing that the open letter to Perronet was a form of propaganda for the Methodist cause, it remains obvious that Wesley is imbuing the class meeting *per se* with a degree of importance that he does not attach to any other aspect of Methodism. Indeed he described the class as a 'prudential means of grace', that is, a method of Christian growth and improvement that was not 'instituted', such as prayer or Communion. This term was allowed of the classes in the

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<sup>20</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 251.

<sup>21</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, pp. 528-529.

<sup>22</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 260.



*Large Minutes* and Wesley exhorted every Methodist not to miss the class meeting.

Wesley was careful to outline and refute the arguments raised against the class meeting, ranging from being a new meeting imposed upon the people, to a lack of leaders to run the classes.<sup>23</sup> It is impressive that Wesley has such an ability to handle opposition in relation to the class. Perhaps from the outset, Wesley's opinion of the class was such that his refutation of the objections raised, meant he could not recognise the usefulness and vitality of the class would not stand the test of time.

The class fulfilled a number of tasks in a small and close meeting that did indeed enable it to be a crown to a new and emerging movement. That said however, for Wesley the class quickly became an immutable and unchanging element of Methodist organisation which he believed would give everyone the same experience of awakening, conversion and potentially sanctification. His letter to Vincent Perronet shows this belief;

It can scarce be conceived what advantages have been reaped from this little prudential regulation. Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to 'bear one another's burdens', and 'naturally' to 'care for each other'. As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for each other.<sup>24</sup>

If that is indeed the case, within 25 years others did not find the class as attractive a meeting. Bearing in mind that class attendance was compulsory, William Holder, a class leader, wrote in his diary more than once that attendance at meetings was poor. By 1764 Wesley was himself writing that those who failed to attend their class three times should be removed from

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<sup>23</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, pp. 262-264.

<sup>24</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 262.

membership.<sup>25</sup> Samuel Bradburn also noted that Methodists did not meet in class when there was no profit to meeting.<sup>26</sup>

The Methodist Conference first met in 1744, and from that meeting onwards, minutes were kept of issues discussed, decisions made and appointments ratified. To all intents and purposes Conference during Wesley's life was a body that met to hear Wesley's opinions, and as Methodism grew, to undertake matters of organisational necessity such as the stationing of assistants.

Wesley's portrayal of the class in Methodism in the Conference *Minutes* is strikingly different to that in his *Journal*, letters or other writings. In Conference, the class is an element of the total organisation. In 1744, the class did not merit mention when the structure of Methodism was reported, showing only 'the United Societies, the Bands, the Select Societies, and the Penitents'.<sup>27</sup> If at that point of the class's existence, Wesley was still formulating the later important role the class would take on this is not too strange an omission.

The assistants were permitted to visit the classes monthly if they were stationed away from London or Bristol, where John or Charles Wesley undertook visitation. Their function was formally to receive members on trial for the bands and classes. As early as 1753 Conference laid down clear guidance to those responsible for admission to the society. The extract below shows the manner in which prospective Methodists were to be 'screened' prior to full admission into the Society:

Q.14. How shall we prevent improper persons from insinuating into the Society?

<sup>25</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. IV, p. 273.

<sup>26</sup> S. Bradburn, *A Memorandum Book*, Vol. I, entry for December 1786. MA 1977/296.

<sup>27</sup> Publications of the Wesley Historical Society, *John Bennet's Copy of the Minutes of the Conferences of 1744, 1745, 1747 and 1748; with Wesley's Copy for those for 1746* (London: Charles H. Kelly. 1896) p. 14.

A. (1.) Give tickets to none till they are recommended by a Leader, with whom they have met at least two months on trial.

(2.) Give notes to none but those who are recommended by one you know, or till they have met three or four times in a class.

(3.) Give them the Rules the first time they meet. See that this be never neglected.<sup>28</sup>

Although there is no record of why this decision was taken, the inference is that men and women who were not serious in joining a society, which meant entering into the life of a class, were seeking admission and either failing to attend class or re-orientate their lives. Prior to this Conference decision, admission was regulated solely by the *Band Rules*, the *General Rules* and from December 1744 the *Directions given to the Band Societies*.<sup>29</sup> These written regulations detailed the behaviour, dress and spiritual growth expected from each new Society member on entry into a class or band on trial. Wesley insisted through Conference that his *Thoughts upon Dress* should be read to each society, and class members were urged to dress modestly. Failure to do so could lead to expulsion. Wesley directed that the assistants, a group of trusted men who increasingly took an *Episkope* role within the emerging circuits should be the class visitor, responsible for regulating them and deciding who should receive tickets and who should be excluded from the Society. The helpers, a group of men subordinate to the assistants, took responsibility for meeting weekly with the class leaders.

Throughout Wesley's life, the classes functioned with varying degrees of success. It is likely that the classes remained active because of the insistence from Wesley that entry to the Society could only be effected as a class member. By 1786 however, Conference was appealing to the societies to revive the

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<sup>28</sup> J. Wesley, *The Minutes of The Methodist Conferences from the First*, Vol. I, p. 478. The *Large Minutes* from which this is reproduced first appeared in 1753.

<sup>29</sup> For these three documents see chapter 8, appendices 10, 11 and 12



bands and select bands as these had fallen into neglect.<sup>30</sup> Had the class not been so closely allied to the society at an early point, as the necessary condition of membership, it too might have been on this list in 1786.

These two strands effectively created the totem of the class meeting. On the one hand, Wesley's polemic created an element of the organisation that was 'prudential', indeed divinely inspired, and this was enhanced by its becoming a mandatory aspect of belonging to the Methodists. On the other hand, the decisions made in Conference actively directed the work of the class meeting as a life changing experience, both spiritually, and socially, through dress and manner. These decisions were reinforced by the publication of specific directions or rules that could be enforced by class leaders.

Wesley also published for the Methodists, *The Character of a Methodist*,<sup>31</sup> and *The Principles of a Methodist*,<sup>32</sup> both published in 1742, set out how a Methodist behaved on the path to perfection, and what a Methodist believed. The latter tract was written to refute anti-Methodist polemic.

According to Hempton, Wesley's publishing enterprise was 'one of the most striking features of Methodism ... Wesley tried to secure control over the discourse of the movement ... He edited hymnbooks, published tracts, and distributed a connectional magazine.'<sup>33</sup> In chapter eight I shall offer more detail about the use of publications as a means to encourage Methodists to rediscover their early class meeting heritage.

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<sup>30</sup> Wesleyan Methodist Conference, *The Minutes of some late Conversations Between the Rev Messrs. Wesley and Others* (Bristol: Bulgin & Rosser. 1786) p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, pp. 31-46.

<sup>32</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, pp. 47-66.

<sup>33</sup> D. Hempton, *Methodism*, p. 58.

These tracts idealised Methodism to her own people, and are reminiscent of another of Durkheim's concepts; the idealisation of religion. This supports the theory of totemism by creating the ideal towards which all should strive. Wesley set before his people the ideal of what a Methodist should experience and how a Methodist should behave. For Durkheim idealisation was inevitable. He argued that to sustain the required intensity to create the ideal, individuals had to be brought together in 'sufficient concentration.'<sup>34</sup> This concentration then enabled 'an exaltation of moral life that is expressed by a set of ideal conceptions in which the new life thus awakened is portrayed.'<sup>35</sup>

As idealisation was unavoidable, Durkheim stated that humankind added the ideal to the reality. John Wesley did this through his writing, both for Methodism's supporters and opponents. Durkheim writes.

We have seen that when collective life reaches a certain degree of intensity it awakens religious thought, because it determines a state of effervescence that changes the conditions of psychic activity. ... Man does not recognise himself; he feels he is transformed, and so he transforms his surroundings. To account for the very specific impressions he feels, he endows things with which he is mostly in contact with properties that they do not have, exceptional powers, virtues that the objects of ordinary experience do not possess. In a word, on the real world in which his profane life unfolds he superimposes another one that, in a sense exists only in his thought, but to which he ascribes a kind of higher dignity in relation to the first.<sup>36</sup>

Through his publications, letters and Conference decisions, Wesley created an idealised 'world' for the Methodist people, accessed not through a large society meeting, but a smaller, more intimate class meeting. This idealised understanding of conversion, faith development and the reorienting of life came through Wesley's long journey to faith up to his moment of the warned heart in 1738, and the almost tortured manner in which he finally came to an evangelical

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<sup>34</sup> E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, p. 317.

<sup>35</sup> E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, p. 317.

<sup>36</sup> E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, p. 37.

'conversion' state on May 24<sup>th</sup> 1738. Wesley searched for a meaningful experience of faith from his university days, even travelling to America to find 'primitive Christianity'; yet until his meeting with the Moravians and the beginning of the Fetter Lane meeting, every effort seemed vain.

The class meeting was a totem, because Wesley's own 'warmed heart' experience was in a small group, and when the opportunity came along for a group meeting that was pastoral and educational as well as a catalyst to conversion and sanctification, it was hard for Wesley to admit that the class meeting could outlive its usefulness, and might need to be replaced or supplemented by other organisations.

This can in part be understood by standing Durkheim's writing on idealisation alongside totemism. The class meeting was a totem for Wesley of all that Methodism embodied; its social conscience, its moral reorientation, its religious development and its personal and corporate discipline. It is not therefore strange to see how the class was also an 'ideal' or perfect form of Methodism. Here Wesley created his ideal, recognising the reality of life, but wanting through the class to offer Methodists an ideal superimposed on society.

But this idealised understanding of what happens within a small group also stretches back to Wesley's reading, and his personal experience. His early and influential reading included the life of the Marquis de Renty. Wesley began abridging de Renty's biography (written by Saint-Jure) on the journey back from Georgia in 1738. De Renty's small group structure, the *Company of the Holy Sacrament*, was a model for Wesley in its aim of personal Christian development, philanthropic life and mystical union with God. It is not hard to see how even as a concept the small group was idealised by Wesley. Although the



class did not hold perfection as its imperative, it was nonetheless the place in which awakening could lead to justification, and the deepening Christian life shared amongst peers.

On a practical level, Wesley had personal experiences of small group meetings. The small, earnest Holy Club, which met regularly, prayed, talked and engaged in practical piety, was an embryonic form of the class. His first attempt at a 'class' in Georgia was modelled on the lines of his reading and early experience, but it was his subsequent experience with the Moravians, and their regular small band meetings, disciplined and lay led, that laid the final foundation for the Methodist class. The class was idealised by John Wesley because of the influence that small groups had in his Christian formation. It is not surprising that this led to the conception by him of the class as a totem of all that it had done for him, and as he understood it would do for others.

John Wesley understood the class to be a microcosm of a truly Christian society, and therefore worthy of totemic status. As previously discussed, gathering individuals who share common aims and ideals, leads to an homogenous group. This creates a 'them and us' mindset, in which the homogenous unit is separate *from* and different *to* those outside the unit. In Wesley's idealised and totemic understanding of the class the 'us' of the homogenous unit were expressing what it meant to *be* a Methodist within the class meeting. Those outside the unit might be influenced by the change that belonging to a class had made to friends, relatives and co-workers and want to join and share in the same experience.

However, unless those beyond the homogenous unit entered the unit (the class) by the same experiential method (the process of conviction of sin and

conversion) the class would be changed from its original purpose. The class functioned successfully only when every member shared not only common aims and ideals, but had undergone the same initiation that led to the common cause expressed through membership of the class; the path of discipleship and potentially perfection.

Thus far, I have focussed on Wesley's personal view of the class meeting, and the importance he attached to it and attendance at it. As I have previously indicated, there is little evidence for the opinions of the people who became Methodists. Primarily, the available views were written by class leaders, who possessed a degree of literacy. Their vocabulary is limited and it is difficult to fully ascertain what feeling or attachment to the class lies behind a single word or phrase.

Bennet Dugdale refers to feeling that meeting his class could be a 'great cross'<sup>37</sup> or by contrast a 'sweet season'.<sup>38</sup> Dugdale also met with a class member who had 'stayed away a few times and then was ashamed to come.'<sup>39</sup> Samuel Bradburn is scathing after his three days of meeting the classes attached to City Road Chapel, 'Regulating the Classes, which I seriously think is mere loss of time, as people will not meet but where they profit. Why should they?'<sup>40</sup> John Goodfellow found in July 1786 that he was hindered from meeting his class, and in the August discovered that many of his class had resolved to cease meeting, 'I met a few of my Class in the evening, but Oh how lifeless & cold do they seem! Many of them that used to meet do not intend coming any

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<sup>37</sup> B. Dugdale, *The Diary of Bennet Dugdale*, entry for 13<sup>th</sup> August 1786. MA 1977/216.

<sup>38</sup> B. Dugdale, *The Diary of Bennet Dugdale*, entry for 25<sup>th</sup> September 1786. MA 1977/216.

<sup>39</sup> B. Dugdale, *The Diary of Bennet Dugdale*, entry for 16<sup>th</sup> May 1786. MA 1977/216.

<sup>40</sup> S. Bradburn, *A Memorandum Book*, Vol. I, entry for December 1786. He met the classes over three days from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> December. MA 1977/296.

more.’<sup>41</sup> Samuel Bradburn commented in his diary in 1780 that many of the people in his Bradford Circuit were loving, but that ‘the generality of the hearers, as well as others, and too many of the Society are much more affected by the world than they are by religion.’<sup>42</sup> Whilst Bradburn does not refer directly to the classes which he led, or which were in his society, his entry suggests that for some of those attached to the society, the classes aims of reorienting life and offering mutual discipleship were not effective.

John Goodfellow first met with the Methodists in 1783, and received assurance on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 1784, characteristically whilst at the sacrament. Unusually, he was not invited to join a class until after his conversion. ‘I had not yet joined the society, or been at a Class-Meeting, but having been pressed by Letter and otherwise: I now went’.<sup>43</sup> Goodfellow’s diary begins with a retrospective of his life from his birth in 1755. This element of his diary is not written by dated daily entry, but as a continuous record of his life, with the date of his conversion included. Within this element of the diary is the undated entry below, added after the account of conversion and joining the Methodists. This is followed by a daily diary. This fits into the accepted model of journaling of the period. Bruce Hindmarsh has indicated how personal biographies were written in *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*.<sup>44</sup> Goodfellow’s account of the usefulness of the class stands as a testament to the totem:

I found likewise that my soul was constantly in need of spiritual food, and that for want of using this means, I had hitherto been ignorant of the devices of the Devil, and easily drawn aside by temptation, which

<sup>41</sup> J. Goodfellow, *the Diary of John Goodfellow*, entry for 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1786. MA 1977/236.

<sup>42</sup> S. Bradburn, *A Memorandum Book*, Vol. I, entry for November 1780. MA 1977/296.

<sup>43</sup> W. Holder, *The Diary of William Holder*, entry around August or September 1784. MA 1977/238.

<sup>44</sup> See D.B. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, pp. 83-86. In his discussion of Joseph Humphries conversion narrative, Hindmarsh shows how this early Methodist convert wrote of his awakening, conversion and justification. Humphries later became a Dissenting minister, and eventually an Anglican clergyman. See also p. 226 and p. 228. Here Hindmarsh offers his view of John Pawson’s narrative autobiography, written with the benefit of a long retrospective review. On p. 228 Hindmarsh notes that Pawson’s autobiography was the ‘syntax of a retrospective consciousness, and it differs markedly from the punctual identity of the lay converts in the 1740’s or the serial identity of the Methodist leaders who continued to publish and revise their journals over time.’



I was after this more aware of, and by looking to Jesus at the first approach of the enemy, I was kept from the snare and enabled to overcome: upon the whole I think this to be the most useful means (except preaching) that we (Methodists) enjoy: it is instructive; it unites together; it stirs us up to press forward; the enemy's schemes are brought to light and defeated; and our souls in general, abundantly comforted, and strengthened.<sup>45</sup>

John Goodfellow related both the class, and preaching as 'means'. If this entry was written in 1784, then Goodfellow is using language to describe an aspect of Methodism with which he had become familiar only after April 1784. This language would have come from reading, or hearing others describe the class, the preaching and other aspects of Methodist organisation. If he maintained a daily record which he later wrote up into the surviving diary, he may have written the entry at a later point in his life than 1784.<sup>46</sup> However, as I have indicated above he also wrote of his distraction whilst attending a class,<sup>47</sup> and within two years, he wrote despairingly of leading classes. John Valton wrote about the class in his diary in a similar manner to Goodfellow in June 1765. He had been with the Methodists for more than a year, and had already noted on two occasions that his experience of class was difficult.<sup>48</sup> However, on the 26<sup>th</sup> June he wrote, 'O what blessings these are, hearing the word of God expounded, meeting class and Band, and Christian Fellowship.'<sup>49</sup>

For both Goodfellow and Valton, the reality class experience is at variance with the entries relating the benefits of the class meeting. These entries then have a totemic feel to them, drawing on their place within the Methodist system as a means of grace.

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<sup>45</sup> J. Goodfellow, *The Diary of John Goodfellow*, entry after April 1784, otherwise undated. MA 1977/236.

<sup>46</sup> Again Hindmarsh is helpful here. In writing of the early Methodist testimonial writers, he notes that what was heard and experienced within a community offered a 'sense of narrative convention'. See D.B. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, p. 157.

<sup>47</sup> J. Goodfellow, *The Diary of John Goodfellow*, entry for 28<sup>th</sup> September 1784. MA 1977/236.

<sup>48</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. I, pp. 130-131. (25<sup>th</sup> September 1764). Vol. II, pp. 66-67. (20<sup>th</sup> May 1765). MA 1977/293.

<sup>49</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. II, p. 79. (26<sup>th</sup> June 1765). MA 1977/293.

The totemic nature of the class was no doubt aided by the ridicule of former friends and neighbours. Elizabeth Collett faced derision. 'Being the only young person then in those parts, who manifested any concern for eternal things, she was subject to much reproach and ridicule, from her ungodly neighbours: but the benefit and comfort she derived from communion with the people of God, far outweighed her toil and suffering.'<sup>50</sup> John Oliver faced a similar trial from his father, who was violent towards him.<sup>51</sup> Mary Bosanquet, who later married John Fletcher, was put out of her family at twenty one,<sup>52</sup> and William Green made the choice to forsake his friends after joining a Class.<sup>53</sup>

Itinerant preachers were also badly treated, no doubt adding to the sense of 'us and them' which arises through homogeneity. Thomas Hanby's *Life* relates the following treatment being meted out to the preachers, '(they) often preached to us while the blood run down their faces, by the blows and pointed arrows thrown at them, while they were preaching.'<sup>54</sup> Wesley himself was subject to similar treatment, 'Soon after you, Sir, paid us a visit, but we were interrupted by the fire-engine being played on the audience.'<sup>55</sup>

Added to personal experience, poor treatment from neighbours and families, and the sense of being 'different' through adhering to the Methodist cause, is the singular experience of *joining* a class. Whether an individual became a class leader, local preacher, or assistant, each personal account has a common thread, namely an ecstatic or experiential awakening and conversion that gave

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<sup>50</sup> Z. Taft, *Biographical Sketches*, Vol. II, p. 121.

<sup>51</sup> J. Oliver, 'The Life of John Oliver', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. II, pp. 418-422.

<sup>52</sup> Z. Taft, *Biographical Sketches*, Vol. I, p. 19.

<sup>53</sup> W. Green, 'An Account of the life of Mr William Green', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. III, p. 252.

<sup>54</sup> T. Hanby, 'The Life of Thomas Hanby', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. II, p. 511.

<sup>55</sup> T. Hanby, 'The Life of Thomas Hanby', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. II, p. 511.

to each class member a shared foundation on which to build a Christian, disciplined, accountable and disciplined life.

Robert Wilkinson joined the Methodists in 1767, and was admitted to a class. His spiritual state was disturbed, but in the class he was able to discuss this, and found encouragement. Eventually he was converted, but it was his spiritual trials and ecstasies that lent the class a special importance.<sup>56</sup> W. Ferguson also found the class vital to his Christian journey. He was from a Scottish Presbyterian background and wanted to join a class to testify of the work of God in his life. At Whitfield's Tabernacle he asked two leaders whether he might join a class;

I went into the Vestry and two Gentlemen I found there, "I should be glad to meet in a Class, that I may speak my experience, and tell of the work of God which I have found upon my heart." One of them said, "What Class shall we put him into?" The other answered, "Indeed I cannot tell, Mr. Wesley's Classes are far more strictly looked after than ours." If you please then, said I, I will go and meet in one of his Classes. He looked at me and said, "Really young man, I cannot blame you."<sup>57</sup>

The ecstatic conversion is related in a number of the testimonials and biographies and these experiences no doubt coloured the understanding and aided the journey of other members. Ann Gilbert's exhorting in class had a profound effect on the membership,

I admonished the young people, and while I was speaking to them was so filled with peace and love of God, that I could not but exhort and entreat them to repent. Presently their laughter was turned to weeping, and one person who had been a backslider for twenty-three years, cried aloud for the disquietude of her soul, and the Lord healed her wounded mind before the conclusion of the meeting.<sup>58</sup>

This would surely have had a profound effect on all present. For those whose faith was rekindled (especially the backslider) and those who were rebuked,

<sup>56</sup> R. Wilkinson, 'A Short Account of Mr. Robert Wilkinson', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. V, pp. 181-182.

