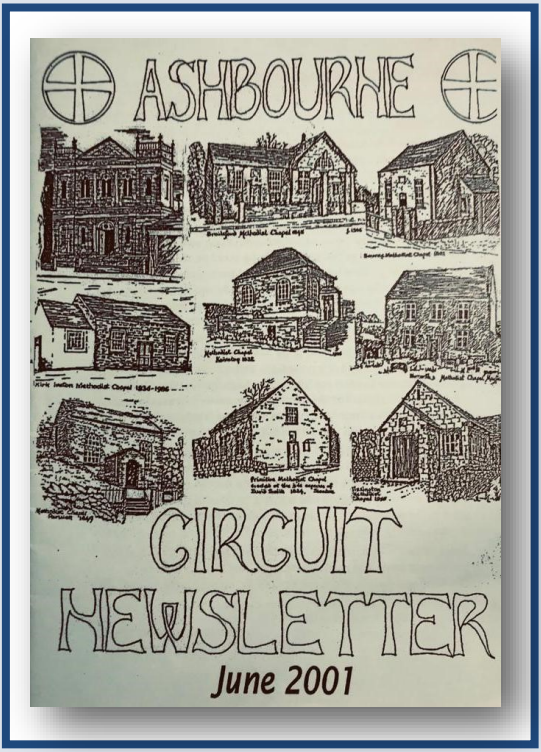
Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society



Volume 63 Part 1 Spring 2021

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Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society

Volume 63 Part 1 Spring 2021

Editors

Dr David Ceri Jones
Rev. Barry D. Lotz

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Cover:
In this edition we welcome the Society of Cirplanologists to WHS. Circuit preaching plans remain of interest and many would show church buildings in the circuit on the cover, as this Ashbourne Circuit Newsletter of 2001, in which the plan was published. Photo provided by Rev. David Leese.

From the editors . . .

As we start a new volume of the *Proceedings*, eagle-eyed readers will notice a number of new developments. We plan to include a short note from the editors at the beginning of each issue, introducing the contents, and occasionally drawing your attention to new developments.

In this issue we have three pieces. John Lander offers some reflections on the reasons for the endemic divisions within early nineteenth-century Methodism, while David Lesse, WHS General Secretary, writes about the Society of Cirplanologists which has recently come under the oversight of the WHS.

The most exciting development is the publication of the winner of the newly launched WHS Essay Competition. It was run for the first time in 2020, and we are keen for information about the competition to be publicised as widely as possible. Further details can be found on the WHS webpage. We hope to be able to publish the winner of the competition each year.

Included with this issue is a copy of the revised WHS Constitution. Do take a look at it, and if you have any comments please communicate them to Donald Ryan. Finally, it is a great pleasure to welcome Simon Lewis as the new *PWHS* Book Reviews Editor. We hope to expand the reviews section in the coming months; do please be in touch with Simon if you have a book that you would like reviewed. We are especially keen to review works of local history, and privately published items related to all things Methodist.

DAVID CERI JONES
BARRY D. LOTZ

'They are a pitiful set of radicals, agitators and slanderers':[1] Methodist Disharmony, 1797-1849

The chronology and main details of the regular divisions that occurred within Methodism in the first half of the nineteenth century are relatively well known to those interested in Methodist history. It is not, though, as straightforward to explain why so many disagreements escalated into bitter arguments, leading to schisms, rather than being settled following mature discussions between fellow Christians.

[1] R. Alder to Jabez Bunting (18 November 1841), in *Early Victorian Methodism: The Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1830-1858*, edited by W. R. Ward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 268.

The word 'schism' appears only once in the Authorised Version (AV) of the Bible – the one familiar to nineteenth century Methodists – and 'secession' not at all. Paul tells the Christians at Corinth: 'That there should be no schism in the body.'[2] Earlier in the letter he felt the need to 'beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement.'[3] Consideration of those texts, and others in the same vein, ought to have prompted greater efforts to avoid expulsions or prevent an environment where members felt forced to resign. The absence of enough civilised conversations to find compromise, achieve mediation or reconciliation often resulted in painful, permanent disruptions and the establishment of new denominations and sects.

Early nineteenth century cultural and social norms when Methodist leaders exercised their responsibilities were very different from those present by the end of the century. Even after the passing of the so-called 'Great' Reform Act of 1832 meaningful democracy was almost non-existent. Only one in five men was entitled to vote; women having no such opportunity until 1918 and not achieving equal voting rights until 1928. In 1800 about 40% of men and 60% of women could neither read nor write; by 1840 those percentages were still 33% for men and 50% for women. Not until the 1880s was school compulsory for children aged between five and ten. The Corn Laws of 1815, not repealed until 1846, were enacted to ensure high grain prices, large profits and wealth for farmers and landowners, but unaffordable costs for everyone else. Agricultural workers were badly treated. Employees and their families suffered greatly when weekly wages in the emerging textile industries fell from around 15 shillings in 1803 to just 5 shillings in 1818. It was not surprising, therefore, that church and secular leaders believed their roles included the authority to decide and implement policies, procedures and practises. Discipline was applied rigorously, independent thought was discouraged, and Methodist members and adherents were expected to accept the instructions of itinerant preachers.