<sup>57</sup> W. Ferguson, 'An Account of the life of Mr W. Ferguson', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. V, pp. 296-297.

<sup>58</sup> Z. Taft, *Biographical Sketches*, Vol. I, p. 49.



shared intimate moments gave mutual purpose, setting them apart from any who had not been party to the meeting, and preventing any new attendees from fully sharing in the mutuality of the group's experience. Perhaps, from that moment, to the members, that class became a totem of God's work amongst them.

Here then is the totemic theme outlined in this chapter found in the practice and ideals of the Methodist people and John Wesley. The totem that the class became was linked to the idealisation process that meant that for each class member who had undergone the same or at least similar entry process into a class meeting, an ideal was created that could not be diluted or altered without irrevocably changing the very nature of the class itself.

Allied to this is the process of homogenisation. When linked with the idealisation process, the members of the class share more than a common interest; they are joined together in a shared, experiential group that demands much in terms of time, personal development, public accountability and social behaviour. All of these characteristics were regulated by rules.<sup>59</sup>

With John Wesley's continual insistence on the value of the class meeting, and the unquestionable value that the meeting had for the early Methodists, especially when a society was recently formed and local opposition was at its height, the class attained a sacred status that developed into a totem.

Throughout Wesley's life, the class meeting stood as the portal for an experiential change of every aspect of individual life. As discussed in chapter

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<sup>59</sup> Appendix 10 expresses this admirably, but the same close observance to regulation can be found in appendices 11 and 12.

five, the class was the crown of Methodism, because it offered so much to men and women who previously found themselves excluded from an affective Christian life.<sup>60</sup>

In opposition to that is the cross that the class became, and that is seen not only in routinisation, but also in totemism. Having used Durkheim's theory as a theme, I have shown how the class fossilised into a totem as it was unable to change from its useful fundamental purpose at the point of creation of a new society, or at a time when a society was under crisis, such as that described in chapter six when Calvinist preachers threatened the viability of the Methodist Society.

Totemism occurred when for Wesley, and for other Methodists, the class became idealised. The Methodist people came to believe the class was sacred and rather like the North Koreans, who are now urged to give totemic status to the *Great Leader* and imbue his image with meaning, so the Methodist people attached significance to what it meant to be a class member. Just as for the indigenous people of Australia who imbue significant meaning to the natural world, and worship it, so the Methodists came to hold that the class was a significant step in the journey of faith because of the testimonial, biographical and sometimes idealised accounts of belonging to a class.

In the following chapter, I shall consider the class meeting as a model useful to only one generation of Methodists. Here elements of routinisation, totemism, and homogeneity will surface. I will show that the model of class which became

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<sup>60</sup> This level of exclusion, affects those for whom the 'middle level' needs of life are not met. These needs are present and may be subject to crises. Within this level, folk religion operates. See G.G. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 200) pp. 30-32.

fixed under totemism was not helpful to a generation of Methodists who grew up within the Methodist society from childhood.

The classic rule for entry to the class was a desire to flee from the wrath to come. Such a rule has authority only for those who sense a need to flee. Later generations of Methodists joined not because there was a present sense of wrath from which there was a need to flee, but because the Methodists became respectable, contributing members of society who were no longer ridiculed, and needed to gather into the class to share the week's burdens and receive comfort and encouragement.

Although beyond the conclusion date of this thesis, a fair example of the acceptance of Methodists in English life can be seen in the employment by Sir Robert Peel Sr. who 'boasted that he left his mills in the hands of Methodists and they served him 'excellently well' ... the Methodist virtues of honesty, sobriety and discipline .... Made for success in business.'<sup>61</sup>

The 'one generational' model then is a method of reviewing the early years of Wesley's Methodism, prior to his death, in which the Methodist people travelled a road that did not have the same starting point, nor was co-terminous with Wesley himself.

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<sup>61</sup> J.M. Turner, *John Wesley. The Evangelical Revival and the Rise of Methodism in England* (Epworth: Peterborough. 2002) p. 140.



## Chapter 8: The One Generational Meeting

The class meeting underwent significant changes in its core functions within a relatively short period of time. Certainly, prior to Wesley's death in 1791, the class meeting had evolved from the first small group meeting in Bristol. Routinisation led the class into a settled and ongoing life without the dynamic drive which initially gave it impetus. Over time, organisation replaced charisma. The larger society took precedence over the smaller class. The Society's aim, to hear preaching and exhortation, to pray and to sing communally and represent the whole gathering of the people called Methodists, became the primary meeting, removing the pre-eminence of the class. Totemism on the other hand, brought to the class a sacred status that tied members to the small group, despite the membership's unease with its function. Class membership offered entry to the Society. In effect, there was no such thing as 'society membership'.

This is challenged by Henry Durbin's letter to Charles Wesley of 15<sup>th</sup> October 1784. Durbin, a trustee of the New Room, was placed on trial within the Society during wrangling over amendment of the Bristol New Room Model Trust Deed. Durbin is complaining about John Wesley's actions. Intriguingly, he suggests that class membership was not compulsory, and that this had been agreed by Wesley himself;

He said I had not been in the Society for some time, as I had not met a class, but he forgot, that about three years ago he declared .... that any serious person might have a ticket & meet in the society without meeting a class & I have always had a ticket.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> G. Lloyd, *Charles Wesley. A New Evaluation of his Life and Ministry* (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Liverpool University. 2002) p. 273. From *Letters Chiefly to the Wesley's*, 2:73 MCA. See also F. Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, p. 223. Baker asserts that Wesley sent Dr Thomas Coke to act on his behalf in arranging the settlement of the Model Trust Deed.

This is not the norm; rather it is the exception that proves the rule.<sup>2</sup> Evidence points directly at a keen insistence on class membership and attendance. I would suggest that Durbin was a wealthy benefactor to the New Room, and that Wesley may have been more relaxed in applying the rules with him until such time as he wanted the Model Trust amended.

Together routinisation and totemism led to the subject of this chapter. Every class had within itself the ability to survive for one generation alone. Second, or third generations, perhaps the children of the first generation, or people drawn to Methodism as it became more acceptable in society, did not have the enthusiastic experience of awakening and conversion, or desire to pursue the journey to entire sanctification through such experience. This does not mean that the pursuit of holiness was lost; rather that such pursuit was drawn into the society. The function of the class was relegated to the role of gateway to the larger meeting.

In 1783, Wesley published his sermon *On Family Religion*.<sup>3</sup> In the sermon, as he addressed the responsibilities of parents towards family and servants, Wesley considered the possible results of resolving to serve God. As he considered the positive consequences, he also gave voice to the possibilities of neglecting family religion. In his opinion, such negation would lead to revival dying away. Wesley quoted Cicero, 'will it not be as the historian speaks of the Roman state in its infancy, *Res unius ætatis*? An event that has its beginning and end within the space of one generation?'<sup>4</sup> Wesley continued by stating that

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<sup>2</sup> See also A. Mather, 'The Life of Alexander Mather', in *Preachers*, Vol. II, p. 230. J Wood, in an addendum to Mather's autobiography noted that he regulated a situation in London in which two members held tickets, without attending a class.

<sup>3</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 3, pp. 334-346.

<sup>4</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 3, p. 335.

the Methodist revival had survived longer than a generation of thirty years, which according to Luther was the period in which a revival lasted.<sup>5</sup>

As Wesley dated the Wesleyan revival's beginning to 1729,<sup>6</sup> he could properly point to a period longer than one single generation. Using Wesley's idiosyncratic dating for the commencement of the revival; this had indeed lasted fifty four years. If 1740 were taken as the revivals start (the point at which John and Charles Wesley separated from the Fetter Lane Society), the revival had lasted forty three years.

However, the quote which Wesley used within this sermon was initially made to the Methodists in Conference in 1768, giving a revival period of either thirty nine, or twenty eight years, dependent on which year is used for the origin of the revival.

At the Conference of 1768, the question was asked 'Q. 23. In many places the work of God seems to stand still'.<sup>7</sup> In twelve numbered paragraphs in reply, Wesley outlined methods in which the revival could be given fresh impetus. The tenth paragraph read, 'But what shall we do for the rising generation? Unless we take care of this, the present revival will be *res unius ætatis*; it will last only the age of a man.'<sup>8</sup> His five numbered sub paragraphs under this question states

1. Where there are ten Children in a Society, meet them at least an hour every week:

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<sup>5</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 3, p. 335. The editorial introductory comments to the sermon state that Wesley recognised that Methodism had lasted longer than a single generation and that the future lay with those who were a new generation in the organisation. 'Wesley was aware that the Methodist Revival had already outlasted the normal life span of such movements, and that its future depended quite crucially on 'family religion', 'the education of children', 'obedience to parents', 'obedience to pastors', etc. Hence the sequence of Nos. 94-97.' See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 3, p. 333.

<sup>6</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 3, p. 335.

<sup>7</sup> J. Wesley, *Minutes of The Methodist Conferences from the First*, Vol. I, p. 79.

<sup>8</sup> J. Wesley, *Minutes of The Methodist Conferences from the First*, Vol. I, p. 82.



2. Talk with them every time you see any at home.
3. Pray in earnest for them:
4. Diligently instruct and vehemently exhort all Parents at their own houses:
5. Preach expressly on Education, particularly when you speak of *Kingswood*.<sup>9</sup>

In this Wesley was showing concern for those who were entering Methodism as a second generation, and whose experience of it had not been that of the previous age, but were children of an earlier generation of Methodists. These exhortations to the preachers are an advice to catechise and teach the children and parents of a settled Methodism.

Ernst Troeltsch described three types of Christian gathering, in which it is possible to clearly identify Methodism's development. Troeltsch, writing in the early years of the twentieth century held that after the death and resurrection of Christ, fledgling Christian communities needed organisation. 'From the very beginning there appeared the three main types of the sociological development of Christian thought: The Church, the sect, and mysticism.'<sup>10</sup>

Troeltsch described the life of each: essentially Church is an institution, sect is a voluntary society and mysticism is a 'world of ideas'.<sup>11</sup> Early Methodism fitted the description of mysticism and sect. The first years of Methodism do not sit with Troeltsch's description of church as an institution. In this chapter, the short useful life span of the class meeting of one generation will show that the mystical aspirations of generation one were short lived, as a desire for acceptance and respectability led to the institutionalisation of the movement by

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<sup>9</sup> J. Wesley, *Minutes of The Methodist Conferences from the First*, Vol. I, p. 82.

<sup>10</sup> N. Birnbaum, & G. Lenzer (eds.), *Sociology and Religion: A Book of Readings* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1969) p. 310. See also J.M. Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation*, pp. 58-59. Turner offers a brief discussion of the sect/church model

<sup>11</sup> N. Birnbaum, & G. Lenzer, (eds.), *Sociology and Religion*, p. 310.

generation two even prior to the creation of the church as an institution within Troeltsch's definition.

Ernst Troelstch and John Kent are used to describe in sociological terms what I am asserting happened within Methodism, and more pertinently, within the class meeting's life. The move from mystical group to sect was a change that saw the Methodist movement settle into an organisation which no longer drew upon the immediacy or experientialism of the early period, preferring to observe the characteristics of the sect. I will show later that Wesley himself understood Methodism as primitive religion, a primary aspect in Troeltsch's model of the sect type. In describing the elements of the sect, Troeltsch concludes that 'an Appeal to the New Testament and to the Primitive Church'<sup>12</sup> rank among the key features.

Whilst Troeltsch does not mention Methodism (which Kent helpfully concentrates on) writing primarily on the development of Protestantism in the milieu of medieval Catholicism, he asserts that in the Reformation the church/sect issue was always under the surface for the reformers and the organisations they created. To this Methodism can relate. Wesley began a movement that was deeply rooted in the mystical tradition, and the class was central to this. He oversaw Methodism's development into the 'sect type', referring for its authority to the primitive church, and sitting uneasily with the state Church.

A simple yet telling definition of both these types can be found in Troeltsch's *Religion in History*. Mystical religion is defined by Troeltsch thus: 'mysticism

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<sup>12</sup> E. Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. 1931) p. 336.

aims at the immediate, present, and inward quality of the religious experience, and the immediate relationship with God that leaps over or complements traditions, cults, and institutions. ... mysticism is concerned strictly with the immediacy of the union with God.'<sup>13</sup> Troeltsch defined the purpose of the sect as a community which 'seeks to gather mature and personally convinced Christians into a holy community that regards the preaching of the gospel, the sacraments, and the institutional community merely as a means for the implanting and fostering of the religious life, with no miraculous power independent of the subject and subjective achievement.'<sup>14</sup>

John Kent's recent book, *Wesley and the Wesleyans*<sup>15</sup> sets Methodism into two distinct periods: primary and secondary. The primary phase lasted from the earliest period into the 1760's. The secondary phase began from the 1760's. Kent sets Troeltsch's theory into the reality of the Methodist movement and organisation. In the early, primary period, ecstasy was a common, if not expected experience. In the secondary, 'sect phase' the organisation of Methodism took precedence over the experiential development of the individual in favour of a more routine journey towards holiness within the context of the organisation. Although John Kent does not refer to Troeltsch in his model, the parallels are clear and helpfully set in the context of Methodism.

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<sup>13</sup> E. Troeltsch, *Religion in History* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark. 1991) pp, 326-327.

<sup>14</sup> E. Troeltsch, *Religion in History*, p. 325. Through the writing of H. Richard Niebuhr, this definition has become tendentious. In *Christ and Culture*, Niebuhr postulated that Christianity and culture have become synonymous, and set out to elucidate the manner in which theologians have sought to understand the relationship of Christ to culture. Quoting Troeltsch, Niebuhr wrote 'Christianity and Western civilisations are so inextricably intertwined that a Christian can say little about his faith to members of other civilisations, and the latter in turn cannot encounter Christ save as a member of the western world.' See H.R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco. 1951) p. 30. Niebuhr continued in the chapter 'Christ and Culture in Paradox', (pp. 149-189) that Troeltsch's 'version of the claims of Christ was more akin to the cultural Christian interpretation of the New Testament prevalent in his day than to a more literal and radical teaching of the gospels.' H.R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, p. 183.

<sup>15</sup> J. Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans*. Kent uses the themes of primary and secondary religion effectively in his discussion of 'Women in Wesleyanism', pp. 104-139.



Kent does not continue with his terminology of Methodism's development beyond the secondary stage. However to extrapolate Kent's model, 'the church' would be 'Tertiary Religion'. This phase of Methodism might be set at the point of Wesleyan Methodism's life when class attendance was divorced from Society membership in the later part of the nineteenth century. Troeltsch argued that the church as institution occurred when the church itself mediated salvation, and removed the emphasis on perfection. At this point the church can compromise with society, and recognise those structures that are not Christian, but might be useful for the organisation of a sinful world.<sup>16</sup> Methodism's involvement in social issues and political life in the later 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the period of 'the Non Conformist Conscience', indicates that this step was taken by a more confident church.

The one generational model can be seen through the work of Mary Fletcher, the wife of the Rev John William Fletcher, 'Fletcher of Madeley'. He was an Anglican priest and Swiss national, and a close ally of the Wesley's, and until his death in 1785 was suggested as a possible successor to John Wesley in the Methodist leadership. Although he has always been linked to Madeley, his only parish, due to his health, his work in the parish was limited, with considerable time spent in Switzerland, and other parts of England. He was also President of Lady Huntingdon's Trevecka College from 1768 to 1770.

Mary Fletcher, born Mary Bosanquet, became actively involved in Methodism during the London revival of 1761. She founded a community in London with two other women and felt called to preach. The community moved to Leeds in

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<sup>16</sup> E. Troeltsch, *Religion in History*, pp. 324-325.

1768, and in 1781 she married Fletcher.<sup>17</sup> After her husband's death, Mary Fletcher remained in Madeley, with her companion, Mary Tooth, joining in the work amongst the societies and classes.

Whilst catechising prospective members of the Anglican Church was a common practice at this period, Mary Fletcher was not using the catechetical approach to that end. Her meetings were class meetings, and from a letter printed in her biography, she evinced her Christian life from the age of 18 within a Methodist context, and in Madeley, describes her leadership of meetings in 'my own preaching room, where the congregation increases, and many come from far, and I am, through mercy, at present carried through six or seven meetings in a week'.<sup>18</sup>

To a degree the Madeley Societies witnessed an unusual conflation of Methodist and Anglican practices. Fletcher maintained a somewhat sketchy parish ministry and had oversight of several local societies from his marriage to his death. Mary Fletcher<sup>19</sup> and Mary Tooth, who wrote the catechetical material, were using it in classes. Both women continued until Mary Fletcher's death in 1815, after which Mary Tooth worked alone.

Amongst the Madeley Society Records are handwritten notes of questions and answers used within class meetings. These notes appear to form a catechumen for the correct manner of Christian living. Unlike the class in its 'classic form' which consisted of open questioning and response from the class leader, in the

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<sup>17</sup> See P. Streiff, *Reluctant Saint? A Theological Biography of Fletcher of Madeley* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2001) pp. 265-270.

<sup>18</sup> Z. Taft, *Biographical Sketches*, Vol. I, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> For an overview of Female public ministry see G. Lloyd, 'Repression and Resistance: Wesleyan Female Public Ministry in the generation after 1791', in *Proceedings*, Vol. 55, part 3, pp. 101-114.

Madeley Society, the leader had a set series of questions which required a specific answer;

Q Can you tell me who made you?

A The great God who made all things

Q Why did God make you?

A That I might know love and serve him here and being with him forever

Q What doth God do for you?

A He keeps me from evil and is always doing me good.<sup>20</sup>

Mary Tooth created a series of catechumenate questions that were sufficient to cover 124 nights of class meetings. Her questions take the catechumen through Scripture from Genesis onwards:

Night the 7<sup>th</sup>

Q Where did we leave off?

A At the command given to Abram

Q What did Abram do in consequence of it?

A He left his country directly

Q How old was Abram? A 75

What is meant by the souls they had gotten in Haran?

A Those whom he had persuaded to worship God

Q Liberty from what?

A From the Guilt of sin, the Power of sin and the nature of sin.<sup>21</sup>

There is also a set of papers specifically intended for a children's class meeting, 'Also the Monday night meeting used for the children in papers of 20 each beginning at Gen 1'.<sup>22</sup>

By the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, in a settled society in Madeley, organised, and overseen by a close Wesleyan supporter, the class was not functioning as it had done in the early period, or indeed, as Wesley frequently reminded the Methodist people it should. These catechumenate classes related more closely to secondary religion or the sect type.

<sup>20</sup> Madeley Society Business, *Fletcher Tooth Collection*. MA Fl 38.9.

<sup>21</sup> Madeley Society Business, *Fletcher Tooth Collection*. MA Fl 38.1.

<sup>22</sup> Madeley Society Business, *Fletcher Tooth Collection*. MA Fl 38.3.



In both Troeltsch and Kent's models, the emphasis moved from experience to knowledge. In this model holiness can be found through settled Christian growth as a learning process rather than by virtue of a shared experiential life. The highly experiential and 'sense of union with God' frequently felt and subsequently described by the first Methodists were unwittingly mystical. The later Methodists sought a more settled and learned community in which to practise a faith.

A parallel will assist in understanding this 'settlement phenomena'. In *A Little Heaven Below*, Lester Ruth describes the highly charged and experiential lovefeasts of Early American Methodism. Lovefeasts included testimonial, encouraging others to express 'the message of experimental religion'.<sup>23</sup> As Love Feasts were private, those who did not possess the correct ticket of entry would not gain entrance. This made belonging more precious to members, and something to be attained by non-members. Once the American Methodists settled their organisation, lovefeasts like other aspects of the organisation became a routine part of Methodist life and no longer had such a valuable purpose.

Essentially second generation Methodists who did not understand the experimental/experiential nature of the previous generation saw little value in belonging. Lovefeasts, like societies and classes, became part of the organisation and not a place in which to share testimony as openly. This is shown by Ruth as he describes testimonies that are anything but experiential,

accounts sometimes complain of self-centered boasting masquerading as testimonies, incoherent testimonies, excessively long testimonies, and testimonies by those whose lives contradicted their words.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> L. Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below*, p. 109.

<sup>24</sup> L. Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below*, p. 110.

Once the initial sense of anticipation within the lovefeast dissipated to routine societal organisation, there was no reason to share personal testimony.

Homogeneity is shown in English Methodism through the use of the rules as a precursor to entry into the class → society → band → select band → lovefeast. The *Large Minutes* directed the leaders to vet prospective members.<sup>25</sup> These Rules were made known to prospective members, as John Oliver discovered when he asked a Methodist leader the requirements for admission.<sup>26</sup> Once rules were published, and made available to those who were not members of the society, an obvious homogeneity is occurring. Attendance and membership is available, not necessarily to those who desire to 'flee from the wrath to come', as the rules exhort in the opening paragraph, but to those who are willing to submit to that which all other Methodists submit to: the regulation of the organisation, and the re-orientation of private, social and business life.

The publication of rules of admission and behavioural expectations reflect the earlier Anglican religious societies, organised by Horneck and others. These societies published rules to which each member had to assent to on admission, and regularly resubmit to.

The first Methodist generational experience, recounted in highly charged and emotive personal testimony, frequently left a fledgling Christian unsure of salvation, and almost certain of damnation, and was a real living expression of a desire to flee from forthcoming trial. A second generation member must surely

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<sup>25</sup> See J. Wesley, *The Minutes of the Methodist Conferences from the First*, Vol. I, pp. 454-456. See also F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies*, p. 194. This is fully expressed at pp. 282-283.

<sup>26</sup> J. Oliver, 'An Account of Mr. John Oliver', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. II, p. 419.

have recognised that the wrath to come<sup>27</sup> was not imminent and was rather more likely to settle for a regulated rule orientated Christian life. C.E. White, writing of class decline in the nineteenth century argued that the doctrine of hell was relaxed and class meeting supervision, which provided 'one of the chief guards against hell,'<sup>28</sup> waned.

I am not decrying the life or work of the second generation. It is not their devotion to Christian living that is in issue, it is how that devotion was expressed, through a more mature and respectable model of meeting and living that differentiates the mystical (primary) period from the sect (secondary) period. A sense of fresh purpose or re-awakening of the mystical or primary force *could* occur when some upheaval, such as the introduction of Calvinism, or Moravianism (both anathema to Methodism) or the prosecution of a Methodist occurred.

The journals and diaries of Methodist leaders indicate something of the slide into class irrelevance; usually as a frustration that the model of class to which they were working was not effective. I have already indicated Samuel Bradburn's distress at the poor state of the London classes.<sup>29</sup> Around 1773 Thomas Taylor discovered that not one of the class meetings in Birstall, 'met well'.<sup>30</sup> In the Leeds Circuit, Taylor believed that if care were taken with class leaders, then the classes would benefit.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See C.E. White, 'The Decline of the Class Meeting', in *Methodist History*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 4, pp. 265-266.

<sup>28</sup> C.E. White, 'The Decline of the Class Meeting', in *Methodist History*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 4, p. 266.

<sup>29</sup> S. Bradburn, *A Memorandum Book*, Vol. I, see the entry for December 1786 and for May 1788. MA 1977/296.

<sup>30</sup> T. Taylor, 'The Life of Thomas Taylor', in *Preachers*, Vol. V, p. 44.

<sup>31</sup> T. Taylor, 'The Life of Thomas Taylor', in *Preachers*, Vol. V, p. 62.



From 1778 the *Arminian Magazine* was intended as a monthly publication for Methodists, those interested in the work of the Methodists, and a polemic against other doctrines. The *Magazine* contained testimonials intended as a means of encouraging a new generation of Methodists to see the process by which a previous generation had come to faith.

Common themes within these accounts are a change of life, a tempestuous discovery of Christ, a regular, though sometimes troubled Christian life and habitual attendance at Methodist meetings leading to an improvement of life. It was not uncommon within the testimony for reprobates to find new purpose, for voices to be heard and visions to be seen, and for the perseverance to remain faithful to Christ in the face of opposition. The purpose of these autobiographies was encouragement to others that growth in grace and holiness was possible, and that a regulated spiritual life, including works of piety and mercy, paved the way for spiritual growth.

The later *Lives of the Methodist Preachers* published in the mid nineteenth century offer biographies of men, pioneers of the movement (many of which were previously in the *Arminian Magazine*), to encourage and attempt to recapture the very first Methodist experiences. In the biography of Sampson Staniforth, whilst the references to awakening are clear, and the spiritual path is not simple, the reader was shown that not only is perseverance through trial of great importance but so was the spiritual experience in the trial. Describing his religious life in the army, Staniforth wrote of going 'on my way sorrowing, but bringing forth fruits meet for repentance.'<sup>32</sup> Other first hand accounts recount

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<sup>32</sup> S. Staniforth, 'The Life of Sampson Staniforth', in *Preachers*, Vol. IV, p. 121. The first edition of this series appeared in the 1840's.

visions, voices and ecstatic periods, accounts which Wesley seemed keen to discover and publish.

Hempton offers insight into Wesley's purposes in publishing these biographies. 'Here was an attempt to control information, memory, and tradition in a remarkable way. .... he was undoubtedly attempting to define a new tradition whose boundaries of print and access to information were largely drawn by himself.'<sup>33</sup>

At the Conference of 1744, Wesley suggested to the assembled preachers that they should maintain personal diaries. This was later codified in his *Rules of an Assistant* of 1753.<sup>34</sup> In later years, Wesley actively sought the biographies of his preachers,<sup>35</sup> and assured them he would edit them as he saw fit.<sup>36</sup> Wesley first addressed the issue of censoring exactly what was published in 1763, and a decision of Conference in 1765 ratified Wesley's right to expel anyone who published without first seeking permission.<sup>37</sup> David Bebbington picks this up in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*. He asserts that Wesley used the *Arminian Magazine* to disseminate his views and thoughts, and the autobiographies were an important part of this. The *Arminian Magazine* gave him opportunity to redress and perhaps re-establish his hope that Methodists remained an experiential people.

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<sup>33</sup> D. Hempton, *Methodism*, p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> See S.R. Valentine, *Mirror of the Soul*, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> See J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol VI, p. 380. This was a letter to John Valton. He wrote to Valton on further occasions. First on the 21<sup>st</sup> April 1780. See J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VII, p. 17. Secondly, the 1<sup>st</sup> October 1780, see J. Wesley, *Works [SE]*, Vol. VII, p. 35. It is clear from this letter that Valton was unwilling to provide a biographical account. Wesley finally wrote to him on the 19<sup>th</sup> December 1780. See J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VII, p. 44. In this letter Wesley declared that supplying a biography was a 'duty.' Wesley also wrote to Christopher Hopper seeking a biography. See J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VI, p. 380.

<sup>36</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VII, pp. 100-101. Again this was in correspondence to Valton on the 18<sup>th</sup> January 1782.

<sup>37</sup> See W. Myles, *A Chronological History*, p. 279.

Wesley tried to maintain a tight control over ideas circulating in the connexion. No preacher, on pain of expulsion, was to go into print without his approval, or, after 1781, without his correction.<sup>38</sup>

Hindmarsh contextualises the earliest testimonials and later autobiographical material in *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*. In the early period, the testimonial material described the process of personal conversion within the context of the group meeting,<sup>39</sup> in this period the band. Later autobiographies offer a restrained pattern of pre-awakening, awakening, conversion and post-conversion life, but within that relate experiential accounts similar to earlier testimonies. Usually the class meeting is related as an experience of grace,<sup>40</sup> but the routine of the meeting is not related.

Hindmarsh's use of Pawson's experiential awakening, which led to the rest of his family accepting Methodism in the late 1750's, evidences that the first generation (Pawson) was able to affect others as deeply as he was affected. An autobiographical letter appeared in the *Arminian Magazine* in 1779,<sup>41</sup> relating his life from the 1760's to that point, followed in 1801 by a fuller autobiography which appeared in *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers*. As might be expected, shortly after conversion, Pawson was given charge of a class, 'Mr. Homer divided our little society into two classes, and made me the leader of one of them.'<sup>42</sup> For Pawson, this responsibility was hard, but he recounted that the experience meant that he 'was brought into a higher state of grace'<sup>43</sup> and he knew 'the abiding witness of the Spirit'.<sup>44</sup> Pawson interestingly was a member of a new society, so small indeed that it could only be made up of a single class.

<sup>38</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism*, p. 68.

<sup>39</sup> See D.B. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, pp. 130-161. Hindmarsh describes the testimonials as offering a sense of individuation within the context of mimesis

<sup>40</sup> D.B. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, p. 228. Hindmarsh used the autobiography of John Pawson to explain the later autobiographical process.

<sup>41</sup> J. Wesley, *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. II, pp. 25-40. As I have shown elsewhere, Wesley edited the submissions of all those who wrote for the *Arminian Magazine*.

<sup>42</sup> J. Pawson, 'The Life of John Pawson', in *Preachers*, Vol. IV, p. 23.

<sup>43</sup> J. Pawson, 'The Life of John Pawson', in *Preachers*, Vol. IV, p. 23.

<sup>44</sup> J. Pawson, 'The Life of John Pawson', in *Preachers*, Vol. IV, p. 23.



The first taste of leadership for Pawson was at the point of division into two separate classes. As Hindmarsh points out, the earliest years are swiftly given over to the emerging itinerant preacher's ministry.<sup>45</sup>

Pawson, like other early Methodists, was joining the Methodist people in the face of opposition. His uncle believed the Methodists would 'murder' the local people,<sup>46</sup> and his father was set against Pawson joining them.<sup>47</sup> For him the reasons for joining the Methodists were that opposition offered a sense of making the Methodists worth joining, and early class experience highlighted the change from sin to salvation.

John Valton,<sup>48</sup> who was asked by Wesley on four occasions to supply a biography, provides further insight into the process of biographical writing. Valton was a prolific diarist, and maintained an annual diary from 1763 onwards. His printed biography in *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers* fills one hundred and thirty six pages.<sup>49</sup> Prior to Wesley's request in 1780 Valton prepared a journal from his personal diary to send to a friend, 'I wrote a long letter to my friend John Watkins who was going to Florida, containing an extract from my journal'.<sup>50</sup>

The biography in *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers* is an edited version of the manuscript diary, omitting those aspects of Valton's experience which he considered unfit to print or unedifying for the Methodist, or non-Methodist

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<sup>45</sup> D.B. Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, p. 229.

<sup>46</sup> J. Pawson, 'The Life of John Pawson' in *Preachers*, Vol. IV, p. 7.

<sup>47</sup> J. Pawson, 'The Life of John Pawson' in *Preachers*, Vol. IV, p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> See H. McGonigle, 'Valton, John', in *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland*, p. 362. Valton was born in 1740 and died in 1794. He maintained his diary from 1763 until his death.

<sup>49</sup> See J. Valton, 'The Life of John Valton', in *Preachers*, Vol. VI, pp. 1-136. The biography has additional material added by Joseph Sutcliffe.

<sup>50</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. 1, p. 79. Entry dated for the 19<sup>th</sup> June 1764. MA 1977/293.

reader. Throughout the diary there are words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and full pages which have been struck through as this process took place.

The biography entry for the 25<sup>th</sup> September 1764, described Valton's recovery from a fever, during which he felt he might die.<sup>51</sup> However, he expurgated from this printed entry his first account of meeting in class.

~~The other evening I was exceedingly tried by one in our Class, who I feared had not a spirit of love. I recommended him to God. After Class the devil roar'd furiously at our Leader's house. Our meeting was forbid, at least our Class Leader my soul's friend was denied the meeting us. I was accused of receiving Stolen Goods and called many bad names.~~<sup>52</sup>

On the 25<sup>th</sup> May 1765, Valton recorded in his diary a detailed account of his opinion of his fellow class members. Not surprisingly, this is not found in the printed biography,

~~Indeed our Class seems to lose both the power and form. Our Class Leader mostly ill, another an elderly person, a Pharisee unwilling to let go her Rage. Another quite lifeless, fell away from what he had received under a dissenting Minister, and another whose pious impressions, like Jonah's Gourd are soon destroyed by levity of spirit and carelessness, and last of all, the unworthiest of all, myself.~~<sup>53</sup>

Valton's diary suggested that a reason for the seeming failure of the class members to meet was the emphases of Methodist teaching. ~~'The doctrine seems to be too harsh, to some, and the way too narrow.'~~<sup>54</sup> Further discouraging entries can be found during the period of Valton's working life as

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<sup>51</sup> J. Valton, 'The Life of John Valton', in *Preachers*, Vol. VI, p. 25.

<sup>52</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. I, p. 130. (25<sup>th</sup> September 1764). MA 1977/293.

<sup>53</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. II, p. 67. (20<sup>th</sup> May 1765). MA 1977/293.

<sup>54</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. II, p. 89. (14<sup>th</sup> July 1765) MA 1977/293.

an Ordinance Officer in Purfleet. These entries cover minimal attendance,<sup>55</sup> arguments,<sup>56</sup> deadness<sup>57</sup> and a desire to cease meeting.<sup>58</sup>

Whilst the majority of Valton's diary related his daily experience in Purfleet from 1763, he travelled as often as he was able to London to attend the Methodist preaching at Snowsfield, the Foundery, and West Street. Whilst in London he attended a class. 'By desire of Mr Windsor, I met his Class without power to speak or pray.'<sup>59</sup>

Valton offers an insight into meeting with a sick former class member who had ceased to meet. Thomas Fenis (Or Carpenter) had met in class some time before and then left. '~~Poor Thom<sup>s</sup>; Fenis or Carpenter who met with us in Class some time ago, and whom the Lord was convincing of sin, but the Devils servants got him away from us~~'.<sup>60</sup> Valton met Fenis again the next day, but his reaction to Valton was to feel shame. 'With extream reluctance I visited the sick Thomas Fenis, was much recovered and seem'd asham'd of me.'<sup>61</sup> For Fenis the class was not sufficiently assimilatory or experiential to warrant his remaining amongst the Methodists.

The even picture of the usefulness of the class through his published biography is set in the manuscript diary into the context of Valton's daily life and

<sup>55</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. II, pp. 121. (Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> October 1765) & p. 150. (5<sup>th</sup> December 1765). Vol. III, p. 78. (27<sup>th</sup> June 1766). Vol. III, pp. 85-86. (23<sup>rd</sup> July 1766). Vol. III, p. 107. (3<sup>rd</sup> September 1766). Vol. III, p. 113. (10<sup>th</sup> September 1766). Vol. III, p. 134. (8<sup>th</sup> October 1766). Vol. III, p. 136. (12<sup>th</sup> October 1766). Vol. III, p. 138. (16<sup>th</sup> October 1766). MA 1977/293.

<sup>56</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. II, p. 106. (28<sup>th</sup> August 1765). Vol. III, p. 97. (17<sup>th</sup> August 1766). MA 1977/293.

<sup>57</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. II, p. 119. (4<sup>th</sup> October 1765). Vol. III, p. 22. (30<sup>th</sup> January 1766). MA 1977/293.

<sup>58</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. II, p. 89. (14<sup>th</sup> July 1765). Vol. II, p. 106. (28<sup>th</sup> August 1765). Vol. II, p. 121. (5<sup>th</sup> October 1765). MA 1977/293.

<sup>59</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. III, p. 122. (17<sup>th</sup> October 1766). There is no entry under this date in *Preachers*. MA 1977/293.

<sup>60</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. III, p. 119. (13<sup>th</sup> September 1776). MA 1977/293.

<sup>61</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. III, p. 120. (14<sup>th</sup> September 1766). MA 1977/293.



experience, which is self critical and sometimes despairing.<sup>62</sup> Valton recorded the class as a helpful meeting on four occasions,<sup>63</sup> and wrote a long account of his class meeting of the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1766. This account was written as that evening's experience was unusual to him, 'I do not know that we ever had such a night nor, anything like it, when the Lord was so present.'<sup>64</sup> However, once home from class his mind was filled with doubt for himself and his friends, and he was afraid he might die.<sup>65</sup> The published biography has a shortened account of this meeting omitting the quotation above, and the disquieting questioning.<sup>66</sup>

In the first year of the class' existence, Abraham Jones,<sup>67</sup> a class leader in London wrote a detailed letter to John Wesley relating his experience of meeting and leading a class. Jones noted. 'My class (except Ja[m]es Moss, for I know not how he walks) do all walk orderly, and keep close to the Word, and the means of grace.'<sup>68</sup> His personal examination however is searching, and self critical. Although Wesley had appointed him, Jones felt he was still 'a worm'.<sup>69</sup> Using the imagery of a person learning to swim, he felt that he was 'greatly afraid of going out of (his) depth.'<sup>70</sup> At this early point, when the class was still used for the collection of monies and the leader visited from house to house,

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<sup>62</sup> See for example J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. I, pp. 29-30. (11<sup>th</sup> March 1764). See also J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. II, pp. 66-67. (20<sup>th</sup> May 1765). MA 1977/293.

<sup>63</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. I, p. 150. (9<sup>th</sup> December 1764). Vol. II, p. 91. (24<sup>th</sup> July 1765). Vol. II, p. 92. (31<sup>st</sup> July 1765). Vol. III, pp. 34-36. (23<sup>rd</sup> February 1766). MA 1977/293.

<sup>64</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. III, p. 35. (23<sup>rd</sup> February 1766). MA 1977/293

<sup>65</sup> J. Valton, *The Christian Experience of the Late Rev. John Valton*, Vol. III, pp. 35-36. (23<sup>rd</sup> February 1766). MA 1977/293.

<sup>66</sup> J. Valton, 'The Life of John Valton', in *Preachers*, Vol. VI, p. 49.

<sup>67</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, pp. 94-95.

<sup>68</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, pp. 94-95.

<sup>69</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, p. 95

<sup>70</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, p. 95. (Word in brackets mine).

Jones found problems in his class members in persevering in their growth in faith.<sup>71</sup>

In the early period of Methodism Wesley along with his brother shared in the regulation of the classes. I have already stated that in 1747, whilst in Gateshead, Wesley recognised that questioning the class leader, rather than each class member could reduce the time regulation might take, even if not the number of expulsions.<sup>72</sup> Whilst in Whitehaven in 1751, Wesley remarked that in the society of two hundred and forty people, only one person did not meet in class. He described this as a 'remarkable circumstance'.<sup>73</sup> This appears to be included in the *Journal* as an experience worthy of note, and when placed alongside many of his published remarks upon class attendance is clearly not the norm of class attendance. In 1759, Wesley regulated the Norwich society, noting that 150 of those who held tickets did not 'pretend to meet at all'.<sup>74</sup> At Limerick in 1760, Wesley noted a 'considerable decrease'<sup>75</sup> in the classes which he believed was the result of 'vice which flows as a torrent'.<sup>76</sup> His remedy was to preach in order to quicken the people.

At the Conference of 1753, Wesley considered with his preachers how Methodism might make the 'Leaders of the Classes more useful'.<sup>77</sup> This consideration took place within the context of a general discussion on the scheme of Methodist organisation and rules. In response to the question, the following answers were offered,

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<sup>71</sup> See Jones comment in relation to E.S. (possibly Eleanor Scholefield), J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26. p. 95.

<sup>72</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 20, pp. 162-163. By this method Wesley reduced the Newcastle Society from 800 to 400 members.

<sup>73</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 20, p. 384.

<sup>74</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 21, p. 226.

<sup>75</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 21, p. 268.

<sup>76</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 21, p. 268.

<sup>77</sup> J. Wesley, *The Minutes of the Methodist Conferences from the First*, Vol. I, p. 454.

Q, How may we make the Leaders of the Classes more useful? – A. 1. Let each of them be diligently examined concerning his method of meeting a Class. 2. Let the Leaders converse with all the preachers as frequently and as freely as possible. 3. Let each Leader carefully enquire how every soul in his class prospers? Not only how each person observes the outward rules, but how he grows in the knowledge and love of God. 4. Let the Leaders frequently meet each others Classes.<sup>78</sup>

Although the reason for this review is unknown, the manner of the answers indicated that the leaders were not undertaking their role as effectively as Conference felt appropriate, and therefore needed their task reinforced by a regular interrogation by others of how they ran their class. Conference also required a regular interchange of leaders and classes. Wesley wrote to Adam Clarke in 1790 expressing this same requirement.

From the early 1760's, Wesley published tracts and pamphlets, wrote to friends and leaders, and on one occasion printed an open letter in the *Journal*, all on the issue of class attendance. In 1764, he wrote a general letter to the Bristol Societies, and implored them to meet in class. Alongside the encouragement was a 'threat' that failing to meet on three occasions brought about self exclusion from the Society and all its associated meetings.

If you constantly meet your band, I make no doubt that you will constantly meet your class; indeed otherwise you are not of our Society. Whoever misses his class thrice together thereby excludes himself ... Halt not between the two. Meet the brethren or leave them.<sup>79</sup>

Earlier that same year, Wesley wrote a letter to 'A Gentleman',<sup>80</sup> subsequently published in the *Journal* in 1768.<sup>81</sup> In publishing the letter, Wesley signalled that those who chose to remain outside of society membership deprived themselves of the benefits that membership brought. Specifically, Wesley addressed the

<sup>78</sup> J. Wesley, *The Minutes of the Methodist Conferences from the First*, Vol. I, p. 454.

<sup>79</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. IV, p. 273.

<sup>80</sup> See J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. IV, pp. 253-255.

<sup>81</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 21, pp. 477-479.



issue of class membership and attendance. Speaking for the 'gentleman' addressed in the letter, Wesley wrote. "But I do not care to meet a class; I find no good in it."<sup>82</sup> His response was simple. 'Suppose you find a dislike, a loathing of it; may not this be natural, or even diabolical? In spite of this, break through, make a fair trial.'<sup>83</sup> In publishing the letter to an anonymous recipient of four years previously, Wesley made available across the connexion and beyond the advice and exhortation to a single person. Wesley's command, to join rather than be a hearer became available to all those who read the *Journal*, and his advice on the class was therefore open to Methodists and non-Methodists alike to observe.