The climate for friction

One Methodist historian believed that 'following the death of Wesley, a Connexional crisis was inevitable'.[4] If that inevitability was shared by John Wesley's successors, the 'Legal Hundred' preachers would dictate the climate for handling disputes. Despite the almost total absence of theological differences, the 'evangelical vision for unity . . . generally proved insufficiently powerful totally to override a deep-seated individualism'.[5] Methodism's official line on democracy was summed up by Jabez Bunting; 'Methodism was as much opposed to democracy as to sin.'[6] Many divisions were caused by the

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2 1 Corinthians 12:25, AV.

3 1 Corinthians 1:10, AV.

4 John T. Wilkinson, 'The rise of other Methodist traditions', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, volume 2,* edited by Rupert Davies, A Raymond George and Gordon Rupp (London, Epworth Press, 1978), p. 276.

5 John Wolffe, *Evangelicals, Women and Community in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Milton Keynes: Open University, 1994), p. 21.

6 *Nottingham Review* (14 December 1827).

absence of substantive roles for laymen and, allied to that, the unfettered power of itinerant ministers, notably Bunting himself. A report of the 1834 Conference noted about one decision that 'many were against it, but Mr Bunting advocated the measure and, like almost every other which is favoured with his advocacy, it prevailed'.[7]

James Dixon, President of the Wesleyan Conference in 1841, wrote with eloquence and concern in 1849, that the church had become 'the centres of power, instead of light; the means of oppression, instead of blessing; the machinery of depression, of suppression, and immoderate and universal control, instead of expansion and progress'.[8] If accurate, and it was written by a respected preacher with no axe to grind, it represented a damning indictment of Wesleyan leadership.

Quite apart from strains within Methodism there was a tension to ensure the maintenance of reasonable external relations with state authorities. For example, there was no hierarchical support for the well-publicised case of the Tolpuddle martyrs of Dorset in 1834 despite five of the six agricultural labourers being Methodists, three of them local preachers.[9] They had attempted to negotiate increases in their low wages but were arrested, tried, convicted and sentenced to seven years in Australia or Tasmania. Protests supporting them were widespread, 'though the Wesleyan authorities were not among the protesters'.[10] Bickering between fellow Methodists was one thing, risking upsetting secular government was tactically foolish, even if that meant a lack of pastoral care for its members. The Presidential Address to Conference in 1837 told its readers that 'respect towards the civil and ecclesiastical institutions of the country, have invariably characterized this flow of feeling and avowal of principle'.[11] No encouragement there for anyone tempted to press for improved working conditions and social reforms as the impact of the Industrial Revolution grew.

Against that background, numerous secessions occurred among Methodist groups between 1797 and 1849. John Wesley had 'governed his widespread Fellowship with autocratic authority',[12] but for almost sixty years after his death splits occurred regularly. The Primitive Methodists, the Bible Christians, and the Methodist New Connexion each lasted as distinct denominations for over ninety years, but there were numerous lesser known and shorter-lived offshoots. *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* refers to no less than twenty-three splinter groups formed in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Disagreements fell into four categories, although there was overlap between them. There were a few doctrinal disputes, but most were associated with the leadership's reaction to revivals connected with large outdoor gatherings, a refusal to accept Methodist discipline, and pressure for increased democracy and basic rights for workers.

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7 Benjamin Gregory, *Side Lights on the Conflicts of Methodism, 1827-1852* (London, Cassell & Co, 1899), p. 176.

8 Wilkinson, 'The rise of other Methodist traditions', pp. 257-8.

9 For more information, see *Methodist Heritage News* (Autumn 2010), 4-5.

10 John Edwards, Peter Gentry and Roger Thorne, *A Methodist Guide to Bristol and the South-West*, (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1991), p. 44.

11 Edmund Grindod and Robert Newton, *The Annual Address of the Conference to the Methodist Societies in Great Britain* (London, John Mason, 1837), p. 20.

12 A. W. Harrison, E. Tegla Davies, B. Aquila Barber and George Goodall Hornby, *The Methodist Church: Its Origin, Divisions, and Reunion* (London, Methodist Publishing House, 1932), p. 47.

Ministers and members were subjected to close connexional scrutiny. At the 1848 Wesleyan Conference a 'brother was reported to be afflicted with a strange idiosyncrasy – he declined to use a razor. . . . He should either shave or sit down.'[13] Should the highest court of Methodism really have involved itself in a minister's personal appearance and threaten to cast him aside? Nor were individual Wesleyan congregations immune from conflict. In Cornwall, Wesleyans at Stithians, a village in the Redruth Circuit, fell out about when the Sunday School tea treat should be held. Those supporting one date 'entered the Chapel and took away all the books belonging to the Sunday School and went to a neighbouring field where they held their Sunday School'.[14] The outcome was a schism and the building of a huge United Methodist Free Church chapel for the dissidents just 100 yards away from the equally large Wesleyan building. At Portland, Dorset, the newly appointed Wesleyan minister took it upon himself to expel fifty members because they apparently practised witchcraft.[15] The Methodist New Connexion, the Primitive Methodists and the Bible Christians also experienced their own internal disputes. Indeed, there were cases when former Wesleyans sought to return to the parent fold when they found the grass was not always greener elsewhere.

A lack of decision-making roles for lay people was a frequent source of resentment. Trustees were expected to take on the responsibility for building chapels, raising the necessary finance, meeting interest commitments and repaying debt. Members met recurring costs, notably of the ministry, acted as stewards, class leaders and Sunday School teachers, and provided a preaching resource to supplement itinerants. Yet they had no say in the stationing of ministers and other major judgements made by itinerants; 'Wesleyan preachers were setting themselves up as a clerical caste apart from their lay followers.'[16] Bunting told the 1835 Conference that 'Lay-delegation is dead and buried'[17], confirming his opinion three years later: 'The genius of Methodism is not the genius of democracy. The two can never harmonise. This party spirit of democracy is very injurious.'[18] Why 'injurious'? Would the leadership feel alarmed by receiving views that had not originated from close colleagues? While laymen led many of the schisms, others were sponsored by disenchanted ministers.

Efforts were occasionally made to encourage adversaries to moderate language and accommodate a range of opinions. That such efforts were necessary can be concluded from a *cri de coeur* from Joseph Agar, who in 1835 wrote that 'I have been a member of this blessed Body more than fifty-six years. . . . Yet I have never seen Methodism in such a disturbed state than as at present.'[19] At the height of one of the bitterest conflicts amid persistent wrangling, another highly experienced minister, Henry Moore, wrote to the 1835 Conference proposing 'that all offenders should be forgiven and restored, for

13 Gregory, *Side Lights on the Conflicts of Methodism*, p. 424.
14 Joyce Green and Tony Langford, *Methodism in Stithians* (Stithians: Stithians Methodist Church, 1991), p. 14.
15 Michael R Watts, *The Dissenters, vol. II: The Expansion of Dissent, 1791-1851* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 106.
16 Watts, *The Dissenters, vol. II*, p. 31.
17 Gregory, *Side Lights on the Conflicts of Methodism*, p. 209.
18 Gregory, *Side Lights on the Conflicts of Methodism*, p. 258.
19 Gregory, *Side Lights on the Conflicts of Methodism*, p. 190.

the faults on both sides need forgiveness'.[20] Not for the first time, his appeal fell on deaf ears. Yet another senior minister, Joseph Entwisle, when President of the Wesleyan Conference in 1825 and seeking to guide a fellow minister, told him, 'Whoever is right or wrong, religion always suffers in what are called religious disputes.'[21]

Why did disagreements become bitter and irreconcilable?

In addressing this question, the nature of the arguments, and the personalities on both sides of the altercations need to be considered. Were the aims always to reform but remain within the parent Methodist body, or were schisms the intended outcomes? What started as one bone of contention frequently became more complex as other issues were thrown into the mix. Contemporary accounts, including Benjamin Gregory's editing of Joseph Fowler's reports of Conferences, and correspondence to and from Bunting from 1820 onwards, show that itinerants devoted much time and energy dealing with relationships with Methodist offshoots.

The first major dispute led to the creation of the Methodist New Connexion in 1797. The founder, Alexander Kilham, apparently wanted equal representation for laymen at all levels, including Conference. While 'conference agreed to make considerable sacrifices',[22] they were not sufficient to satisfy him. Kilham had been a local preacher since 1782, an itinerant since 1785, and was involved in various disagreements with Wesleyan authority. He was censured by Conference in 1792 and sent to Aberdeen where he took a contrary view about Methodism's relationship with the Church of England. He produced outspoken written material calling for reform, and Conference expelled him in 1796.[23]

Kilham was a single-minded, uncompromising man who probably saw his departure coming, and welcomed it. He had an 'eagerness for disputation . . . and . . . tactlessness which infuriated friends as well as enemies',[24] but also displayed 'effective vigour' and 'a fertile and suggestive mind'.[25] He persuaded a few itinerants, notably William Thom, a member of the Legal Hundred, and about 5% of the Wesleyan membership, including chapel trustees, to secede with him. Wesleyan criticism persisted. Thomas Coke was adamant in 1799 that the Methodist New Connexion was 'as troublesome a set of people that ever plagued a Church of Christ'.[26] Ill-will festered; the superintendent of the Burslem Wesleyan Circuit referred in 1826 to 'this hotbed of Kilhamitis [sic], Ranterism, and every other ism that is subversive of all rule and order'.[27]

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20 Gregory, *Side Lights on the Conflicts of Methodism*, p. 199.

21 Joseph Entwistle to Jabez Bunting (31 December 1831), in *The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting 1820-1829*, edited by W. R. Ward (London: Royal Historical Society, 1972), p. 133.

22 W. R. Ward, *Religion and Society in England, 1790-1850* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1972), p. 38.

23 *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland*, edited by John A. Vickers (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2000), p. 191.

24 Watts, *The Dissenters, vol.II*, p. 360.

25 Harrison, Davies, Barber and Hornby, *The Methodist Church*, pp. 52-3.

26 Letter from Thomas Coke to Ezekiel Cooper (12 January 1799), John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

27 Jonathan Barker to Jabez Bunting (15 September 1826), in *The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting*, edited by Ward, p. 147.