Whilst in Dublin in 1771, Wesley was faced with a situation that had been 'a continual jar, for at least two years past, which had stumbled the people, weakened the hands of the preachers, and greatly hindered.'<sup>84</sup> Wesley was explicit in his diagnosis, 'if one wheel in a machine gets out of its place, what disorder must ensue!'<sup>85</sup> The Leaders had assumed more responsibility than Methodist polity allowed them. These leadership difficulties had led to one hundred class members ceasing to meet their class.<sup>86</sup> After meeting the leaders, stewards and preachers, Wesley met the classes, from which he discerned a 'general faintness'.<sup>87</sup> Later he met the leaders and read over an amended version of the *General Rules*, setting each position in a society into its place.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 21, p. 479.

<sup>83</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 21, p. 479.

<sup>84</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 22, p. 266.

<sup>85</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 22, p. 268.

<sup>86</sup> C.E. White, 'The Decline of the Class Meeting', in *Methodist History*, Volume XXXVIII, Number 4, (ed. C. Yrigoyen, New Jersey: United Methodist Church. 2000) pp. 259-260.

<sup>87</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 22, p. 267

<sup>88</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 22, pp. 267-268.

During 1776, Wesley wrote twice on the issue of class attendance. In February he wrote to Joseph Benson,<sup>89</sup> stationed in the North East, and in March to Thomas Rutherford,<sup>90</sup> who was then stationed in Edinburgh. Wesley commented to Benson that he required him to withhold tickets from any who failed to meet a class weekly, and to put out any who had failed to meet twelve times in a quarter without excuse. This instruction was to be enacted in Newcastle and Sunderland.<sup>91</sup> At the beginning of the letter, Wesley appeared to be highlighting a situation that was occurring elsewhere. 'We must threaten no longer, but perform.'<sup>92</sup> He noted to Benson that he had enacted the same rule in the London Society in the previous November. Wesley also instructed Benson that he should also take care with those appointed class leaders.

I pray without fear or favour remove the leaders, whether of classes or bands, who do not watch over the souls committed to their care 'as those that must give account'.<sup>93</sup>

In the following month, in his letter to Rutherford he required three named individuals to be removed from membership for their failure to attend a class. 'I require John Campbell, John Laird, and Peter Ferguson to take their choice one way or the other. If they will meet their class weekly, they are with us. If they will not, they put themselves from us.'<sup>94</sup> It appeared that Rutherford had written specifically to Wesley seeking advice as to disciplining these three men. Wesley's response left no room for discussion. It is impossible to state what these men had done, other than failed to meet in class, but their refusal to conform to the rules of meeting must have been affecting other members.

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<sup>89</sup> See W. Myles. *A Chronological History*, p. 299. Benson was amongst the 'Second Race of Methodist Preachers', and began his itinerancy in 1771.

<sup>90</sup> See W. Myles. *A Chronological History*, p. 304. Rutherford was amongst the 'Second Race of Methodist Preachers', and began his itinerancy in 1772.

<sup>91</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VI, p. 208.

<sup>92</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VI, p. 208.

<sup>93</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VI, p. 208.

<sup>94</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VI, p. 210.

The situation in Derry, Ireland in 1783 was even more serious than that in Edinburgh. Wesley wrote to John Cricket,<sup>95</sup> to 'reprove strongly their (the people's) unfaithfulness and unfruitfulness,'<sup>96</sup> he added, 'you must immediately resume the form at least of a Methodist Society. I positively forbid you or any preachers to be a leader; rather put the most insignificant person in each class to be leader of it.'<sup>97</sup> In Derry the society structure had fallen away, and the classes had ceased to exist. Wesley's express command to put the most insignificant person into leadership of each classes was to prevent the leaders taking roles that local Methodists were reluctant to assume. In Derry neither the society, nor the classes were functioning.

The previous year, (1782) Wesley had visited John and Mary Fletcher. Their complaint to him was that 'after all the pains they had taken, they could not prevail on the people to join in society, no, nor even to meet in a class.'<sup>98</sup> Wesley's remedy was to preach and issue an invitation to join him and Mr Fletcher. Wesley recorded. 'Ninety-four or ninety-five persons did so; about as many men as women.'<sup>99</sup> Earlier that year, Wesley expressly commanded John Valton to put John Sellars out of the society. His desire was clear, 'I cannot allow John Sellars to be any longer a leader: and if he will lead the class, whether I will or no, I require you to put him out of our Society. If twenty of his class leave the society too, they must. The first loss is the best. Better forty members should be lost than our discipline lost.'<sup>100</sup> Wesley had noted earlier that Sellars 'got his own soul much quickened in Macclesfield, he will now be a

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<sup>95</sup> See W. Myles. *A Chronological History*, p. 300. Cricket was a 'Second Race' preacher, beginning his itinerancy in 1780.

<sup>96</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VII, P. 166. (Words in brackets mine)

<sup>97</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VII, P. 166.

<sup>98</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 23, pp. 232-233.

<sup>99</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 23, p. 233.

<sup>100</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VII, p. 101.



blessing to many at Chester.<sup>101</sup> It is to be assumed that Wesley meant he had received the Holy Spirit. In less than two weeks his manner of class leadership (of more than the recommended twelve members) had been reported to Wesley. His response was to remove Sellars from the society and accept that some would leave with him.

In 1788, Wesley wrote to Edward Jackson, 'I commend you for denying tickets to all that have neglected their classes, unless they seriously promise to meet them for the time to come. You cannot be too exact in this.'<sup>102</sup> Wesley wrote to Adam Clarke<sup>103</sup> in Dublin in 1790 that the classes had benefited from a change of leaders. 'I am glad our leaders have adopted that excellent method of regularly changing the classes. Wherever this has been done, it has been a means of quickening both the leaders and the people. I wish this custom could be effectually introduced.'<sup>104</sup> Wesley's comment to Clarke indicated that the classes had a tendency to become moribund, and the leaders' ineffective if left in charge of the same class for any length of time.

Wesley published a tract at the height of the perfection controversy in 1762,<sup>105</sup> entitled *Cautions and Directions given to the Greatest professors in the Methodist Societies*.<sup>106</sup> This was subsequently published within *Farther Thoughts on Christian Perfection*,<sup>107</sup> and finally contained in *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. This tract addressed the societies when the controversy over the issue of sinless perfection was at its height. Wesley would not allow

<sup>101</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VII, p. 98. This letter was written to Hester Anne Roe.

<sup>102</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VIII, pp. 98-99.

<sup>103</sup> N.W. Taggart, 'Clarke, Dr Adam', in *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland*, P. 69. Clarke began itinerating in 1782.

<sup>104</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VIII, p. 244.

<sup>105</sup> See H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, pp. 336-342. The leaders of the controversy, Thomas Maxfield and George Bell were based in London, and separated from Wesley over the reception of sinless perfection.

<sup>106</sup> J. Wesley, *Cautions and Directions, Given to the Greatest professors in the Methodist Societies* (London: 1762)

<sup>107</sup> J. Wesley. *Farther Thoughts Upon Christian Perfection* (London: 1763)

this particular definition of perfection, always arguing that those made perfect could still be subject to involuntary sin. Some Methodists followed the leaders of the disagreement, Thomas Maxfield and George Bell<sup>108</sup> to their meetings, and Wesley specifically addressed the schism that he believed this action caused. He insisted within the tract that schism would be avoided if Methodists attended their class or band, as these (along with the public meetings), were 'the very sinews of our Society; and whatever weakens, or tends to weaken, our regard for these, or our exactness in attending them, strikes at the very root of our community.'<sup>109</sup>

The behaviour of the Methodists, who chose to follow Maxfield and others, was sufficiently important for Wesley to urge his people to maintain the order and rules he had laid out some twenty years before in the *General Rules*. Although Wesley was an advocate of perfection, and was willing to hear accounts of those who claimed to have received it, he was unwilling to allow that perfection meant that discipline, and meeting others was unnecessary for those that had attained it. Over a period of time Wesley published this same advice to prevent schism as he understood it, and to encourage meeting in class. These publications were available to all those who attended the societies, and was a warning to continue meeting.

I have already shown how Wesley wrote in strong, yet affectionate terms to Nancy Bolton in 1790. This letter, written in the last year of his life, is a heartfelt plea to a friend to return to a class meeting. Towards the end of the letter, after his exhortation to her to go to a class, 'sick or well', Wesley described the

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<sup>108</sup> See D.A.L. Cooney, 'Bell, George', in *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland*, p. 26.

<sup>109</sup> J. Wesley, *A Plain Account*, p. 94.

process of meeting as taking up a cross.<sup>110</sup> In this he is stating that the class is not intended to be an easy meeting, but it is clear that Nancy Bolton was unwilling to face the rigours of it.

Rack states clearly the reality of class life. He recognises that the ideal picture of the class was described by Wesley in the *Plain Account of the People Called Methodists* of 1748.<sup>111</sup> However, as I have shown above from these varied accounts of class difficulties, 'there were many casualties from the start'.<sup>112</sup> Rack notes that the ideal, laid before Methodists and non-Methodists alike in the *Plain Account*, is tempered by 'his records of complaints about members who seldom met and complained that it did them no good when they did; the frequent purges tell their own tale.'<sup>113</sup>

Leadership of classes and numbers wishing to belong could in their own way lead to a breakdown of an effective class system. Grace Murray, at one point a possible wife for John Wesley, but who later married John Bennet wrote in her diary. 'I had a full hundred in Classes, whom I met in two separate meetings'.<sup>114</sup> 50 people per class would have led to an ineffective meeting. The class could only operate effectively in an intimate setting, where every member had opportunity to speak, listen and learn. In a group of 50, the essential intimacy was lost.

At the Conference of 1775, a decision was made to halve any classes containing more than 30 members.<sup>115</sup> The sentence following the decision to

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<sup>110</sup> J. Wesley, *Letters [SE]*, Vol. VIII, p. 246.

<sup>111</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 241.

<sup>112</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 241.

<sup>113</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 241.

<sup>114</sup> S. R. Valentine, *John Bennet*, p. 207.

<sup>115</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*, Vol. 1, p. 120.



reduce class sizes indicates that sizeable classes were not uncommon, 'It would be well if this rule were constantly attended to.'<sup>116</sup> Second generation members would not have found any useful purpose in belonging to a large group. Indeed, even the first generation would rarely have found such a huge meeting helpful.

The rule of class membership as a precondition to society membership meant that each prospective Methodist was assigned a class. A new member, joining a large, settled group, would not have opportunity to experience the close fellowship of the ideal class number, led by an experienced leader. The small group of 10 or 12 could properly lay claim to Troeltsch's model of mysticism. It was intimate, it had access to shared experience, it could respond sensitively to need or admonish sin. The larger classes were in effect more like Troeltsch's Sect model; voluntary societies gathered together for association, but unable to access the immediacy of mysticism.

To a second generation, unlike those who wrote early testimonies or kept journals and diaries and made much of the value of their communal class experience as a vital regular means of growth in grace and holiness, it was possession of the ticket and the social standing that came with it that offered value. The class was necessary, but not of primary importance. It had offered much to the first generation of Methodists, but did not offer much to later generations. Thus John Kent is correct when he writes,

After the first wave of Wesleyanism the societies gradually lost their appetite for ecstatic experience, because members were beginning to feel themselves in control of their social and personal circumstances.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</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*, Vol. 1, p. 120.

<sup>117</sup> J. Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans*, p. 42.

A simple example of this early experiential meeting is noted in an oath, made against the Methodists in 1747.

This informant on his oath voluntarily saith that he formerly attended the meetings of those persons who called themselves Methodists being invited so to do by one of their preachers called Cownley and that they divide themselves into different classes where they meet in private homes that a husband and wife cant be of the same Class nor Father & Daughter, nor father & son, nor a brother and sister, that they often pretend to receive the Spirit & they that receive it (as they say) just above the room & ask others if they don't feel the Spirit: and that he is credibly informed that one Joseph Heber of the said Parish ... reported he was in a trance or deep sleep when an angel appeared to him.<sup>117</sup>

This quotation, from an anti-Methodist oath, shows how experiential or highly charged Methodist class meetings were. The settled Methodists of the later 18<sup>th</sup> century were not enamoured of the highly charged and emotive writings in journals and diaries of the first Methodists, who pioneered the movement across England. Not only did they not identify with such charged meetings, they did not identify with the writings of these early men and women.

John Kent, in his discussion of Methodism's earliest phase, primary religion, summarises Wesley's lifelong reliance on his own experience and understanding of religious practice. He quotes V.H.H. Green:

His life was built around his own experience, an experience glazed and insulated from the outside world by his confidence in God and in himself. Completely selfless and yet intensely egoistic, he had come to identify himself with his own creation.<sup>118</sup>

In this was Wesley's major failing; that he could not see that those who had come into a settled Methodism did not have his primary religious affection. The class was not the melting pot of an exuberant and vibrant faith after the first generation's experience had faded to memory.

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<sup>117</sup> Lambeth Palace Archives *Archbishops Papers – Secker Papers*, Volume 8, (*Methodists*) 1738-57. This was An oath sworn before J Snow by Thomas Lovell (25<sup>th</sup> May 1747), 8 in folio. This oath was part of Lavington's information gathering exercise against the Methodists.

<sup>118</sup> J. Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleys*, p, 43.

Roy Hattersley's biography of Wesley approaches the change from mysticism to sect by showing how Wesley became concerned with the need for unity across the Connexion in the 1760's. He does not consider the move towards a laxity of doctrine in favour of a broader organisation reliant on rules of behaviour within the framework of Troeltsch's model, but this fits well within it. The need for unity expressed in Hattersley's view in the *Large Minutes* created a body of doctrine that 'still bound Methodism to the Church of England.'<sup>119</sup> Yet by the time of their publication, Methodism was broader than these minutes and required skilful handling to remain one body, albeit with a loose connection to Anglicanism. Hattersley suggests that it was the maintenance of Methodist unity that overrode the need to remain as a reforming body within the Anglican Communion.

In the change from mysticism to sect, under the model expounded by Roy Hattersley, the emerging, confident grouping known as Methodism required an identity that bound them together. That identity was no longer based on the earlier experiential model, but on a regulated, 'national' set of rules and expectations imposed from Conference.

For Hattersley, these changes in Methodism's printed rules and doctrines, contained in the *Large Minutes* and other publications, set the second generation on a course that would inevitably lead to separation from the Church of England. A regulated, national organisation had moved away from the early years of ad hoc local decisions, and later generations were joining a broader Methodism. These generations were seeking the order of Methodism as a sect,

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<sup>119</sup> R. Hattersley, *A Brand from the Burning: The Life of John Wesley* (London: Little, Brown. 2002) p. 299.



and all it offered: regulation, doctrine, respectability, and organisation. Roy

Hattersley gives a sense of this when he writes;

In his sixtieth year Wesley continued to pay necessary respect to the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Church of England's homilies. But he was laying down articles and homilies of his own. By choice and by design, year by year, Methodism was creating its own position within the spectrum of Protestant Christianity.<sup>120</sup>

The first generation who had come into a locally organised society and class, or whose religious society had been taken over by the Wesleys, would have recognised only the form of their class by the 1760's. That which was a small element of a small and somewhat informal Connexion was by this period a highly organised national group. The east-west axis of 1740 had long since given way to a complex Connexion that could not be disciplined by an itinerant Wesley working alone. The leadership that had developed to service the Connexion was drawn from primary stage Methodists, working with the remnants of that group, but commonly with a secondary generation, who did not identify easily with their leaders' experience.

The earliest testimonies, journals and diaries highlighted the process towards conversion, and a daily, almost obsessive measurement of spiritual fervour, coupled with ecstatic experience, or at least the hope thereof. William Holder regularly reviewed his spiritual state, which varied from depression to near ecstasy. Towards the end of 1768, he shared his writing with a family with whom he was staying:

I breakfast (sic) with P Newman was still pressed by the enemy, after breakfast I read some things of my Journal to them, particularly how I was before, at the time, & after my deliverance.<sup>121</sup>

The result of his reading was to 'open the eyes' of a woman present at the time.

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<sup>120</sup> R. Hattersley, *A Brand from the Burning*, p. 298.

<sup>121</sup> W. Holder, *The Diary of William Holder*, entry for 29<sup>th</sup> November 1768. MA 1977/238.

Anti-Methodist polemic serves to show how those not sympathetic to the Methodist cause used the model of testimonial spiritual journalling and diarying to good effect. One writer, using the pseudonym 'Nathaniel Snip',<sup>122</sup> admirably uses the voices and ecstatic experiences of the early Methodists to show them as enthusiasts and anti-enlightenment people. For 'Snip' a Methodist was an individual who rejected all forms of entertainment, dressed soberly and saw God in every aspect of human life and natural event. Although 'Snip' had no time for Methodists, his short '*Journal*' lampooning the more serious Methodist journals and diaries, indicates what turned second generation Methodists away from their earlier counterparts. All was supernatural and highly Dissenting.

John Walsh helps to make the reason for these highly charged writings pertinent to a first generation, but by default also serves to explain why a later generation found them, and the experiential class meeting, less relevant. 'The Methodists offered the poor a salvation which they felt to be within their reach, immediately attainable and recognizable.'<sup>123</sup> This is highlighted in a letter of 1747 to the Bishop of Exeter, who was compiling a dossier on Methodist activity. The authors wrote to the bishop;

A set of people who stile (sic) themselves Methodists have infus'd their enthusiastick (sic) notions in to the minds of vast numbers of the meaner sort of people in the western part of this County, they are very strenuously endeavouring to propagate them all over it: several have assembled frequently .... the preacher they are so very fond of, is no better than a mean illiterate Tinner, and what is more surprising, but a boy of nineteen years old.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> N. Snip, *A Journal of the Travels of Nathaniel Snip a Methodist Teacher of the Word* (London: W. Bristow & M. Cooper. 1761).

<sup>123</sup> J.D. Walsh, "Methodism" and the Origins of English Speaking Evangelicalism', in *Evangelicalism*, p. 31.

<sup>124</sup> Lambeth Palace Archives 'Bishops Meetings: Papers of Bishop Lavington of Exeter', *Archbishops Papers – Secker Papers*, Volume 8, (*Methodists*) 1738-57. Letter from J. Birkhead and J. Tremayne to the Bishop of Exeter, (23<sup>rd</sup> May 1747). 4 in folio. See also T. Hext's letter to the Bishop of Exeter dated the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1748. Same folio, pp. 64-65.

It is no wonder that a generation, who joined Methodism as a means of social pretence or respectability, or the children of those who had been amongst the poor, felt no sympathy or empathy with the earlier Methodists. The class meeting had served its life in one generation, for a later generation another model of meeting was required but none was forthcoming.

This thesis is not concerned with the changes made within Methodism from 1749, when the basic organisation was in place. However, knowingly or otherwise, Wesley was actively involved in making a second generation of Methodists part of an organisation, not a movement. To have had an experiential second generation required Methodism to remain committed to a movement, which inevitably meant constant change.

Frank Baker addresses this in *John Wesley and the Church of England*. Through his discussion of the Deed of Declaration, settled in 1784, he opens the chapter with the ominous words, 'If ever there was a year when Wesley could be said to have irrevocably severed himself and Methodism from the Church of England it was 1784.'<sup>125</sup> The Deed however, merely regularised the reality of Methodism, setting out what would happen after his death. Myles noted in his précis of the Conference for 1784 that there were preachers whose names were not included as members of the 'Legal Hundred'. Those named by Myles<sup>126</sup> left the Methodist Connexion, and in doing so, left behind the men happy to be numbered amongst an emerging Methodist Church

Wesley had made his movement uniform in 1749; he had abandoned hope of reconciliation with evangelical Anglicans in the 1760's. Methodist properties

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<sup>125</sup> F. Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, p. 218.

<sup>126</sup> W. Myles, *A Chronological History*, p. 158. Myles names the men who left as John Hampson Sen., John Hampson Jr., William Eells, Joseph Pillmore, and a few others



were established on a Model Trust Deed, and the doctrinal standards for all Methodists were settled as Wesley's *Forty Four Sermons* and his *Notes on the New Testament*. Wesley also published a form of worship for the Methodists and ordained men to supply the sacramental life of the Methodists.

In these actions, which Baker asserts Wesley recognised as acts of separation, but hoped for a way through them that would not actually lead to physical separation,<sup>127</sup> the Methodists fundamentally changed as an organisation. The small experiential classes of 1742, which met to raise funds to alleviate poverty (as well as settle debts), one of the great pietistic acts of the Methodists, were now part of a larger Connexional structure.

Class money was used to support the Itinerants and thereby Methodist structure, as Wesley accepted in correspondence to his brother as early as 1751.<sup>128</sup> Charles' objection to this was that paying the preachers in this way maintained his brother's authority over them,<sup>129</sup> a charge John Wesley denied. Perhaps by not maintaining the preachers the movement's sharp edge could have been maintained, and held the experiential nature of the movement for a longer period.

However, Wesley's control has to be an important factor in the decline of the class. This is discussed fully in the previous chapters, but it can be seen here that as the emphasis shifted from movement to organisation, the survival of the jobs of the 'employees', those in local, Circuit, and Connexional leadership became the primary focus of the leadership *per se*. Charles Wesley noted this

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<sup>127</sup> F. Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, p. 218.