Harmony within the Methodist New Connexion was soon disturbed. An itinerant, John Straw, sought to transfer his allegiance to the Wesleyans, claiming that the 'kind of government which is prevalent in our connexion I firmly believe to be highly unscriptural and pernicious', and that '[t]he people are the rulers and ministers are the ruled'.[28] A similar view was expressed by another preacher, Samuel Hulme, in 1840. The 1797 secession occurred because laymen demanded substantive contributions to decision-making, but the roles were perceived to have been reversed when ministers complained they were insufficiently appreciated. Two other Methodist New Connexion itinerants, George Beaumont and Ben Rushton, were expelled for introducing politics into sermons, and in 1841 Joseph Barker was dismissed for refusing to perform infant baptism. He also had Chartist sympathies, and on his departure took with him twenty-nine chapel congregations and about 20% of the New Connexion membership. Methodist divisions were not confined to the Wesleyans.

The next major argument about a totally different issue reached its climax in 1811 when the Primitive Methodist denomination was formed. Only a few weeks after tents were erected for preaching and prayer at the first open-air 'camp' meeting in May 1807, the Wesleyan Conference, with remarkable speed, approved a resolution banning them; 'even supposing such meetings to be allowed in America, they are highly improper in England, and likely to be productive of considerable mischief; and we disclaim all connection with them'.[29] That judgement ignored reports of conversions in England for the benefit of Wesleyan societies, and supportive comments from Joshua Marsden, a Wesleyan itinerant based in Nova Scotia, America. The decision was, however, effectively reversed when 'Conference of 1820 blessed what the Conference of 1807 had banned'.[30] Measured consideration would probably have avoided Primitive Methodism being formed.

The Primitive Methodists were known, sarcastically and as a term of abuse, as 'Ranters' but Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, the leaders, reacted to their expulsions from the Wesleyans with a commendable refusal to enter into acrimonious exchanges. If Kilham relished the chance to lead a new Methodist group, neither Bourne nor Clowes had any predetermined ambition to establish a separate organisation. Bourne was known to have 'natural timidity' and was 'bashful and retiring', and Clowes was said to be 'a man of extraordinary piety and usefulness'.[31]

Following another camp meeting, a society was formed at the village of Standley, and 'it was expected that this society would be united with the Burslem circuit of the old Connexion; but as the superintendent, Mr Edmondson, would only consent for the place to be supplied with preaching on condition that the Bournes and their associates

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[28] John Straw (forwarded to Joseph Entwistle) to Jabez Bunting (18 February 1826), in *The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting*, edited by Ward, p. 139.

[29] Quoted in John Petty, *The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (London, John Dickenson, 1880), p. 30. 1807 is confirmed in H. B. Kendall's history as the date of the Wesleyan Conference decision but *The Methodist Church; its Origin, Divisions, and Reunion* (p. 60) gives 1810 as the year.

[30] H. B. Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church*, vol. 1 (London, Edward Dalton, 1899), p. 311.

[31] Petty, *The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion*, pp. 9, 27 and 42.

should not preach there at all, the terms were not satisfactory to the parties concerned'.[32] Bourne was naturally reserved but he 'was nevertheless a man of indomitable energy, and was too stern and unbending a nature to be turned aside by trifles'.[33] Bourne and Clowes then felt there was no acceptable alternative but to formalise a new denomination, a decision confirmed by issuing class tickets. While they each served Primitive Methodism with great dedication for another thirty years, they could not prevent divisions. In 1829 the Norwich Circuit was 'injured by employing improper characters', and its 'very existence threatened by dissension'.[34] Ten years later the 'Selstonites' split from the Belper Circuit in protest at a decision to increase 'the modest stipend of the superintendent from fourteen to sixteen shillings a week'.[35]

The use of tents is mirrored in the 1820 formation of the Tent Methodists in Bristol. Local preachers took a tent to villages without chapels in Gloucestershire in 1814 and succeeded in achieving growth in Wesleyan societies. However, the local circuit leaderships refused to countenance unauthorised initiatives, principally by George Pocock, the founder, and he was expelled together with other local preachers after a hostile exchange of pamphlets. A further factor was Pocock's intention to begin 'the erection of places . . . and have those places so conveyed, that those persons who were instruments of raising up people and places should not be excluded from the pulpits.'[36] That provocative ambition was never going to be sanctioned by the Wesleyan hierarchy. Pocock was determined to continue the activity and prepared a set of rules, bought a former Baptist chapel, and began issuing class tickets. The group grew for about five years before declining steadily; Pocock being re-admitted to the Wesleyans and restored as a local preacher in about 1835.

Another 'fervent evangelist' who wished to be 'set free to wander through the towns and villages, proclaiming the way of salvation'[37] was William O'Bryan. He established the Bible Christian denomination in 1815 following expulsion from the Wesleyans because of 'no graver charge than irregularity in seeking the salvation of souls'.[38] Later however, O'Bryan himself left the Bible Christians in 1829, taking some members with him, when he 'demanded that his single vote should preponderate, and determine every case, even when he was opposed by the united view of the Conference'.[39] Having objected to his expulsion from the Wesleyans because of a lack of proper consideration, he wished to run the Bible Christians without first gaining agreement from colleagues. The group that seceded with him was reunited in 1835 bringing 545 members back to the fold.

The Independent Methodist denomination was formed when five separate societies in Cheshire and Lancashire came together in 1805 following various disputes. Two were

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32 Petty, *The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion,* p. 39.
33 Petty, *The History of the Primitive Methodist Connexion,* p. 27.
34 Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church,* pp. 212-3.
35 Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church,* p. 249.
36 George Pocock, *A Statement of Facts connected with the ejectment of Certain Ministers* (Bristol: Philip Rose, 1820), p. 10.
37 Harrison, Davies, Barber and Hornby, *The Methodist Church,* p. 62.
38 R. Pyke, *The Golden Chain* (London: Henry Hooks, 1915), p. 16.
39 Pyke, *The Golden Chain,* p. 77.

former Methodist New Connexion societies, another congregation held open air meetings that the Wesleyans came to disallow, and another wished for an unpaid ministry. The other, a group of Church of England members who met for Bible study and fellowship, left when the founder believed that only ordained clergy should preach. The Independent Methodists later attracted disillusioned societies when, among other reasons, it was claimed 'the Primitive Methodist preachers were tyrannical',[40] and because of a belief in an unpaid ministry. A basic principle of the Independent Methodists was of 'a universal Church, not rigid but adaptable',[41] a totally different position from that taken by the Wesleyans. 'The Independent Methodists, the Primitive Methodists, the Tent Methodists, and the Bible Christians all owed their origins to lay evangelistic activity that would not accept the constraints of Wesleyan order.'[42] The evangelical work of all these revivalist groups began in places where Wesleyan chapels were absent as they had no wish to compete.

There was another connection between them. Including the two founders of the Primitive Methodists, there were five men connected with the initial progress of these four offshoots. Coincidentally, or providentially, all were born between 1772 and 1780, their Wesleyan membership began within nine years of each other, and they all started local preaching in the early 1800s. Apart from Peter Phillips, the leader of the Independent Methodists, and Hugh Bourne, who knew and respected each other, the rest were not, it seems, aware of each other's complementary activities.

Wesleyan opposition to these evangelical offshoots 'ensured the continuity of the revivalist tradition within Methodism, while losing any chance they previously had of controlling it.'[43] It can be argued that Wesleyanism would have been strengthened, not weakened by the loss of members, if the leadership had demonstrated a willingness to compromise. Instead, quite apart from endless unproductive hours at annual Conferences, much time and energy were spent at grass roots levels sniping at dissenting groups. In 1829 it was asserted 'that Ranterism has been the ruin of that [Walworth, London] society',[44] and twenty-five years after the Primitive Methodists were established, they were described as an 'overflowing swarm of ranters'.[45]

If some individuals and groups separated from the Wesleyans because of revivalist ambitions, others were 'protest movements against Wesleyan church government'.[46] The wish by a small majority of trustees to install an organ in a large new chapel in Leeds in 1827 led to a bitter secession, made more serious because the local Leaders' Meeting and the District meeting had both rejected the wish of the chapel trustees. It escalated even further when the matter was brought to Conference and Bunting

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40 James Vickers, *History of Independent Methodism* (Wigan: Independent Methodist Bookroom, 1920), p. 168.
41 Vickers, *History of Independent Methodism*, p. 74.
42 Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 33.
43 James Gordon Terry, 'The Causes and Effects of the Divisions within Methodism in Bradford 1796-1857' (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Huddersfield, 1999), p. 231.
44 David McNicoll to Jabez Bunting (17 September 1829), in *The Early Correspondence of Jabez Bunting*, edited by Ward, p. 215.
45 Joseph Sutcliffe to Jabez Bunting (13 December 1836), in *Early Victorian Methodism*, edited by Ward, p. 171.
46 Watts, *The Dissenters, vol. II*, p. 33.

persuaded members to overturn earlier considered judgements, a decision he later regretted. As a result, the Protestant Methodist denomination was formed with 1,000 Wesleyan members, later to merge with the Wesleyan Methodist Association. A local schoolmaster, James Sigston, involved in an earlier dispute that led to the short-lived establishment of the 'Kirkgate Screamers' in 1803 and perceived to be a trouble-maker, was behind the argument.

In 1832 a split among Derby Wesleyans over a doctrinal matter led to about 1,800 members seceding from a number of congregations. Then, in a disagreement about his wish to sever the relationship with the Church of England, Joseph Rayner Stephens, an itinerant serving in Lancashire, withdrew in 1834 following criticism of him at Conference. He set up a 'Stephenite' circuit which survived for about fifty years, pressing additionally, for better worker rights, focussing on women and children. At around the same time another long-serving Wesleyan itinerant, Samuel Warren, having been appointed to a committee to examine the best ways of training ministerial candidates, objected to Bunting being given additional powers as President of the theological institution that was to be established. The exchange of vitriolic material exacerbated the issues, and Warren succeeded in attracting over 20,000 to join what became known as the Wesleyan Methodist Association. Other dissenting bodies joined it before it became a constituent member of the United Methodist Free Churches (UMFC) in 1857.