<sup>128</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, p. 479. See also J. Whitehead, *The Life of the Rev John Wesley M.A.* (London: Stephen Couchman. 1796) p. 342. This is a transcript of the *Large Minutes* and allowed an annual collection from the Classes for the building of new Preaching Houses. (Q49)

<sup>129</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 26, p. 479. Fn5

change in the 1750's. 'Unless a sudden remedy be found, the preachers will destroy the work of God. What has wellnigh ruined many of them is their being taken from their trades ... the tinner, barber, thatcher, forgot himself, and set up for a gentleman, and looked out for a fortune, having lost the only way of maintaining himself.'<sup>130</sup>

Opponents of Methodism laid before Wesley the charge that men were seeking a life beyond their station. Howard Snyder quotes Augustus Toplady, an Anglican Calvinist, who advised Wesley to

Let his cobblers keep to their stalls. Let his tinkers mend their vessels. Let his barbers confine themselves to their blocks and basons. Let his bakers stand to their kneading-troughs. Let his blacksmiths blow more suitable coals than those of controversy.<sup>131</sup>

If classes were supporting (to Charles' disgust) the new itinerancy, then their focus was of itself changing in line with a new 'professional' group emerging among them. The class was the ground from which these preachers had come, and from which new preachers would arise. The mystical life of the movement, or primary religion was giving way to the emerging sect or secondary religion, and as Kent maintains, 'by the late 1760's the Wesleyan leaders had to ease the pressure of their idiosyncratic theology on daily life; they were responding more cautiously to the religious situation they had created.'<sup>132</sup> Quite simply, as Methodism grew as a voluntary association, and the organisation required more than a sheet of rules to govern belonging and behaviour, Wesley tempered his idiosyncrasies to bring forth a more socially acceptable Methodism. The passage of time led to a change in the emphasis of the classes life, from experiential to catechetical, from confessional to fellowship meeting. This change suited a leadership which was settling into a regulated and increasingly

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<sup>130</sup> F. Baker, *Charles Wesley as Revealed by his Letters* (London: Epworth Press. 1948) pp. 84-85.

<sup>131</sup> H.A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, p. 64.

<sup>132</sup> J. Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans*, p. 105.

respectable lifestyle. A lifestyle that eschewed emotionalism which led to marginalisation by the local community, in favour of 'fellowship' leading to acceptance by the local community.

Added to this has to be the changing world view of the Methodist people themselves. Early Methodists shared John Wesley's desire to band together into societies, where mystery, visions and rapture were part of the way of life. Wesley's quest for primitive religion, continued beyond his purpose for travelling to America, and through his life Wesley managed to walk a tightrope between enthusiasm and reason. In 1750, Wesley was reading the French Prophet John Lacy<sup>133</sup> and although he denied their claim to direct revelation, he accepted their claim that the Montanists were truly Scriptural Christians.<sup>134</sup> Wesley denied the enthusiasm he saw in their claim to particular revelation, but was willing to allow a claim to early Christian roots. Likewise, John Wesley's ready acceptance of the accounts of divine providence from his people could be countered by his denial that Methodists had any claim to unique religious revelation as David Hempton has argued.<sup>135</sup>

Amongst the early Methodists, primitive religion reigned, and in that, the experiential class meeting was paramount; supplying sufficient sub culture for Wesley to maintain at the opening of the New Chapel in City Road in 1778, that Methodism was 'the old religion, the religion of the Bible, the religion of the primitive church, the religion of the Church of England'.<sup>136</sup> Some thirty six years after the first class meeting in Bristol he could not allow that any shift of

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<sup>133</sup> Lacy's book was *The General Delusion of Christians with Regard to prophecy*.

<sup>134</sup> See H. Schwartz, *The French Prophets*, p. 205. The *Journal* entry is J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 20, p. 356.

<sup>135</sup> D. Hempton, *Methodism*, pp. 32-54.

<sup>136</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*, pp. 173-188. Kenneth Carveley quotes this passage from Wesley sermon in his essay.



emphasis had taken place for his people. Kent correctly describes the ecstatic events surrounding the class and early Methodists, and indeed Wesley's own ecstatic experiences:

When he described these events he did not question what had happened, he defined and approved what took place as divinely prompted. He did not hesitate to use the language of perfect holiness to stir up others, he was always demanding that they 'go on to perfection'. And he believed their claims that they had achieved a state of perfect love in which the self was possessed by a divine spirit.<sup>137</sup>

The Methodists moved on without him. At the earliest period, the very nature of being members of a voluntary religious group gave impetus and purpose when attacks by a mob, or attempts to suppress field preaching through the judiciary were stock in trade for small and oppressed local societies. Leslie Church's writing on persecution graphically accounts the early problems encountered by fledgling Methodist Societies;

Towards the end of May (1743) mobs from Darlaston, Walsall and Bilston attacked the Wednesbury Methodists. Houses were wrecked and looted, and 'even pregnant women were beaten with clubs and otherwise abused'.<sup>138</sup>

Perhaps most effective in forming the homogenous and closely knit class or society were the verbal and physical attacks upon the Methodists led by local clergy or bishops. Notable in this was the Bishop of Exeter,<sup>139</sup> who in the early years of Methodism used a form of intelligence gathering to discredit Methodism, and he was not averse to using the judiciary to suppress the Methodists. Opposition can be described as a further factor which drew the earliest Methodist people together. I have shown elsewhere that the use of violence, threat, or even another doctrine or the trial of a fellow Methodist could

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<sup>137</sup> J. Kent, *Wesley and the Wesleyans*, pp. 191-192.

<sup>138</sup> L.F. Church, *More about the Early Methodist People* (London: Epworth Press. 1949) p. 74. See also J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 11, pp. 282-289. Wesley recounted in *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Part III*, the attacks made upon the Methodists in Darlaston, West Bromwich and Wednesbury.

<sup>139</sup> This was Bishop Lavington, whose papers are now held at Lambeth Palace Library in the *Secker Papers*.

cause a society to bond, or re-group. Equally however, in the face of local opposition, members would leave the Methodists. This is most clearly seen in the *Journal* entry of March 1743.<sup>140</sup>

As time progressed however, the desire to be respected and respectable (an inherent trait of Methodist people who followed Wesley's prescriptive dress and behaviour code) grew amongst the people who called themselves Methodists. With the falling away of the mob and magistrate, the people who by the time of Wesley's death were interested in their own buildings and place in society, left behind the primitive religion that Wesley believed he had founded and sought a settled, communal model of being.

To the generation of primitive religion belonged the experiential class meeting; to a later generation belonged the respected society. Charles Wesley's acerbic comment of the preachers setting themselves up as 'respectable' men illustrates this point well. Whether he was concerned that the emerging working class was seeking to settle at a point above their natural station in life, or whether he was noticing that the leadership was 'divorcing' from the people is impossible to tell. The one point from it is this: Methodism as a voluntary meeting of men and women focussed upon the effects of meeting in class, relied on hostile external forces to give purpose and impetus. Once hostility ceased, the class for the reasons outlined in this section lost purpose and impetus.

The class worked as an effective meeting for the first Methodist people, eager to share in the experiential religion that included them as potential leaders, and

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<sup>140</sup> See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 19, p. 318. Amongst those who left was one person as people were rude in the street, twelve because their parents were not willing for them to attend, and five because others spoke badly of the society.

willing to submit to the local authority of John and Charles Wesley. Later generations, who revered the Wesleys' as founders of their chosen faith structure, but who were not so closely controlled by them directly (but by the itinerants without the same gravitas of authority), did not pick up on the experiential 'heritage' of their recent predecessors, preferring not mysticism but organisation.

The class meeting could not satisfy the generations beyond the earliest mystical or primary phase as fully as it needed to do to maintain its principal functions; fellowship, conversion and discipleship, financial accountability, and discipline. The use of a class as a catechetical group, and its oversize led to a failure in effectiveness. Further, using the class as a means of eliciting funds to support the emerging leadership relegated its purpose from experiential to functional.

The class became part of a broad organisation, not the kingpin of a movement into which every prospective Methodist entered as the starting point for a life changed by faith, and shared in common with others whose own conversion supported, encouraged and challenged the new member. The life changes the class required for the first generation were not as stringent for men and women who had grown up within Methodism and who had learnt behaviour from an early age, or for those who wished to join an organisation that offered a respectable model of life within a faith structure.

The following conclusion will examine the class both as crown and cross in the light of Wesley's inheritance of faith and its relatively short effective lifespan prior to Wesley's death in 1791.



## Chapter 9: Conclusion

At the end of chapter two, I drew attention to the well known term relating to Wesley's structure of belief, 'the quadrilateral'.<sup>1</sup> This term, coined by Albert Outler, is used to describe Wesley's theology through Scripture, tradition, reason and experience. However, I agreed with David Hempton that quadrilateral is inadequate when used in relation to Wesley himself. As Hempton states,

the attempt to boil Wesley's theology down to a simple formula, such as the much-peddled quadrilateral ... spectacularly misses the point. A forensic appeal to geometrical precision, of all the approaches to Wesley's theology, is the one least likely to capture its essence.<sup>2</sup>

Hempton's term, 'vortex' is more descriptive of Wesley's faith structure. For Wesley, the experience of life to conversion on May 24<sup>th</sup> 1738 was indeed a vortex, or whirlpool of fast moving life and spiritual experience. Through his reading, conversation, practice and witness, Wesley was experiencing, assimilating and rejecting the models of faith with which he came into contact.

This process is most famously known in his rejection of the mystics, but he also disagreed with aspects of Law's and à Kempis' writings amongst others. In *The Christian Library*, intended for the Methodists, primarily the assistants, Wesley abridged many authors, leaving only those aspects of their writing to which he could assent. Likewise, though he held a high regard for de Renty, Wesley still abridged St Jure's biography, ensuring only that de Renty's practices, acceptable to Wesley became known amongst the literate Methodists.

However, a vortex requires a continuous flow of water into the whirling pool for it to remain a fast moving, spiralling, vital pool of water. It is undoubtedly true that

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> D. Hempton, *Methodism Empire of the Spirit*, p. 57.

Hempton's descriptor is accurate for John Wesley, and his brother Charles.

They both experienced classic pietist conversions, through readings of Luther's preface to the Romans (John) and the Commentary on Galatians (Charles), but those came at the end of a long and tortuous journey, especially for the elder Wesley.

The moment of conversion crystallised the journey that had taken since 1725 for John Wesley, and similarly 1729 for his brother. I have already outlined in detail the variety of theologies, doctrines and periods that Wesley accessed in order to create what was to become the Wesleyan schema, subsequently offered to those who were willing to follow his pattern of Christian living from 1740. The vortex of Wesley's theology was delivered into the Methodist Movement as a given scheme of spirituality. He offered to the society, class and bands that which he had come to accept and would subsequently teach and seek to hand as a legacy to his people.

I have argued in this thesis that the fullness of Wesley's theology was found within the class meeting in its earliest years from 1742, and shown that the experiential, expressive and accountable small group which was the class could offer a faith encounter that was not dissimilar to Wesley's own. Awakening was frequently highly charged with feelings of uncertainty and helplessness, and conversion was a sense of the fullness of God, coupled with visions, voices and ecstatic experiences.

The four elements of class membership I have drawn out in this thesis; fellowship, conversion and discipleship, financial accountability, and discipline, were integral to Wesleyan spirituality and each can be discovered from aspects of the system of faith that Wesley had himself created over a period of thirteen

years. Each of these aspects is best understood when the vortex of Wesley's system is at its most lively.

From Spener's *Collegia Pietatis*, the later Unitary Societies and Fetter Lane Society, fellowship was a vital element of associational life found within the religious life of pietists, Anglicans and Moravians. For each of these traditions the need to deepen fellowship was fundamental to increasing spiritual life and in some Unitary Societies at least might have offered a means of improving in business. At its most meaningful, fellowship required class members to recognise themselves personally accountable, not only for their attendance at class, but also for their use of time and money. This accountability was also to be expressed in the class as members openly and honestly discussed their spiritual state before their peers.

Conversion and discipleship can similarly be identified from earlier traditions. Alongside the Pietists, Anglicans and Moravians, the Puritans also sought to convert and disciple men and women, in a variety of ways, through the pursuit of godliness and holiness, through the use of journals and diaries, and by teaching that there were degrees of faith. Discipleship was further expressed in pietistic works of mercy.

Financial accountability appears in the Unitary Societies, and young men were encouraged to pay into their society funds to cover the support of the poor. The Methodists were encouraged to support their own poor, as well as those beyond the society's boundaries. Wesley drew on the Unitary Society model in which those who were not themselves rich supported their peers in their distress and also reached into the community to assist the poor within the wider community. This accountability diversified beyond the Unitary Societies aims as monies



gathered began to be used for the support of an emerging stipendiary leadership.

The key to these three strands of the class's life was discipline. Again, Wesley's own highly disciplined life and experience fed into the class meeting all he learnt from other traditions. Discipline was central to the Puritan model of faithful living, the pietists of both Moravian and Halle traditions and the membership of the Unitary Societies. This discipline was not as Dean<sup>3</sup> suggested simply a means of ensuring that class members were held in a 'repressive' atmosphere under which continuing membership was dependent on submitting to authority. I hold that the discipline of the class was mutual. Members assented to a discipline, shown most clearly in the *Directions and Rules*.<sup>4</sup>

Over arching these aspects of communal life were mysticism and the means of grace. Mysticism was found in Wesley's belief that men and women could experience perfection in this life. He drew this aspect of his spirituality from the Puritans, the mystics; both Eastern and continental, and from his high Anglican roots. The class meeting was not the primary place in which perfection was sought, but it was a meeting to which those who had been made perfect would belong. In essence, men and women who had been awakened but had not received assurance, could meet with and see at first hand those who were perfected in love.

In stating this, I am aware that Dean understood the bands' primary function to be the 'vision of perfection'.<sup>5</sup> He then relates the rationale of the class as disciplinary. I disagree that this is so, as the perfected members of the Society

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<sup>3</sup> W.W. Dean, *Disciplined Fellowship*.

<sup>4</sup> See appendices 10, 11 and 12.

<sup>5</sup> W.W. Dean, *Disciplined Fellowship*, p. 180.

would have a place in the class meeting. Their presence alone lifts the purpose of the class beyond discipline.

Wesley's personal reliance on the means of grace spilled into every aspect of societal life, and was an element of class life. At one level this reliance was simply to ensure church order, and prevent Methodism being seen as Dissent. At another level this reliance reflected Wesley's high Tory Anglicanism, his understanding of Christian life prior to the Commonwealth and the early church. His insistence on the observance of the fasts of the church,<sup>6</sup> and the baptism<sup>7</sup> or re-baptism of Dissenters is another element of his denial of Dissent and reliance on the Anglican Church as the bedrock of a faithful life.

In Hempton's 'vortex model', the class meeting for the earliest generation of Methodists was the same swift moving, vibrant and experiential system of faith contained in a small group. The term vortex, describes well the pattern of Methodist life when those coming into the movement were either previously un-churched, Dissenters seeking a fresh expression of faith, Anglicans moving from traditional Unitary Societies, or women, who had previously had their Christian expression confined to the Parish church, or to family prayers.

Some of the earliest testimonies, predominantly from females, elucidate the exciting change of life that Methodism offered. Social status beyond the class remained unaltered, yet within it women and men found that a voice could be expressed which had previously been ignored, and a status was offered that gave opportunity to lead and direct a peer group. I hold therefore that Wesley's

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix 10: Rule 6; Appendix 12: Rule III, part 5.

<sup>7</sup> See Wesley's correspondence with Sarah Perrin. Perrin was un-baptised (and may have previously been a Quaker), who despite being allied to Wesley's work in Bristol from 1740 was not baptised until October 1743. This meant her involvement in societal life was limited until that point. See especially letter: Sarah Perrin to John Wesley. October 1743. From: *Letters Chiefly to the Wesley's Volume II*.

quadruple approach; Scripture, tradition, reason and experience was a vortex for early Methodists too.

Hempton clearly states why this might be so. 'Any model that lacks dynamic movement towards holiness and its growth within individuals and its dissemination throughout the world is clearly inadequate.'<sup>8</sup> For the earliest followers of the Methodist model of spirituality within the milieu of the Evangelical Revival this is true. The primary purpose of class membership was fellowship with God. This was found in the context of a dynamic relationship with one's peers under God.

Each individual was able to enter the class aware of their un-awakened state, and through that recognise the need for salvation, a change of lifestyle and life pattern and through conversion and discipleship learn the Wesleyan way of faith. This way of faith offered at a significantly deep level not just godliness (what to do), but also holiness (how to be). This can be described simply as a serious turn to works of piety and works of mercy for every Methodist.

The Wesleyan model of organisation is remarkably similar to the Moravian model. The Moravians began to organise themselves more rigidly after the experience of 12 year old Susanne Kühnel in 1727.<sup>9</sup> Over time, classes were introduced, and bands drawn from them. Bands were segregated in the same way as the Methodist bands, which Wesley copied from the Fetter Lane organisational structure. Wesley's classes which were not introduced until 1742, took the same place within the movement's structure as the Herrnhut classes

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<sup>8</sup> D. Hempton, *Methodism Empire of the Spirit*, p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> See p. 27.



did in the Moravian structure. Unlike Herrnhut's classes however, Methodists met in class without segregation by age, sex or marital status.

The settled Moravian model at Herrnhut was unable, even within a short period of time, to maintain ecumenical unity. Wesleyanism drew men and women from a variety of religious backgrounds and it may be that without the closeness of a community rule, Methodism was more easily able to hold in tension varieties of religious understanding.

The caveat however is that Wesley imposed his own model of spirituality on the people called Methodists. Perhaps it was easier to do this with a group of people who were voluntarily joining a non-communal movement, than in a communal movement made up of a number of traditions. Herrnhut imposed communal rules, but Zinzendorf did not insist that Lutherans, Moravians and others should accept one model of faith.

It may also be true that Wesley did not attempt communal living for Methodists, as the Fetter Lane experiment with the House 'Shiloh'<sup>10</sup> in Islington was unsuccessful. This thesis does not discuss the communal experiment in detail, but its lifespan was short and whilst Wesley attended meetings at the House, he clearly did not see that this was a model for his own movement, preferring his people not to live in community, separate from society, but in society itself. His first hand experience of Herrnhut might also have led him to see community living as a separation from the world. Despite the Moravians rejection of mysticism themselves, this manner of living was reminiscent of the mystical desire for the annihilation of the will, with the believer ultimately lost in God.

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<sup>10</sup> See pp. 177-178.

Whilst John Wesley considered communal living at Kingswood,<sup>11</sup> and built the Orphan House in Newcastle, there is no evidence that either building provided this. Rack<sup>12</sup> adduces that plans were laid for some form of communal living, especially in the holding of 'common stock'<sup>13</sup> amongst select society members, but these plans do not seem to have been brought to fruition. Whilst communal living might have fulfilled Wesley's interest in primitive Christianity, held over from his involvement with the Manchester non-jurors, the reality was that men and women of the social level Methodism reached could not abandon work and trades for such a lifestyle.

It is unarguable that the earliest years of Methodism, with its highly organised connexional structure, and emerging system of unpaid and subsequently paid leaders, was unique within the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century. George Whitefield, Wesley's Calvinist 'rival', was constantly travelling between England and America. He left behind him no formal structures. This meant there was no supervised organisation for him to return from America to. Early in Wesley's career as a Methodist proper, he took over the building and subsequent running of Kingswood School,<sup>14</sup> on the outskirts of Bristol. Wesley had no qualms in doing this, despite the foundation being Whitefield's, and the fact that his preaching tours were in part a means of raising funds for the school. The Countess of Huntingdon's attempts within the Calvinist branch of the Revival in founding Trevecka College in 1768 to train Calvinist ministers was too late to counter Wesley's associational network of lay-led societies.

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<sup>11</sup> See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 25, p. 667. Whitefield wrote to Wesley and was clearly upset. In this letter he asked whether it was intended that 'the house at Kingswood is intended hereafter for the brethren to dwell in as at Herrnhut?'

<sup>12</sup> H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, pp. 364-365.

<sup>13</sup> See J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 9, p. 270. *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodist*. Wesley outlines the brief rules for the Select Societies in this open letter to the Rev. Mr. Perronet.

<sup>14</sup> See H.D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, p. 201.

The voraciousness of Methodism in assimilating other societies; Grimshaw's Howarth Societies for example, or taking over Unitary Societies, as Wesley did in Bristol, and in Cornwall, and his refusal to reach a rapprochement with Anglican colleagues such as Samuel Walker in Truro, or Henry Venn in Huddersfield, was a strong factor in the success of the emerging movement.<sup>15</sup> In short, whilst Wesley travelled tirelessly, converts to Methodism, who were also travelling, could begin a new society in their locality, not simply modelled on Wesley's pattern, but as a replica of the pattern.<sup>16</sup> These new societies then became Wesley's. Hence the later need for a single Model Trust Deed on which all preaching houses were to be settled to prevent local societies claiming ownership. This gave the added benefit that Methodists who travelled were able to attend, or join identical societies. Thomas Olivers<sup>17</sup> attended the society in Bristol, and then moved to Bradford upon Avon. He was able to move from one Society to another without having to go through a new learning process of the society's meetings.