The most long-lasting dispute began in 1844. A series of anonymous pamphlets known as 'Fly Sheets' contained extensive criticism of the Wesleyan leadership, much of it directed at the extensive roles that Bunting had acquired. Attempts were made to find out who was, or were, responsible. Three itinerants, James Everett, Samuel Dunn and William Griffith, all of whom had been ministers for at least twenty years, were expelled after a five-year long bitter controversy. They were later instrumental in the formation of what became the UMFC. It is difficult to judge whether those behind the writing and widespread distribution of the pamphlets genuinely wanted to reform Wesleyan administration, structure and decision-making processes or whether they simply intended to cause trouble and embarrassment for the leadership.

There were other secessions during the period under review, including the Methodist Revivalists, formed in 1819, the Gospel Pilgrims in 1830, and the Teetotal Wesleyan Methodists in 1841. The issues of disagreement were wide ranging with both ministers and laymen as sponsors, and there was no obvious hierarchical regret displayed when former colleagues departed.

Intriguingly, the vast majority of the divisions occurred in a narrow geographical band across England, from Lancashire and Cheshire in the west, south as far as north Staffordshire and eastwards into Yorkshire, notably Leeds. Of all the schisms recorded in *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland,* and others not sufficiently significant to be reported there, only the Bible Christians established in north-west Devon, the Teetotal Wesleyan Methodists, in St Ives and west Cornwall, and the Tent Methodists, founded in Bristol, did not originate from that part of England. The 1834

Conference was told that 'secessions had occurred in five strong circuits: Bolton, Halifax, Burslem, Oldham and Ashton',[47] all within that north of England area.

Leeds was a fast-growing industrial centre in west Yorkshire that endured regular instances of Wesleyan dissent. There was a doctrinal dispute in 1753, argument about the relationship with the Church of England in 1784, Kilham's expulsion in 1796, the 'Kirkgate Screamers' in 1803, the defection of a class to the Primitive Methodists in 1819, and the 'Organ Case' in 1827. Riots occurred in connection with food price increases in the 1810s, and there was a significant strike at a wool processing factory in 1831. These experiences have been explained as coming from 'a solid, radical, political tradition in Leeds, both of a public reformist and revolutionary underground nature'.[48] Factory workers objected to the introduction of machinery, and that might have produced an inclination among Methodists to reject or question the policies and practises being implemented by itinerants.

A similar situation existed in Manchester and nearby Lancashire towns. Coupled with the introduction of mechanisation was a sharp fall in textile worker wages from 23 shillings a week in 1802 to just 8 shillings in 1826. Bearing in mind that 51% of the adult population worked in the industry,[49] the adverse impact of greatly reduced incomes prompted many to press for the establishment of precursors to trade unions. An independent outlook of life generally may have spilled over into being less inclined to accept Methodist policy decisions.[50] Another centre of various disputes were the north Staffordshire pottery towns and nearby Derby to the east.

A definitive judgement as to why so many of the feuds occurred in a small part of England is not possible. Did the Methodists in that narrow strip of England have more independent and argumentative minds than elsewhere? There were other parts of England, such as Newcastle upon Tyne, Bristol, and London – the Wesley triangle – that also had large groups of members, but experienced fewer divisive quarrels. It is a subject for exploration in greater depth.

Conclusion

The national context within which Christian denominations operated in the first half of the nineteenth century was challenging. The war on continental Europe finally ended in 1815 and military personnel returning home found high unemployment and food prices, but falling wages. Families were having to move from rural communities into towns where living conditions were often appalling, and death rates reflected poor housing and medical facilities. As one social historian expressed it; 'the long war was a grave misfortune. With its violent disturbances of economic life, and its mood of "anti-Jacobin" reaction against all proposals for reform and all sympathy with the claims and

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47 Gregory, *Side Lights on the Conflicts of Methodism*, p. 147.

48 Robin Pearson, 'The Industrial Suburbs of Leeds in the Nineteenth Century: Community Consciousness among the Social Classes' (unpublished PhD thesis: University of Leeds, 1986), p. 92.

49 *The Textile Mills of Lancashire: The Legacy*, edited by Rachel Newman (Lancaster: Oxford Archaeology North, 2018), p. 36.

50 For a comprehensive review of Methodist divisions in Lancashire, see D. A. Gowland, *Methodist Secessions: The origins of Free Methodism in three Lancashire towns* (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1979).

suffering of the poor – the war formed the worst possible environment for the industrial and social changes then in rapid progress.'[51]

Twenty-first century accountability and governance practises cannot be fully applied to nineteenth-century Methodism, but there are relevant comparisons. There was substantial intransigence shown by Methodist leaders as evidenced by the imposition of strict discipline and the absence of meaningful democracy. There was an assumption and expectation that largely unexplained directives agreed at Conference, and implemented by circuit superintendents, would be scrupulously followed.