The Methodists as a movement existed until around 1749. At that point, with the introduction by John Bennet of the Circuit Meeting in Todmorden, the movement became an organisation proper. Wesley added no further layers of structure into the Methodist system, and from that point, he worked on a clearly defined system: conference; circuit; society; class; band; select bands (perfect and penitents). I have not included the select societies into this structure for two reasons. First, they were clearly people taken 'from' Methodist life to act as advisors to Wesley personally. Secondly, there is no evidence that these

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<sup>15</sup> See p. 120. The Unitary Society in St Ives became Methodist in 1743

<sup>16</sup> An example of a differing pattern was found by Samuel Bradburn in Wales. In the societies to which he was appointed, there were no classes, and he began divisions, later named classes. See S. Bradburn, *A Memorandum Book*, Vol. I, September 1775. MA 1977/296.

<sup>17</sup> T. Olivers, 'The Life of Thomas Olivers', in *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. II, p. 82. See also p. 85.



actually functioned beyond Wesley's earliest references to them. I would propose that from 1744 the Conference fulfilled this advisory role.

Into this defined organisation, the people called Methodist fitted as their abilities and promotion gave rise; band leaders, class leaders, society leaders and stewards, local preachers, and assistants, all came to recognise their role within a given structure. Movement through the elements of the organisation can be called promotion, and with promotion and ensuing responsibility came a desire, as Weber argued, for the organisation to survive to maintain their place. Once the Methodists began supporting assistants on stipends, however small,<sup>18</sup> then routinisation was taking hold. Wesley was the charismatic leader, but he was rarely present in circuits and societies. Local leadership therefore took the initiative to maintain Methodism as an organisation. It is here I would argue that Hempton's definition of Wesley's spirituality fails. A vortex cannot settle, yet that is what happened with the Methodist organisation. It is accurate to replace *vortex* with *quadrilateral* at this point, since an organised and settled Methodism required a set form of spirituality that each Methodist could access, accept and develop through.

Until a settled pattern emerged and was imposed across the Connexion, a vortex was indeed a helpful descriptor. The earliest Methodists found themselves subjected to verbal, printed and physical abuse. The earliest Methodists relied upon highly charged experiential moments of awakening and conversion. The first Methodists, who came from a variety of backgrounds needed a place in which to assimilate; the class was that place. Later Methodists joined for different reasons.

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<sup>18</sup> See J. Crowther, *A True and Complete Portraiture of Methodism*, pp. 253-254.

The quadrilateral model aptly fits later 'secondary' Methodists. These received the Methodist system from a well organised and regulated organisation. Through publications, Wesley's occasional personal visits, and the power of the assistants, the spirituality which Wesley held personally was handed to the people as a given scheme. For these Methodists, the quadrilateral model is a helpful descriptor, primarily because they saw the relationship between Scripture, tradition, reason and experience, not as a fast swirling pool of moving spirituality, but as a body of belief handed from a previous generation, or discovered through the preacher's sermons, Wesley's writings, or the intimacy of the class.

The hymns of Charles Wesley provided a backdrop against which Methodists could reference their lives. Hymnody gave a means of expressing hopes, expectations and experiences in a communal manner. Equally however, these same hymns, set within the context of Scripture, or based upon a desired experience, became integral to the Wesleyan manner of spirituality. Whether sung lustily, or read privately, the hymns published in various forms from 1739 gave to the Wesleys' followers a way of assimilating their spirituality in a common form. Undoubtedly a vital element to the success of the Wesleyan movement, they equally stood as a way in which the quadrilateral of faith could be learned. The hymns expressed what was believed, from awakening to sanctification, and modelled the journey from one to the other. As a settled organisation emerged from the early years of a tumultuous movement, hymnody provided a way in which, perhaps more than any other Wesleyan teaching method, spirituality could be assimilated as a schema of belief.

The thesis has discussed emerging spirituality over a period of more than two hundred years. Beginning with the Puritans who returned to England after Mary

Tudor's death, and discussing the emergence of piety in Europe, I have shown how Wesley drew upon a variety of religious affections, and assimilated those he found acceptable into his own body of belief. Within that period, each strand of religious belief came to be routinised, in that each became recognisable as a system of belief to which an individual could be held. Methodism was no different. Whilst each strand of belief represented a new mode from that which existed previously, no new strand entirely replaced that which had preceded it.

In the Evangelical Revival, Methodism was one single strand, albeit the most carefully organised and highly regulated. Therefore, the routinisation that occurred within Methodism could be identified in other strands, with which this thesis is not concerned. Notably, routinisation affected the class meeting most severely. As Wesley's Methodists organised, leaders began to emerge from the class who saw their future within the organisation, and in time their control over the local societies and circuits grew. Wesley became a figurehead, rather than the controlling charismatic leader of the earliest period.

As I evidenced in chapter six, the membership reacted to routinisation by non attendance at class meetings and drawing away from the openness required of them week by week. The elective affinity originally given to the class, through manner, dress, language and behaviour, was not maintained as affinity occurred within the life of the society, the larger, less demanding meeting. The centrality of the class therefore declined.

In a similar vein, totemism added to the class's decline. As Wesley became more distant from the Methodist people, yet held the importance of meeting in a class, especially in his letters and publications aimed at leaders rather than



members, the class took on an iconic status, helped by Wesley's spiritual language addressed to the foundation of the class, not least that it was a 'prudential' means of grace.

As was shown in the article about Kim Il Sung,<sup>19</sup> the process of totemism is occurring in part because the leadership are willing to afford him such status, and in part because the people themselves are willing to accept that this status is being placed upon Kim Il Sung. Similarly, the leadership of Methodism accepted that Wesley held a high regard for the class, and therefore undertook their part in maintaining the class in a system which had outgrown it. Unlike the acceptance of the totemic status of Kim Il Sung by the North Korean people, the Methodist people expressed their lack of interest in the class by not attending, or by coming to faith through other mediums in Methodism, notably the prayer meeting.

Within the discussion of totemism in chapter seven, I noted that as the class meeting was used as the only means of entry into the society, it had to survive, even as a shell of its original purpose, to fulfil that function. As an ideal, made known to the people through Wesley's publications, the totemic class was the ideal place to be awakened, converted and disciplined and created a model through which affective religion could be discovered.

The discussion of homogeneity within chapter seven, addressed the 'them and us' syndrome that an homogenous unit (the class meeting) required for a level of success. Once Methodism settled, the emphasis of the homogenous unit moved from the experiential class to the routine society. The class meeting

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<sup>19</sup> See p. 278.

required a specific mode of entry; the society required only an acceptance of broad Methodist values.

Finally, in chapter eight, I evidenced the manner in which the class was wholly operational for only one generation; those who joined whilst Methodism was under attack, or those who desired to change their life and lifestyle. The use of Troeltsch's and Kent's terminology assisted the description of the process in which later generations moved away from a mystical understanding of faith and life, expressed in the experiential class meeting, to a sect-like settled understanding of faith and life in which being a Methodist was not to be derided, but a welcomed and accepted model of religious life, even though outside the state religion.

The earliest Methodists entered into a mystical or primary religious view of the world through the Methodist movement. Mysticism featured in Wesley's reasoning for leaving England for Georgia in 1735, and was the teaching he would abandon because of the lack of 'concrete' faith it offered. The Methodists of the 1740's onwards discovered a mystical 'world of ideas' within the class meeting, offering the possibility of an immediate experience of God in the here and now. For them mysticism was tempered by adherence to the means of grace, and by continuing to reside within the communities from which they had come; unlike Wesley, who had more or less fled England and all that was secure.

Later Methodist men and women sought the secondary or sect-like experience of religious life, offering an established routine of religious life, within a culture that was no longer as distrustful of the Methodists. The matured lifestyle of the people, exemplified by Ruth's account of the decline of the American Methodist

lovefeast, accounted for the loss of interest of later generations in the full meaning of class, a meaning that could be read about, sung of, and testified to through Wesley's constant publications and his leaders' regular exhortations, but which no longer spoke personally to the people called Methodists who were finding their way to God.

The place of Methodism in the Evangelical Revival is unparalleled, even though the emergence of Methodism within it was one new model of religious experience among many. This new model or discontinuity was not recognised as such by Wesley or his brother. Both considered themselves constant priests in the Church of England, and they demanded their members gave allegiance to the same Mother Church. However Wesley drew into his own system of belief more elements of other religious strands or traditions than any other leader. Other traditions were plundered by Wesley and assimilated into his own schema, under the overarching umbrella of Anglican allegiance within Methodism.

In time, Methodism experienced settlement and regulation and became a recognised and organised branch of the Evangelical Revival that it had broken into with such vigour in 1740. Just as Wesley drew from established schemas of belief, so his own schema matured and Methodism added to the fullness of the body of English belief, giving a name to a particular strand. Methodist became as recognisable as Pietist, Puritan, Moravian or Anglican.

The class meeting became a casualty of the maturation of the movement into an organisation because it was the single group to which everyone belonged, and it was the single group that demanded a particular form of religious experience to work. The band and sub sets of the band, required members to



actively seek holiness, and it is true they also declined and failed,<sup>20</sup> but there was never a requirement for any Methodist to belong; just a hope on Wesley's part that some would persevere towards perfection. The class's importance as a prudential means of grace gave it a place that was hard to dislodge. With the earliest Methodist people, there undoubtedly was a prudential element to the meeting; for God's prevenient grace had drawn together a disparate group into one body.

Later Methodists, who entered a routinised, idealised and totemised class became 'second generation' Methodists, who could not understand why such value was placed upon a meeting in which secrecy was paramount, and the verbal expression of temptation and sin, with the resultant chiding or praise was required.

In all, the decline of the class from crown to cross was, as I have argued through this thesis, inexorable and inevitable. Expressed in the context of 'vortex' and 'quadrilateral' in this conclusion, I have shown how the Methodists matured in spite of Wesley's inability to change as his people's circumstances changed – giving rise in part to the constant stream of correspondence and publications urging class observance. The question remains however: would Methodism have experienced success in its earliest 'primary' period if the class meeting had not become the portal into the movement? I assert that it would not.

The class meeting offered a small, highly affective, experiential group meeting, in which each individual was wholly included, for each person's experience

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<sup>20</sup> See 'Advice to Preachers', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*. Volume 4 (eds. R.E. Davies, A.R. George, & G. Rupp; London: Epworth Press. 1988) p. 214. In 1786 Wesley exhorted the assistants to re-establish the bands and select societies

spoke to another's. This 'prudential means' offered a place for the inarticulate and illiterate as much as the rising artisan classes, who were otherwise excluded from Anglican religious observance, or members of Dissenting groups. Personal experience which could not be found in Dissent or the Church of England could be spoken of and heard about in class, giving to each newly awakened searching individual not just the possibility, but the promise of the same awareness of faith.

Hempton once more assists in this conclusion. Writing on the centrality of Scriptural holiness, he draws out the importance for the Methodists of self determination in faith,

What is distinctive about Methodist Spirituality, however, is its remorseless emphasis on scriptural holiness and on the need for human beings to take control of their spiritual destinies, not as passive respondents to the iron will of God, but as active agents in "working out our own salvation" or what one scholar has aptly called "responsible grace."<sup>21</sup>

This self determinism, drawn by Hempton from the journey of Scriptural holiness, was the crown of the class meeting; that each member was responsible for their personal development. Equally it describes the class's decline; that later Methodists sought their self determination within the less rigorous society meeting. The Methodists of the secondary period did not see their life as any less dedicated to Scriptural Holiness, but the context in which that was worked out was in a more public arena.

The class meeting was the crown of the first Methodists' experiential lives; it became the cross of the later Methodists' settled, regulated and socially acceptable lives. The class was a reminder to those outside Methodism of its

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<sup>21</sup> D. Hempton, *Methodism Empire of the Spirit*, p. 58. Randy Maddox used the term 'responsible grace'. See R.L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace. John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books. 1994)

earlier, more separatist period, when the mystical life was present for those who joined. It was also a reminder, for Wesley particularly, of a period that might be described as a 'golden age', when immediate access to God was discovered by a mainly un-churched population in the context of a small prudentially ordained group. Whilst for the general population in the later period, the decline of the class made Methodism less difficult to enter, and more acceptable to join, for Wesley it removed, or dulled the primary reason for entering Methodism, a desire to flee from the wrath to come.

The class did not convert the millions that Henderson asserted in the introduction. It did however give to the movement an initial impetus that no other grouping had: a welcoming and peer-based meeting that offered and delivered access to an experience of God's grace, leading to conversion, and embarking upon the path towards perfection in Christ. When the class declined, the single most effective evangelistic tool available to the Methodists was lost forever. In the process of organisation and with the generational gap between the foundation of the movement and the present widening, only Wesley's insistence on the efficacy of the class continued to maintain its place as the entry point for the Methodist people.

The class meeting was the crown of the movement, and the cross of the organisation that was Methodism in the eighteenth century. This thesis set out to illustrate how the class altered within a set period of time, and how the people who accessed the class altered their understanding of its purpose. Through it I have shown how the inheritance of John Wesley, brought into a schema of spirituality in Methodism could be accessed most meaningfully in the class meeting. I have indicated how that spirituality offered the first generation of Methodists a radical model of Christian faith different to any other, especially



through established Anglicanism, and how that model became unpopular as Methodists ceased to want to share in such an experiential manner of Christian formation, preferring the Society, which offered a style of worship, which, whilst distinctive, was not entirely dissimilar to Anglicanism, or Dissent.

Here then was the rise and decline of the class meeting taking place in the forty nine years before Wesley's death. With the class's functional demise, Methodism embarked on a path that led to its acceptance within the mainstream of English religious life. The class remained in name, and in reality continued to be the nominal entrance into the Society into the late nineteenth century, but no attempt to reinvigorate the class would succeed. In 1865, correspondence on the issue of class attendance as a condition of membership compared English and American models of society: admission, with the English Methodists continuing to insist on class observance. One correspondent, 'A Liberal' gave voice to the reality that would shortly occur;

I believe that Methodism would gain both in spirituality and in power, were meeting in a Class allowed to become voluntary instead of compulsory, that I am inclined to think our American brethren are ahead of us in this matter, and that we might take a leaf out of their book with advantage to ourselves.<sup>22</sup>

The author could not have known that within a few short years the attachment of membership to class attendance would be irrevocably severed; however, the reality was that the membership had chosen to distance themselves from the class meeting a century before the leadership assented to the actuality.

(90,722 words)

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<sup>22</sup> See 'The Class Meeting in Decline', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. 4, p. 531.

**Abbreviations****Abbreviations used in this thesis for published series of volumes:**

<i>Arminian Magazine</i>	<i>The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption. 1778, 1779, 1780, 1781, 1782.</i>
<i>Journal [SE]</i>	J. Wesley, <i>The Journal of the Rev John Wesley A.M</i> (8 volumes) (ed. N. Curnock; London: Epworth Press. 1938)
<i>Works [BE]</i>	J. Wesley, <i>The Works of John Wesley, The Bicentennial Edition.</i> (ed. F. Baker; Oxford and Nashville. 1976 – 2003)
<i>Journal</i>	C. Wesley, <i>The Journal of the Rev Charles Wesley MA</i> , (two volumes) (ed. T. Jackson; Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press. 1980)
<i>Preachers</i>	T. Jackson, (editor), <i>The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers Chiefly Written by Themselves</i> , (six volumes), (London: Wesleyan Conference Office. 1872)
<i>Letters [SE]</i>	J. Wesley, <i>The Letters of the Rev John Wesley AM</i> (ten volumes) (ed. J. Telford; London: Epworth Press. 1931)

**Abbreviations used in this thesis for Journal series:**

JEH	<i>The Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i> (1987)
<i>Proceedings</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society</i> (1896 - 2005)

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**Appendix 1****The Rules of Anthony Horneck's Savoy Society<sup>1</sup>**

- 1 All that enter into such a Society shall resolve upon a holy and serious life.
- 2 No person shall be admitted into the Society until he has arrived at the age of sixteen, and has been first confirmed by the bishop, and solemnly taken upon himself his baptismal vow.
- 3 They shall choose a minister of the Church of England to direct them.
- 4 They shall not be allowed, in their meetings, to discourse of any controverted point of divinity.
- 5 Neither shall they discourse of the government of Church or State.
- 6 In their meetings they shall use no prayers but those of the Church, such as the Litany and Collects, and other prescribed prayers; but still they shall not use any that peculiarly belong to the minister, as the absolution.
- 7 The minister, whom they choose, shall direct what practical divinity shall be read at these meetings.
- 8 They may have liberty, after prayer and reading, to sing a psalm.
- 9 After all is done, if there be any time left, they may discourse each other about their spiritual concerns; but this shall not be a standing exercise which any shall be obliged to attend unto.
- 10 One day in the week shall be appointed for this meeting, for such as cannot come on the Lord's day; and he that absents himself without cause shall pay three-pence to the box.
- 11 Every time they meet, every one shall give six-pence to the box.

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<sup>1</sup> From: F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies 1520-1799*

12 On a certain day in the year, viz. Whit-Tuesday, two stewards shall be chosen, and a moderate dinner provided, and a sermon preached; and the money distributed (necessary charges deducted) to the poor.

13 A book shall be bought, in which these orders shall be written.

14 None shall be admitted into this Society, without the consent of the minister who presides over it; and no apprentice shall be capable of being chosen.

15 If a case of conscience shall arise, it shall be brought before the minister.

16 If any member think fit to leave the Society, he shall pay five shillings to the stock.

17 The major part of the Society shall conclude the rest.

18 The following rules are more especially recommended, to the members of the Society, viz. To love one another. When reviled, not to revile again. To speak evil of no man. To wrong no man. To pray, if possible, seven times a day. To keep close to the Church of England. To transact all things peaceably and gently. To be helpful to each other. To use themselves to holy thoughts in their coming in and going out. To examine themselves every night. To give every one their due. To obey superiors, both spiritual and temporal.

Appendix 2The Poplar Regulations<sup>2</sup>

1. That the sole design of this Society being to promote real holiness of heart and life: it is absolutely necessary that the persons, who enter into it, do seriously resolve, by the grace of God, to apply themselves in good earnest to all means proper to make them wise unto salvation. (1 Pet. i.15; Josh xxiv.15; 2 Tim. iii.15)
2. That in order to their being of one heart in this design, every member of this Society shall own and manifest himself to be of the Church of England, and frequent the liturgy, and other public holy exercises of the same. And that they be careful withal to express due Christian charity, candour and moderation towards all such Dissenters as are of good conversation. (Rom. xv.5, 6: Phil. ii.2: 1 Pet. ii.13; Eph. iv.2; Rom xii.18)
3. That the members of this Society shall meet together one evening in the week at a convenient place, in order to encourage each other in practical holiness, by discoursing on spiritual subjects, and read God's holy word, and to pray to Almighty God, and praise Name together. And to this assembly any serious person may be admitted upon request. (1 Thess. v.14; Rom. xiv.19; psalm xxxiv.3)
4. That at such meetings there be no hot disputes about controversial points, State affairs, or the concerns of trade, and worldly things; but that the whole bent of the discourse be to glorify God, and edify one another in love. (Rom xv.6; Eph iv.16)
5. That it be left to every person's discretion to contribute at every weekly meeting, what he thinks fit towards a public stock for pious and charitable uses;

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<sup>2</sup> Reproduced from F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary Religious Societies 1520-1799* pp. 140-142.



and the money thus collected shall be kept by the two stewards to the Society, who shall be chosen by majority of votes once a years, or oftener, to be disposed of by the consent of the major part of the Society, for the uses above-mentioned. And the said stewards shall keep a faithful register of what is thus collected and distributed, to be perused by any member of the Society, at his request. (1 Cor. xvi.2)

6. That any respective member may recommend any object of charity to the stewards, who shall (with the consent of the rest) give out of the common stock, according as the occasion requires. And in a case of extraordinary necessity, every particular person shall be desired to contribute farther, as he thinks fit.

7. That every one who absents himself four meetings together (without giving a satisfactory account to the stewards) shall be looked upon as disaffected to the Society.

8. That none shall be admitted into this Society, without giving due notice thereof to the stewards, who shall acquaint the whole Society therewith. And after due enquiring into their religious purposes and manner of life, the stewards may admit them if the major part of the Society allows it, and not otherwise. And with the like joint consent, they may exclude and member proved guilty of any mis-behaviour, after due admonition, unless he gives sufficient testimony of his repentance and amendment, before the whole Society.

9. It is hereby recommended to every person concerned in this Society, to consider the many inconveniences (and many times sins), which attend ale-house-games, and wholly decline them. And to shun all unnecessary resort to such houses and taverns, and wholly to avoid lewd play-houses. (Gal, v.13; 1 Thess. v.22)

10. That whereas the following duties have been too much neglected to the scandal and reproach of our holy religion, they do resolve, by the grace of God, to make it their serious endeavour,

To be just in all their dealing, even to exemplary strictness. (1 Thess. iv.6)

To pray many times every day: remembering our continual dependence upon God, both for spiritual and temporal things. (1 Thess. v.7)

To partake of the Lord's Supper at least once a month, if not prevented by a reasonable impediment. (1 Cor. xi.26; Luke xxii.19)

To practise the profoundest meekness and humility. (Matth. xi.29)

To watch against censuring others. (Matth. vii.1)

To accustom themselves to holy thoughts in all places. (Psalm cxxxix.23)

To be helpful to one another. (1 Cor. xii.25)

To exercise tenderness, patience, and compassion towards all men. (Tit. iii.2)

To make reflections on themselves when they read the Holy Bible, or other good books, and when they hear sermons. (1 Cor. x.11)

To shun all foreseen occasions of evil: as evil company, known temptations, etc. (1 Thess. v.22)

To think often on the different estates of the glorified and the damned, in the unchangeable eternity, to which we are hastening. (Luke xvi.25)

To examine themselves every night, what good or evil they have done in the day past. (2 Cor. xiii.5)

To keep a private fast once a month (especially near their approaching the Lord's table), if at their own disposal; or to fast from some meals when they may conveniently. (Matt. vi.16; Luke v.35)

To mortify the flesh, with its affections and lusts. (Gal. V. 19, 24)

To advance in heavenly-mindedness and in all grace. (1 Pet. iii.8)

To shun spiritual pride, and the effects of it; as railing, anger peevishness, and impatience of contradiction, and the like.