Bunting was so prominent a figure during the period under review that the extent of his culpability for the serious disputes needs assessment. An itinerant since 1799, he was appointed Assistant Secretary in 1806, Secretary for the first of two spells in 1814, to the Legal Hundred in 1814, to the first of four years as President in 1820, and undertook senior positions in the Missionary Society, as Connexional Editor and at what became Hoxton Theological Institution. W. R. Ward's editing, in two volumes, of Bunting correspondence provides a fascinating insight into the state of Methodism, and of Bunting's personal involvement. Ward believes that 'Bunting and the "high" Methodist party proceeded in their domestic policies to consolidate the status and develop the work of the ministry', and 'on the other side "low" Methodism perceived the root of the connexion's troubles in the very institutionalization to which Bunting pinned his faith'.[52]

Among supportive itinerants, William Vevers wrote to Bunting in 1834 telling him of his 'unmingled indignation [at] the unprincipled attempts which are now made to wound your feelings and lessen your influence'.[53] Conversely, a letter from John Arthy, a deacon of the Church of England, and a more objective correspondent, urged Bunting in 1836 'to use the influence God has given you to put an end to the disputes between the Preachers and people, for what could either side gain by victory?'[54] Achieving harmony was hindered by provocative statements. At the 1831 Conference, Bunting said of Joseph Beaumont, a fellow itinerant, 'There must be something wrong with his head and heart.'[55] He quickly retracted the unsavoury, offensive remark, saying it was not 'personal'; but how it could not be so is difficult to fathom. Three years later Bunting complained that he was '. . . an object of downright cruelty, of persecution, slander and detraction'.[56] He, and other leaders, were constantly engaged in 'fire-fighting' day to day crises, arguably mostly self-inflicted.

Bunting was revered by some he came into contact with while others disapproved, and even scorned him. Such polarisation of views was not conducive to having confidence that the running of an increasingly complex organisation would be effective. His personality and insistence on tight discipline discouraged consultation, mature debate and scrutiny of impending decisions. In 1837, just a year after being selected to

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51 G. M. Trevelyan, *English Social History* (London: Book Club Associates, 1973), p. 463.
52 *Early Victorian Methodism,* edited by Ward, pp. xiv and xv.
53 William Vevers to Jabez Bunting (15 October 1834), in *Early Victorian Methodism,* edited by Ward, p. 94.
54 John Arthy to Jabez Bunting (25 April 1836), in *Early Victorian Methodism,* edited by Ward, p. 143.
55 Gregory, *Side Lights on the Conflicts of Methodism,* p. 108.
56 Gregory, *Side Lights on the Conflicts of Methodism,* p. 167.

membership of the Legal Hundred, Thomas Galland complained that 'there is not the freedom of debate there should be'.[57] Nonetheless, newspaper reports of Bunting's death in June 1858 correctly noted that he, 'next to its founder, has been the most remarkable and influential that has appeared in the field of Methodism'.[58]

People who challenged decisions had passionate commitment to the issues they championed. Methodist leaders, however, mainly but not exclusively Wesleyans, showed an inherent reluctance to be pushed into changes sponsored by others, especially laymen. While some dissidents were sad at leaving, whether expelled or voluntarily, others seemed bent on spoiling for a fight. They were probably surprised at the extent to which members were prepared to transfer allegiance to them rather than remain with a particular denomination. Bourne and Clowes, the Primitive Methodist leaders, had no intention of leaving Wesleyanism until they felt there was no alternative. The same, albeit with less certainty, could be said of others, including O'Bryan.

A cooperative mindset would have avoided many divisions. With progress towards a democratic state, should not lay people equipped with valuable skills and experience have been trusted, even encouraged, to share in Conference decision-making? Why was outdoor evangelism, so important to Wesley, considered unacceptable? Should not the wish to have organs installed in chapels have been anticipated? Was it really necessary for the respective proponents of teetotalism and temperance to be at loggerheads over the extent of alcohol consumption, and whether fermented or unfermented wine should be used at communion services?

Apportionment of blame assumes that the secessions were unwanted distractions from the church's real mission of winning souls for Christ. A number of letters and comments, made at the time of divisions and long afterwards, actually suggest that some Methodists adopted a 'good riddance' approach to those involved in the splits, condoning and even, perhaps, encouraging them. Conference members generally accepted, but with inadequate knowledge, the leadership's proposed expulsions of dissidents. Only two Conference members, both medical doctors, opposed three resolutions in 1841 that led to the formation of the Teetotal Wesleyan Methodists. During just four months between July and October in 1836 disputes occurred at Stourbridge, Helston, Sunderland, Appleby, Driffield and Camelford[59] – showing that problems were widely distributed throughout the country.

It would be too simplistic to conclude that the principal reason for the acrimonious disagreements lay in the stubbornness of denominational leaders or the cussedness of single-minded individuals pursuing their own agenda. But there is little doubt that some sought, and gained, publicity for their actions and were prepared to incur the wrath of fellow Christians. However, while some offshoots survived until one of the twentieth century amalgamations in 1907 and 1932, others had much shorter lives. The need for organisational structures necessitated huge commitment from many people, and constant criticism may have persuaded some that the causes they sponsored were not

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57 Gregory, *Side Lights on the Conflicts of Methodism*, p. 230.
58 *Manchester Times*, 19 June 1858.
59 *Early Victorian Methodism*, edited by Ward, pp. 150-1.

worth the aggravation they encountered. It is doubtful whether those who instigated controversial reform proposals had, in advance, worked through the implications of their actions. Many sects later joined other offshoots, including the Wesleyan Methodist Association in the late 1830s and the United Free Methodist Church in 1859. Other members reverted to the Wesleyans, and still more disappeared altogether.