To pray for the whole Society in their private prayers. (James v.16)

To read pious books often for their edification, but especially the Holy Bible (John v. 39); and herein particularly, Matt. v, vi, vii,; Luke xv, xvi; Rom. xii, xiii; Eph. v, vi; 1 Thess. v; Rev. i, ii, iii, xxi, xxii. And in the Old Testament, Levit. Xxvi; Deut. Xxviii; Is. Liii; Ezek.xxxvi.

To be continually mindful of the great obligation of this special profession of religion; and to walk so circumspectly, that none may be offended or discouraged from it by what they see in them; nor occasion given to any to speak reproachfully of it.

To shun all manner of affectation and moroseness, and be of a civil and obliging deportment to all men.

11. That they often consider (with an awful dread of God's wrath) the sad height to which the sins of many are advanced in this our nation; and the bleeding divisions thereof in Church and State. And that every member be ready to do what, upon consulting with each other, shall be thought advisable, towards the punishment of public profaneness, according to the good laws of our land, required to be put in execution by the King's and the late Queen's special order. And to do what befits them in their stations, in order to the cementing of our divisions. (Mal. iii. 16; Judg. v. 15; Deut. xiii. 8; Levit.xxiv. 11)

12. That each member shall encourage the catechising of young and ignorant people in their respective families, according to their stations and abilities: and shall observe all manner of religious family-duties. (Deut. vi. 7; Josh. Xxiv. 15)

13. That the major part of the Society shall have power to make a new order to bind the whole, when need requires; if it be approved by three pious and learned ministers of the Church of England, nominated by the whole Society.

14. That these orders shall be read over at least four times in the year, by one of the Stewards; and that with such deliberation, that each member may have time to examine himself by them, or to speak his mind in anything relating to them.

15. lastly, that every member of this Society shall (after mature deliberation and due trial), express his approbation of these orders, and his resolution to endeavour to live up to them. In order to which, he shall constantly keep a copy of them by him.

The end of the Orders



**Appendix 3****Samuel Wesley's Rule for the Epworth Society<sup>3</sup>**

This Society first met on the 1<sup>st</sup> February 1701 – 1702

I Every week at set hours, when 2 or 3, or more do meet together for this intent, First to pray to God; Secondly to read the Holy Scriptures, and discourse upon Religious Matters for their mutual Edification; and Thirdly, to deliberate about the Edification of our neighbour, and the promoting it.

II Those that do thus meet together, are above all things solicitous about the Salvation of their neighbour, yea they make it their business to be Christians not only in name but in deed: least they should strive rashly to pull out the Mote from the Eyes of others, not observing the Beam in their own; and lest while they preach to others themselves should become castaways.

III For this reason they do not admit every body promiscuously, but if any one desires to be of their Society, it must be done by the consent of all; and therefore his piety ought to be known to all, lest a little leaven should spoil the whole lump, For they take it for Granted that things will then fall out well, when each of them shall be of that mind, as that it may be affirm'd upon good Grounds that This is Emmanuel that dwells through Faith, of the power of God, in the Heart of every One, as in his Temple.

IIII Nor do they allow that the number of their members should encrease too much, lest this Religious design should fall with its own weight, or at least be marr'd. Therefore when they have twelve Members they admitt no more. But if God shall stir up more, two shall desire the same Edification with them, they seperate two members from them, to form a new Society with those that desire

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<sup>3</sup> W.O.B. Allen, & E. McClure, *Two Hundred Years: The History of The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1698-1898* (London: S.P.C.K., 1898) pp. 89-93. See also D.L. Watson, *The early Methodist Class Meeting* (Nashville, Discipleship Resources. 1985) pp. 194-196.

it, till that also grow's up to the number of Twelve, and so another new Society be form'd out of it.

V A Society or two now being set up; they think it may be practicable to take such in persons only, in whom there may be hopes, that by such a pious Conversation, they may be brought to a real and serious denying of the World, yet not to admit above 2 or 3 at the most of such Members, of whose solid piety they are not yet sufficiently apprised lest by any unwary Charity towards all it may happen by degrees, that Darkness might begin to get ground.

VI But if they of whose Conversion to God there may be hopes, shall not blush to devote themselves to Vice and Wickedness and thereby become a scandal to their neighbour: they are no longer look'd as a part of the Society lest those who are sincere should be drawn to partake either of the Vice or of the Scandal.

VII All Debates about the Corruption of Manners which have crept into the Church, of Amending or Reforming the Church point of Manners, is refer'd to the first Society. The other Societies are contented with their own Edification and if any one knows what will tend to the publick Edification, he discover's it to the first Society, that so it may be consider'd by all the Members thereof, how it does conduce towards the common design, and may be reduced into practice.

VIII But this first Society does in no wise assume any prerogative to itself: but the Debating about the publick Edification is for this reason; least one Society should hinder another, and because all are not fitt to be Counsellors. Hence it is that this Society is obliged to be carefull to take in such Members alone, as are able to help the Church by their wisdom and good advices.

VIII They do not take in any Women into these Societies, in order to avoid scandal and all other abuses the more easily, to which promiscuous meeting cannot be but liable. Women may hear their Husbands at Home, and Girls their parents: for tis a duty incumbent upon every Member of these Societies, next to his own soul to be chiefly solicitous for those of his Family. And if there be any

one who is a Master of a Family, yet by his grace Conversation he may be very beneficial to those amongst whom he lives, tis very necessary that by living Examples men may see what a true Christian is, who still is very hard to meet with.

X they carry on a subscription in every Society, towards which every Member contributes each Meeting, according to his Charity and ability. The money so collected is to be expended no other way than in promoting the designs of the Societies, or for reforming the Church.

XI Their first care is to set Schools for the Poor, wherein Children (or if need be, Adult Persons,) may be instructed in the Fundamentals of Christianity by en of known and approv'd Piety.

XII Their second design is to procure little Practical Treatises from Holland, England, and Germany, &c. to translate them into the Vulgar Tounge, print them, and so to give or lend them to those who are less solicitous of their own and others Edification.

XIII The Third is to establish a Correspondence with such Societies in England, Germany, &c. that so they may mutually Edify one another: especially since they have learn'd that by keeping up a Correspondence, as they gain knowledge and experience in Edifying the whole Church: so their wholesome advices will thereby be forwarded and the better reduced to practise.

XIII The Fourth is to take Care of the Sick and other Poor, and to afford them Spiritual as well as Corporal Helps. When their Stock is sufficiently large to carry on these pious Designs, they deliberate of some other proper method of disposing of that which remains. The means will not fail to be present, if all things shall be done of God, in God and thro' God.

**Appendix 4****The Rules of the Rev Samuel Walker's Truro Society<sup>4</sup>**

The design is threefold-to glorify God-to quicken and confirm ourselves in faith and holiness-and to render us more useful among our neighbours.

First. As a Society, we shall be better able to glorify God; for hereby we shall bear a more public and convincing testimony to the cause of Christ, and make a more avowed profession of his name and gospel in these evil days, than we could do when separate. Every one of you desires that his kingdom may be further enlarged, and better established than it is, which, by joining your hands together to promote so desirable an end, will be most effectually brought about.

Take then these cautions for this purpose.

Let each look upon himself as associated with others, to promote the honour of their common master.

Never therefore be ashamed of him, or his doctrines, or your fellow Christians in this Society.

Demean yourselves, every one, as his disciples, by walking in all humility, meekness, heavenly mindedness, and charity, after his blessed example.

Keep yourselves heedfully fro all things that may disgrace your profession, or this Society-such as pride, in a conceit of your own knowledge and attainments, or that you are admitted members of this Society-valuing yourselves on any distinction of place or circumstances, sinking into a worldly frame, or declining into sloth and idleness, practising at least dishonesty, or conniving at it in others; making sinful compliances to avoid shame, or promote your temporal

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<sup>4</sup> Reproduced from F.W.B. Bullock, *Voluntary religious Societies 1520 – 1799* pp. 206-209.



interests, falling into luke-warmness, and losing your first love, and absenting yourselves from, or slighting public ordinances.

Often, especially before or after temptations to any of these, reflect that you belong to a Religious Society, instituted to promote the honour of Christ.

Secondly. The second design of this Society is to quicken, comfort and build up yourselves, and one another in your holy faith. By this means, we shall be better able to maintain the war against our enemies, who are all united against us, and to grow in grace; as we may hope, by this association, we shall have the Spirit to assist and strengthen us; we shall have the benefit of mutual advice, and reproof; shall be more hardy in opposing temptations besetting us from a wicked world: shall walk under a peculiarly happy restraint, from the observation and eyes of our brethren upon us, and be assisted by the mutual prayers of each for the rest. To this end,

Watch over one another in love.

Be willing to hear of your faults, and thankful for reproof.

Watch against any disgust against any of your brethren, and if any arise, without delay tell the party, and if that fail, the director.

Desire the prayers of one another, and pray for one another.

Be sure not to rest on being members of this Society, as if that could be your security either from falling here, or for heaven hereafter.

Guard against the least decay in your love for Christ, zeal for his honour, and love to souls.

Preserve continually in your mind, your obligations to these things, from your relation to us as members of this Society.

Thirdly. The third design of this Society is to promote our usefulness among our neighbours. Hereby we make ourselves more discernable. People cannot so

easily be quiet in their sins, when they see United Societies testifying against them by their practice. Good examples are naturally more prevalent than reproof or advice, especially if the first be wanting. To this end,

Be careful to set such examples to all about you.

Think not to gain any by sinful compliances.

Discountenance all things which may be snares to your neighbours, such as public-houses, gaming, and many diversions and sports, which are not convenient nor of good report.

Shew all love to men's souls, and enforce that by a care of their bodies.

Avoid all quarrels and disputes, which usually begin in pride or impatience, and end in anger, malice, and revenge.

Do not be angry with those who blame this Society. If they point out anything wrong, reform it; if not, meekly and silently bear with them.

Despise none in your hearts, because not members with you.

Shew no valuing of yourselves because you are.

Let the following motives encourage you to observe the rules:

Real disciples must do more than nominal professors.

The Spirit is promised to comfort and assist those who walk by these rules.

You will have peace and satisfaction in your own consciences.

You are engaged in the most honourable service.

You will hereby promote the best of interests, and honour the best of masters.

He will acknowledge you as his servants, and reward your labours and perseverance, in the day of his appearing.

The Orders for the Religious Societies at Truro, under the direction of the Rev Mr. S.W. – Instituted February, 1754, read as follows: -

In the single men's Society, no woman to be admitted.

In the married men's, their wives and other women, but no single men.

That the sole design of this Society, is to promote real holiness in the heart and life of all who belong to it, in a dependence upon the Divine Power, and the conduct of the Holy Spirit, through our Lord Jesus Christ, to advance and perfect all good in us.

That in order to our being of one heart, and one mind, and to prevent whatever may engender strife as well as to remove all occasion of offence being taken against us, no person be admitted a member of this Society, or be allowed to continue such, who is a member of any other religious meeting, or follows any other preaching than that of the established ministry in this town. That none be admitted members, but such as are inhabitants here and communicants, and that no person at any time be introduced, but at the request of the director.

That the members of this Society do meet together at a convenient place, one evening in every week, and that they go home at nine o'clock.

That every member endeavour to give constant attendance, and be present at the hour of meeting precisely, and that whoever absents himself four meetings together, without giving satisfactory reason to the Society, shall be looked upon as disaffected to it.

That to prevent confusion, no person be removed from the Society but by the director, who shall be present on such occasion, and that any person do apply to him in cases where he judges such removal needful; and that a disorderly carriage, or a proud contentious, disputing temper (the greatest bane to Christian love and peace) be sufficient ground for such complaint and removal.

N.B. By a disorderly carriage, we mean not only the commission of gross and scandalous sins, but also what are esteemed matters of little moment in the eyes of the world, such as light use of the words, Lord, God, Jesus etc. in ordinary conversation, which we cannot but interpret as an evidence of the want of God's presence in the heart. The buying and selling of goods which have not

paid custom. The doing of needless work on the Lord's day. The frequenting ale-houses or taverns without necessary business.

And considering the said consequences of vain amusements so generally practised, we do in charity to the souls of others, as well as to avoid the danger of such things to ourselves, think ourselves obliged to use particular caution, with respect to many of them, however innocent they may be, or are esteemed, to be in themselves; such as cards, dancing, clubs for entertainment, play-houses, sports at festivals and parish feasts, and as much as may be parish feasts themselves; lest by joining therein, we are a hindrance to ourselves and others. And that no person may remove from one place or Society to another, without the consent of the director.

That with the concurrence of the director, the major part of the Society may have power to make new orders, when need shall require it, but that the proposal for this purpose be made by the director, and that any member may consult him about it before the day of the meeting.

That every member do esteem himself peculiarly obliged to live in an inoffensive and orderly manner, to the glory of God and the edification of his neighbours; that he study to advance himself and others, humility and meekness, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, love to God, gospel repentance, and new obedience, in which things Christian edification consists, and not in vain janglings. And that in all his conversation and articles of his faith, he stick close to the plain and obvious sense of Holy Scripture, carefully avoiding all intricate niceties and refinements upon it.

That these orders shall be read over at least four times a year by the director, and that with such deliberation, that each member may have time to examine his own conduct by them.





6 That every member will labour to give constant attendance and to be present at the House of Meeting precisely and that whoever absents himself four nights successively without giving a satisfactory account to the Deputy which shall by him be communicated to the Society shall be looked upon as disaffected the Society.

7 That to prevent confusion no person be removed from this Society but by the Director, who if possible shall be present upon such occasions and that any member do beforehand apply to the Director if he judge such removal needful – shall a disorderly carriage, a proud contentious and disputing temper (the greatest adversary of Christian love and peace) be sufficient grounds for such complaints and removal and that no person may remove from one society to another without the Director's consent.

8 That with the consent of the director the major part of the Society have power to make a new order when need requires but thatg the Proposal for this purpose be made by the Director or someone deputed by him and that any person may consult him thereon before the day of meeting.

9 That every member do consider himself as peculiarly obliged to live in an inoffensive and orderly manner to the glory of God and the edifying of his neighbours that he study to advance in himself and others humility, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, love to God, Gospel repentance and new obedience, wherein Christian edification doth consist; and in all plain and abvious sense to the Holy Scriptures carefully avoiding all niceties and refinements upon them.

10 That the orders shall be read over at least four times in the year by the Director or Deputy and that with such deliberation that each member may have time to examine himself by them

11 That the membership of this Society do meekly & humbly join together in the following exercises, the Director or in his absence the Deputy shall read the following sentences –

God is greatly to be feared &c

Then shall be said these three Collects all kneeling

Prevent us &c

O most blessed &c

O God for as much &c

Then all seating themselves shall be read a portion of Scripture with Mr. Ruskitts exposition appointed by the Director –

Then all kneeling down they shall joyn in the Confession of sin

O Almighty God &c

Our Father &c

After which the Director alone shall say

Almighty and everlasting God &c

O most holy & blessed God &c

Then all standing up a psalm shall be sung and a sermon read to be appointed by the Director, after which shall be read some suitable prayers he shall judge fit.

Then all standing up this Exhortation and Humility shall be read

My brethren since the great God &c

And a Psalm being sung the Reader shall say

It is very meet &c

All shall joyn

Therefore with angels &c

The Reader alone

May the Grace of God &C

Appendix 6 (Rules A)The Rules of the Fetter Lane Society<sup>6</sup>

“THE RULES and orders of a religious Society meeting AT PRESENT IN A ROOM in Fetter Lane. THE MEMBERS CONSISTING OF PERSONS IN COMMUNION WITH THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH, GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST ON EARTH PEACE GOOD WILL TOWARDS MEN. LITTLE CHILDREN LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER

May 1 1738

In obedience to the command of God by St James (5:16) and by the advice of Peter Boehler: (a It was agreed by John Bray, Brazier; Sheperd Wolf, Barber; John Edmonds, Poulterer; James Hutton, Bookseller; William Oxlee, Clogmaker; William Clarke, Barber; John Shaw (late) attorney & John Wesley, Clerk – All members of the Church of England

That they will meet together once a week, to confess their faults one to another, And pray for one another, that they may be healed.

That any others of whose sincerity they are well assured, may if they desire it, meet with them for that Purpose and May 29<sup>th</sup> it was agreed:

That the persons desirous to meet together for that Purpose, be divided into several bands or little societies.

That none of these consist of fewer than five or more than ten persons.

That some one person in each band be desired to interrogate the rest in order, who may be called the Leader of the Band.

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<sup>6</sup> W.M. Trousdale, ‘The Moravian Society. Fetter lane – London’, in *Proceedings*, Vol. XVII, part II, p. 30.



Tuesday Sept. 20

It was agreed

That John Bray, Shepherd Wolf, John Edmonds, James Hutton, William Oxlee, William Hervey, John Shaw, John Wesley, John Brown and the Leaders of the New Bands meet together at McBray's at 6½ every Wednesday evening. That each Leader then give an Account of the State of each Person in his Band. That a person and time then fixed, for doing what may then appear necessary; of which an account is to be given in the beginning of the Next Meeting. That in Particular a Person and time be then fixed, for settling and visiting female bands.

Monday Sept 26

It was agreed

That each of the Bands meet twice in a week; once on Monday Evenings, the Second time, when it is most convenient for each Band.

That every person come punctually at the hour appointed, without some extraordinary Reason.

That those that are present, begin exactly at that hour.

That every meeting be begun & ended with Singing and prayer.

That each Person in order speak as freely, plainly, and concisely as he can, the Real State of his Heart, with his several Temptations and Deliverances since the last time of meeting.

That all the Bands have a Conference at 8 every Wednesday evening, begun and ended with Singing and prayer.

That whosoever speaks in this Conference stand up, & that none else speak till he is sat down.

That nothing which is said in this Conference be by any means mentioned out of it.

That every Member of this Society who is a Member of any Other, prefer the Meeting with this & with his Particular Band, before the Meeting with any other Society or Company whatever.

That if any Person absent himself without some Extraordinary Reason, either from his Band or from any Meeting of the whole Society, he be first privately admonished, & if He absent again, be reprov'd before the whole Society.

That such women as have entered their names the Friday before, if there be no objection against them, may meet in the Society Room, every Wednesday from six to eight in the evening.

That no men be present except their Respective Husbands, & the Persons who pray and Expound the Scriptures.

That any who desire to be admitted into the Society be ask'd,

What are your reasons for desiring this?

Will you be entirely open?

Using no kind of Reserve, least of all in the case of Love or Courtship.

Will you strive against Desire of Ruling, of being first in your Company, of having your own way?

Have you any objections to any of our orders?

The orders may then be read to them.

That those who answer these Questions in the Affirmative, be proposed every Fourth Wednesday.

That everyone then present speak clearly and fully, whatever objection he has to any Person proposed to be a member.

That those against whom any Reasonable Objections appears, be acquainted with that Objection, & the admitting them upon Trial postponed, 'till that Objection is removed.

That those against whom no Reasonable Objection appears or remains, be in order for their trial, immediately formed into distinct Bands & some Person agreed on to assist them.

That if no New Objection then appears, they be after a month's Trial admitted into the Society.

That every fourth Saturday be observed as a Day of General Intercession, which may continue from 12 to 2, from 3 to 5 & from 6 to 8.

That on Sunday se'ennight following be a general lovefeast from 7 to 10 in the evening.

That a Collection be made towards a Common Stock, in each Band on Monday Evening, at 6 and 8 on Wednesday s, at 8 on Friday & on the General Thanksgiving Day.

That out of this be defrayed the expenses of the Lovefeasts, of Letters, & whatever else relates to the Society in General.

That in order to a Continual Intercession every Member of this Society chuse some Hour either of the day or night, to spend in Prayer chiefly for his Brethren.

That in order to a Continual Fast three of the Members of the Society fast every Day (as their health permits) Sundays and Holidays excepted, and spend as much as they can of that Day, in Retirement from Business & Prayer."

**Appendix 7 (Rules B)****The Rules of the Fetter Lane Society<sup>7</sup>**

“Orders of a religious Society meeting in Fetter Lane.

“In obedience to the command of God by St James, and by the advice of Peter Boehler, May 1, 1738, it was agreed,

That they will meet together once in a week, to confess their faults one to another, And pray for one Another, that they may be healed.

That any others, of whose Sincerity they are well assured, may, if they desire it, meet with them for that purpose. And May 29, it was agreed,

That the Persons desirous to meet together for that Purpose, be divided into several Bands or little Societies.

That none of these consist of fewer than five, or more than ten persons.

That some person in each Band be desired to interrogate the rest in order, who may be called the Leader of that Band.

And on Monday, September 26, it was agreed,

That each Band meet twice in a week; once on Monday Evenings, the second Time, when it is most convenient for each Band.

That every person come punctually at the hour appointed, without some extraordinary Reason.

That those that are present, begin exactly at the hours.

That every meeting be begun & ended with Singing and prayer.

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<sup>7</sup> D. Benham, *Memoirs of James Hutton* (London: Hamilton Adams & Co. 1856)



That every one in order speak as freely, plainly, and concisely as he can, the Real State of his Heart, with his several Temptations and Deliverances since the last time of meeting.

That all Bands have a Conference at eight every Wednesday evening, begun and ended with Singing and prayer.

That at nine of the Clock the names of the Members be called over, and the absenters set down.

That notice of any extraordinary Meeting be given on the Wednesday Night preceding such Meeting.

That exactly at ten, if the business of the Night be not finished, a short concluding prayer be used, that those may go who are in haste, but that all depart the Room by half an hour after ten.

That whosoever speaks in this Conference stand up, and that none else speak till he is set down

That nothing which is mentioned in this Conference, be by any means mentioned out of it.

That every Member of this Society, who is a Member of any other, prefer the Meeting with this, and with his Particular Band, before the Meeting with any other Society or Company whatsoever.

That if any Person absent himself without some Extraordinary Reason, either from his Band or from any Meeting of the whole Society, he be first privately admonished; and if He be absent again, reprov'd before the whole Society.

That any Person who desires, or designs to take any Journey, shall first, if possible, have the Approbation of the Bands.

That all our Members who are in Clubs, be desired to withdraw their names, as being Meetings nowise conducing to the Glory of God.

That any who desire to be admitted into this Society, be asked, What are your reasons for desiring this? Will you be entirely open using no kind of Reserve,

least of all in the case of Love or Courtship? Will you strive against Desire of ruling, of being first in your Company, or having your own way? Will you submit to be placed in what Band the Leaders shall choose for you? Have you any Objections to any of our orders? The orders may then be read to them.

That those who answer these Questions in the Affirmative, be proposed every Fourth Wednesday.

That everyone then present speak clearly and fully, whatever Objection he has to any Person proposed to be a member.

That those against whom any Reasonable Objection appears, be acquainted with that Objection, and the admitting them upon Trial postponed till that Objection is removed.

That those against whom no Reasonable Objection appears or remains, be, in order for their Trial, formed into distinct Bands & some Person agreed to assist them.

That if no new Objection then appear, they be, after two month's Trial admitted into the Society.

That every fourth Saturday be observed as a Day of General Intercession, which may continue from twelve to two, from three to five & from six to eight.

That on Sunday se'en-Night following be a general lovefeast from seven till ten in the evening.

That in order to a continual Intercession, every Member of this Society choose some Hour, either of the Day or Night, to spend in Prayer chiefly for his Brethren.

That in order to a continual Fast, three of the Members of the Society Fast every Day (as their health permits), Sundays and Holidays excepted, and spend as much as they can of that Day, in Retirement from Business, and Prayer.

That each Person give Notice to the Leader of his Band how much he is willing to subscribe towards the general Charge of the Bands, and that each person's Money be paid into the Leader of his Band once a Month at farthest.

That no particular Person be allowed to act in any Thing contrary to any Order of the Society, but that every One, without Distinction, submit to the Determination of his Brethren; and that if any Person or Persons do not after being thrice admonished, conform to the Society, they be not esteemed any longer as Members.

That any Person whom the whole Society shall approve, may be accounted a correspondent Member, and as such, may be admitted at our general Meetings, provided he correspond with the Society once in a Month at least."

**Appendix 8 (Rules C)****The Rules of the Fetter Lane Society<sup>8</sup>**

This evening our little society began, which afterwards met in Fetter Lane. Our fundamental rules were as follow:

In obedience to the command of God by St James, and by the advice of Peter Böhler, it is agreed by us,

That we will meet together once a week to 'confess our faults to one another, and pray for one another, that we may be healed.'

That the persons so meeting be divided into several bands, or little companies, none of them consisting of fewer than five or more than ten persons.

That every one in order speak as freely, plainly and concisely as he can, the real state of his heart, with his several temptations and deliverances, since the last time of meeting.

That all the bands have a conference at eight every Wednesday evening, begun and ended with singing and prayer.

That any who desire to be admitted into the society be asked, 'What are your reasons for desiring this? Will you be entirely open; using no kind of reserve? Have you any objection to any of our orders?' (which may then be read).

That when any new member is proposed, every one present speak clearly and freely whatever objection he has to him.

That those against whom no reasonable objection appears be, in order for their trial, formed into one or more distinct bands, and some person agreed on to assist him.

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<sup>8</sup> J. Wesley, *Works [BE]*, Vol. 18, pp. 236-237.



That after two months' trial, if no objection then appear, they may be admitted into the society.

That every fourth Saturday be observed as a day of general intercession.

That on the Saturday seven-night following be a general lovefeast, from seven till ten in the evening.

That no particular member be allowed to act in anything contrary to any order of the society; and that if any persons, after being thrice admonished, do not conform thereto, they be not any longer esteemed as members.

Appendix 9Religious Societies from John Wesley's *Diary*

## Minories

Sun 17<sup>th</sup> September 1738 5pm — preached, sang, prayed:

Sun 24<sup>th</sup> September 6pm

## Bear Yard

Tues 19<sup>th</sup> September 1738 7.30: 3<sup>rd</sup> October 8pm: Tue 24<sup>th</sup> October 8pm:

Tue 31<sup>st</sup> October 8.15pm: Tue 7<sup>th</sup> November 8pm

## Savoy

Thu 21<sup>st</sup> September 1738 7.45pm: Thu 28<sup>th</sup> September 8.30pm:

Thu 19<sup>th</sup> October 8pm: Thu 26<sup>th</sup> October 8pm: Thu 2<sup>nd</sup> November 8.15pm: Thu

21<sup>st</sup> December 8pm: Thu 28<sup>th</sup> December 8pm: Thu 4<sup>th</sup> January 1739 8pm: Thu

11<sup>th</sup> January 8pm: Thu 18<sup>th</sup> January 8pm: Thu 25<sup>th</sup> January 8pm:

Thu 1<sup>st</sup> February 8pm: Thu 8<sup>th</sup> February 8pm: Thu 22<sup>nd</sup> February 8.30pm:

Thu 22<sup>nd</sup> March 8pm: Thu 6<sup>th</sup> September 8pm: Thu 8<sup>th</sup> November 8pm

## Westminster

Fri 20<sup>th</sup> October 1738 7.30pm: Fri 12<sup>th</sup> January 1739 7.30pm

## St Anne's Lane

Fri 29<sup>th</sup> December 1738 8pm: 5<sup>th</sup> January 1739 7.45pm

## Blendon

Tue 24<sup>th</sup> October 1738 10am

## Wapping

Fri 27<sup>th</sup> October 1738: Fri 16<sup>th</sup> March 1739 6pm:

Fri 15<sup>th</sup> June (26 present [comforted]): Fri 6<sup>th</sup> June 1740 6.30pm:

Fri 20<sup>th</sup> June 6.30pm: Fri 18<sup>th</sup> June 6.30pm

## St Bride's

Sun 29<sup>th</sup> October 1738: 24<sup>th</sup> December 1738 5.30pm

## Southwark

Wed 1<sup>st</sup> November 1738 7pm: 15<sup>th</sup> December 7pm:

Sun 18<sup>th</sup> February 1739 5.15pm: 18<sup>th</sup> March 5pm:

3<sup>rd</sup> September 4.45pm (visited): 30<sup>th</sup> June 1740 5.45pm: Mon 14<sup>th</sup> July 7pm

## Gutter Lane

Thu 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1738 6pm

## Blackfriars

Thu 14<sup>th</sup> December 1738 8pm

## Goodman Fields

Fri 22<sup>nd</sup> December 11am

## Bloomsbury

Fri 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1738 12.15pm

## Deadman's Fields

1<sup>st</sup> January 1739 7.30pm

## Creed Church Society

(St Katherine Cree) 7<sup>th</sup> January 1739 5.15pm

## Beech Lane

13<sup>th</sup> January 1739 6pm: 17<sup>th</sup> February 6pm: Fri 23<sup>rd</sup> February 7pm

## Aldersgate

17<sup>th</sup> September 1738: 11<sup>th</sup> February 1739 3pm

## Gravel Lane

12<sup>th</sup> February 1739 8pm: Mon 19<sup>th</sup> February 8pm: Mon 26<sup>th</sup> February 8.15pm:

Mon 19<sup>th</sup> March 8pm: Mon 26<sup>th</sup> March 8pm (many angry!)

## Dowgate Hill

13<sup>th</sup> February 1739 7.30pm: Tue 20<sup>th</sup> February 8pm: 11<sup>th</sup> September 8pm:

6<sup>th</sup> November 7pm

## The Green Man

14<sup>th</sup> June 1739 8pm (possibly with George Whitefield)

Lambeth Marsh

9<sup>th</sup> September 1739: 16<sup>th</sup> September 7pm: Sun 23<sup>rd</sup> September 6.30pm

Plaistow

(The Ship) 10<sup>th</sup> September 1739 4pm

Plaistow

(The House) Mon 10<sup>th</sup> September 1739 5pm in the House 7.30pm:

at the House Fri 14<sup>th</sup> September 5.30pm: at the house Mon 24<sup>th</sup> September

4.30pm: 16<sup>th</sup> June 1740 4.15pm: at the House, the bands Mon 23<sup>rd</sup> June

4.30pm: at the house

The Three Cups

Sat 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1739 1pm

Carnaby Market

Mon 24<sup>th</sup> September 1739 8.30pm

St James's

25<sup>th</sup> September 1739 4pm: Tue 6<sup>th</sup> November 4pm

Winchester Yard

25<sup>th</sup> September 1739 8pm: Sun 4<sup>th</sup> November 5pm:

Mon 5<sup>th</sup> November 7.30pm (many ill)

Deptford

27<sup>th</sup> Sept 1739 3pm

Turner's Hall

27<sup>th</sup> September 1739 6pm

Bowe's Society

7<sup>th</sup> June 1740 5pm

Long lane

28<sup>th</sup> June 1740 6.30pm: 7<sup>th</sup> July 7pm: Sat 12<sup>th</sup> July 6.30pm:

Sat 19<sup>th</sup> July 6.30pm



Marylebone

2<sup>nd</sup> July 1740 6pm: Wed 16<sup>th</sup> July 1740 6pm

Whitechapel Society

Sat 5<sup>th</sup> July 1740 6.15pm

**Appendix 10****The Nature, Design, and *General Rules* of the United Societies****In London, Bristol, Kingswood and Newcastle upon Tyne****(1743)**

1. In the latter end of the year 1739 eight or ten persons came to me in London who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired (as did three more the next day) that I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come,<sup>9</sup> which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That we might have more time for this great work I appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week, namely on Thursday, in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily), I gave those advices from time to time which I judged most needful for them; and we always concluded our meeting with prayer suited to their several necessities.

2. This was the rise of the United Society, first at London, and then in other places. Such a Society is no other than a 'company of men "having the form, and seeking the power of godliness",<sup>10</sup> united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation'.<sup>11</sup>

3. That it may the more easily be discerned whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies, called

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<sup>9</sup> Matt. 3:7

<sup>10</sup> Cf. 2 Tim. 3:5

<sup>11</sup> See Phil. 2:12

Classes, according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in every class, one of whom is styled the Leader. It is his business:

(1). To see each person in his class once a week at the least;

in order

To receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the poor;

To inquire how their souls prosper;

To advise, reprove, comfort or exhort, as occasion may require.

(2). To meet the Minister and the stewards of the Society once a week,

in order:

To pay in to the stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding;

To show their account of what each person has contributed; and

To inform the Minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly and will not be reprov'd.

4. There is only one condition previously required in those who desire admission into these societies, 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come'<sup>12</sup>, to be saved from their sins'<sup>13</sup>. But wherever this is really fixed in the soul it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation.

First, By doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind – especially that which is most generally practised. Such is –

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<sup>12</sup> Matt. 3:7

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Matt 1:21

The taking the name of God in vain.<sup>14</sup>

The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work thereon, or by buying or selling.

Drunkenness, buying and selling spirituous liquors; or drinking them (unless in case of extreme necessity).

Fighting, quarrelling, brawling; brother 'going to law'<sup>15</sup> with brother; returning evil for evil,<sup>16</sup> or railing for railing; the 'using many words'<sup>17</sup> in buying or selling.

The buying or selling uncustomed goods.

The giving or taking of things on usury.<sup>18</sup>

Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation, especially speaking evil of ministers or those in authority.

Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us.<sup>19</sup>

Doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as

The 'putting on of gold or costly apparel', particularly the wearing of calashes, high-heads or enormous bonnets;

The taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus,

The singing of those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God;

Softness, and needles of self indulgence;

Laying up treasures upon earth;

Borrowing without a probability of paying: or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.

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<sup>14</sup> See Exod. 20:7 etc

<sup>15</sup> Cf. 1 Cor. 6:6

<sup>16</sup> See 1 Pet. 3:9

<sup>17</sup> See Eccus. 20:8 also Eccus. 13:11

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Lev 25:36; Isa. 24:2 etc.

<sup>19</sup> See Matt. 7:12, etc.



5. It is expected of all who continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Secondly, By doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power, as they have opportunity doing good of every possible sort and as far as possible to all men:<sup>20</sup>

To their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick, or in prison.<sup>21</sup>

To their souls, by instructing, reproofing, or exhorting all they have of any intercourse with; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine of devils, that 'we are not to do good unless our heart be free to it'.

By doing good especially to them that are of the household of faith,<sup>22</sup> or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others, buying one of another, helping each other in business – and that so much the more because the world will love its own, and them only.

By all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed.

By running with patience the race that is set before them;<sup>23</sup> denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily';<sup>24</sup> submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and offscouring of the world;<sup>25</sup> and looking that men should 'say all manner of evil of them falsely, for their Lord's sake'.<sup>26</sup>

6. It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Thirdly, By attending upon all the ordinances of God. Such are:

The public worship of God; . . .

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<sup>20</sup> See Gal. 6:10

<sup>21</sup> See Matt. 25:35-39

<sup>22</sup> See Gal. 6:10

<sup>23</sup> See Heb. 12:1

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Luke 9:23

<sup>25</sup> See 1 Cor. 4:13

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Matt. 5:11

The ministry of the word, either read or expounded;

The supper of the Lord;

Family and private prayer;

Searching the Scriptures;<sup>27</sup> and

Fasting, or abstinence.

7. These are the *General Rules* of our societies; all which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written Word, the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these we know his Spirit writes on every truly awakened heart. 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 admonish him of the error of his ways. 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.<sup>28</sup>

John Wesley

Charles Wesley

May 1, 1743

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<sup>27</sup> See John 5:39; Acts 17:11

<sup>28</sup> See Ezek. 3:19, etc

**Appendix 11***Rules of the Band Societies (Drawn up December 25<sup>th</sup> 1738)*

The design of our meeting is to obey that command of God, 'Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another that ye may be healed.'<sup>29</sup>

To this end we intend:

To meet once a week, at the least.

To come punctually at the hour appointed, without some extraordinary reason.

To begin (those of us who are present) exactly at the hour, with singing or prayer.

To speak, each of us in order, freely and plainly the true state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, word or deed, and the temptations we have felt since our last meeting.

To end every meeting with prayer, suited to the state of each person present.

To desire some person among us to speak his<sup>30</sup> own state first, and then to ask the rest in order as many and as searching questions as may be concerning their state, sins, and temptations.

Some of the questions proposed to every one before he is admitted amongst us may be to this effect:

Have you the forgiveness of your sins?

Have you peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ?<sup>31</sup>

Have you the witness of God's Spirit with your spirit that you are a child of God?<sup>32</sup>

Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart?<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Jas. 5:16

<sup>30</sup> The italics indicate that the alternative 'her' might be used

<sup>31</sup> See Rom 5:1

<sup>32</sup> See Rom 8:16

<sup>33</sup> See Rom 5:5

Has no sin, inward or outward, dominion over you?<sup>34</sup>

Do you desire to be told of your faults?

Do you desire to be told of all your faults, and that plain and home?

Do you desire that every one of us should tell you from time to time whatsoever is in his heart concerning you?

Consider! Do you desire we should tell you whatsoever we think, whatsoever we fear, whatsoever we hear, concerning you?

Do you desire that in doing this we should come as close as possible, that we should cut to the quick, and search your heart to the bottom?

Is it your desire and design to be on this and all other occasions entirely open, so as to speak everything that is in your heart, without exception, without disguise, and without reserve?

Any of the preceding questions may be asked as often as occasion offers; the five following at every meeting:

What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?

What temptations have you met with?

How was you delivered?

What have you thought, said or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?

Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See Rom 6:14

<sup>35</sup> This question was removed from later editions, in around 1779 or 1780.



Appendix 12*Directions given to the Band Societies*

Dec. 25, 1744

You are supposed to have the 'faith that overcometh the world'<sup>36</sup>. To you therefore it is not grievous,

I. Carefully to abstain from doing evil; in particular.

Neither to buy nor sell anything at all on the Lord's Day.

To taste no spirituous liquor, no dram of any kind, unless prescribed by a physician

To be at a word both in buying and selling.

To pawn nothing, no, not to save life.

Not to mention the fault of any behind his back, and to stop those short that do.

To wear no needless ornaments, such as rings, ear-rings, necklaces, lace, ruffles.

To use no needless self-indulgence, such as taking snuff or tobacco, unless prescribed by a physician.

II. Zealously to maintain good works; in particular,

To give alms of such things as you possess, and that to the uttermost of your power.

To reprove all that sin in your sight, and that in love, and meekness of wisdom.<sup>37</sup>

To be patterns of diligence and frugality, of self-denial, and taking up the cross daily.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. 1 John 5:4

<sup>37</sup> See Luke 9:23

<sup>38</sup> Jas 3:13

III. Constantly to attend on all the ordinances of God; in particular,

To be at church, and at the Lord's table, every week, and at every public meeting of the bands.

To attend the ministry of the Word every morning, unless distance, business, or sickness prevent.

To use private prayer every day, and family prayer if you are the head of a family.

To read the Scriptures, and meditate thereon, at every vacant hour. And,

To observe as days of fasting or abstinence all Fridays in the year.

**Appendix 13**

Of the right METHOD of meeting CLASSES and BANDS,

in the Methodist-Societies<sup>39</sup>

[By the late Mr. Charles Perronet<sup>40</sup>]

In general, the method proper for meeting the one is proper for meeting the other.

The particular design of the Classes is,

To know who continue members of the Society;

To inspect their Outward Walking,

To enquire of their inward State;

To learn, what are their Trials? And how they fall by, or conquer them?

To instruct the ignorant in the first Principles of Religion: if need be, to repeat, explain, or enforce, what has been said in public Preaching.

To stir them up to believe, love, obey; and to check the first spark of Offence or Discord.

The particular design of the Bands is,

To enquire, whether they now believe? Now enjoy the life of God? Whether they grow herein, or decay? If they decay, what is the cause! And what the cure?

Whether they aim at being wholly devoted to God; or would keep something back?

Whether they see God's hand in all that befalls [sic] them? And how they bear what he lays upon them?

Whether they take up their cross daily? Resist the bent of Nature? Oppose self-love in all its hidden forms, and discover it, through all its disguises?

Whether they humble themselves in everything? Are willing to be blamed and despised for well-doing? Account it the greatest honour, that Christ appoints

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<sup>39</sup> Arminian Magazine, Volume IV

<sup>40</sup> Charles Perronet died on August 12<sup>th</sup> 1776

them to walk with himself, in the paths that are peculiarly his own? To examine closely, whether they are willing to drink of his cup, and to be baptized with his baptism?

Whether they can cordially love those that despitefully use them! Justify the ways of God in thus dealing with them? And in all they suffer, seek the destruction of inward Idolatry, or Pride, Self-will and Impatience?

How they conquer Self-will, in its spiritual forms? See through all its disguises, seeking itself, when it pretends to seek nothing but the glory of God?

Whether they are simple, open, free, and without reserve in speaking? And see it their duty and privilege so to be?

To enquire concerning Prayer, the Answers to Prayer, Faith in Christ, Distrust of themselves, Consciousness of their own witness and nothingness:

How they improve their talents? What zeal they have for doing good, in all they do, or suffer, or receive from God?

Whether they live above it, making Christ their All, and offering up to God nothing for acceptance, but his Life and Death?

Whether they have a clear, full, abiding conviction, that without inward, compleat, universal Holiness, no man shall see the Lord? That Christ was sacrificed for us, that we might be a whole burnt-sacrifice to God; and that they having received the Lord Jesus Christ will profit us nothing, unless we steadily and uniformly walk in him?

C.P.

I earnestly exhort all Leaders of Classes and Bands, seriously to consider the preceding Observations, and to put them in execution with all the Understanding and courage that God has given them.

J.W.