There was no open process for the selection of candidates for leadership roles. Appointment to the Legal Hundred was largely, if not entirely, based on longevity of itinerant ministry. Those who found themselves in positions of power too frequently misinterpreted authority as superiority, theological learning as unassailable wisdom, and personal views as undeniable truths. Plenty of itinerants were appointed leaders, but too few were statesmen willing and able to seek consensus for strategic longer-term development while handling operational pressures. Bunting, and others, would have been fully aware of Jesus's instruction to 'love thy neighbour as thyself',[60] but goodwill, humility and Christian charity were often absent.

In stark contrast to the majority of ministerial and lay comments, the final words come from Peter Phillips, who exercised a near fifty-year leadership of the Independent Methodists. Referring to his own principles, he said; 'I will do my utmost to defend them; but I have no right to be angry with those who differ from me.'[61] And at the last Annual Meeting before his death in 1853 he urged members to 'strive not for mastery, and, instead of making aggression on the Christian world, make aggression on Satan's kingdom'.[62] Had those perceptive remarks been generally accepted, the disharmony among Methodists would have been far less, and fellow Christians might not, as this paper's title shows, have been described as 'radicals, agitators and slanderers'.

JOHN LANDER (Barton Stacey, Hampshire)

60 Matthew 22:39 and Mark 12:31.
61 Vickers, *History of Independent Methodism*, p. 16.
62 Vickers, *History of Independent Methodism*, pp. 30-1.

Society of Cirplanologists

One of the distinctive practices of Methodism has been the issue of a preaching plan, usually, but not only, by the circuit. So, in the hands of enthusiasts, has subsequently arisen the portmanteau word 'Cirplanology'. It is a name that has needed, and often continues to require explanation as to precisely what it refers. The entry for Cirplanology, in the *Dictionary of Methodism* directs the reader to 'see circuit plans'. Whilst this has indeed been the principal subject of the work of the society, its interests have extended to Methodist tickets, and other such ephemera.

The society came into existence after the Manchester Conference in 1955. There a number of enthusiasts who were interested in collecting and studying Methodist circuit plans, determined to form the Society of Cirplanologists. The prime instigator at that time was Arnold Whipp, and the first president was Oliver Beckerlegge. The society has continued to be blessed by its leadership. Its aim was to bring together plan collectors, plan makers and plan printers. In doing so it sought to promote the study, collection and research into circuit plans, and to encourage the preservation of older plans. It sought to do this by cataloguing plans, building up its own collection, and issuing a journal to provide a forum for sharing knowledge. In retrospect the intent to build up its own collection, though well meaning, was not sustainable, and a cause of fragmentation of plan archives in the long term. Colin Dews on behalf of Cirplanology has, and is continuing to ensure that the society's plans are suitably placed in other publicly accessed archives.

Cirplan[1] has been the bulletin of the society, originally published twice a year. This was edited by W. H. Hodgson up to 1959, E. Alan Rose to 1964, then jointly with Ken Bowden to 1967, who then took on the role alone till 2016, when David Leyshon assumed the role. The nature of the articles published has centred upon mainly Methodist plans and some readers might have thought they knew about plans. However, *Cirplan* has journeyed its readers through Teetotal plans,[2] Band of Hope Union plans,[3] plans for religious services in Union workhouses,[4] Sunday School teachers' plans,[5] Prayer Meeting Plans,[6] and more.

The bulletin has delighted in the unusual and the surprising. It has not been a systematic study, but I would suggest that to its readers, little has often meant more. The range of articles featured in *Cirplan* has continually demonstrated the variety of plans in content, style and production. To those not familiar with *Cirplan* typical subjects covered have, for example, included the possible reasons behind the material of plans, whether linen, silk, paper or postcard.[7] Or discussion on the preachers' means

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1 Copies are available from the author, at the address on the inside cover of the *Proceedings*.
2 *Cirplan*, issue 101, vol. 13, no. 5 (2005), 122.
3 *Cirplan*, issue 110, vol. 14, no. 6 (2010), 168.
4 *Cirplan*, issue 96, vol. 12, no. 8 (2003), 209.
5 *Cirplan*, issue 99, vol. 1, no. 3 (2004), 72.
6 *Cirplan*, issue 111, vol. 14, no. 7 (2010), 187.
7 *Cirplan*, issue 81, vol. 11, no. 1 (1995), 19.

of transport as referred to in the plans, from the Horse Hire Funds,[8] to the local preachers' petrol ration allowance (apparently complete form B),[9] and why some plans had the phase of the moon included.[10] The reason for the latter being that the full moon allowed preachers to cycle to appointments on those well-lit nights. On other darker nights a circuit taxi was allowed. It can be seen that these all reflected the social circumstances of their times.

The membership of the society peaked at over 100, but has maintained itself at between 90 and 100. It will not be a surprise however that what has changed is the profile of that membership. 40% of the current members were in the society before 2000, and some many years before. They have been active and energetic contributors to *Cirplan,* but latterly *Cirplan* has struggled to attract contributions. Although the numerical membership has not changed, the former wide base of active participation has diminished.

At its 2020 Annual General Meeting the society was faced with an officer crisis and a letter was sent out intimating that the future of the society depended upon willingness to fill key posts. The membership, though expressing appreciation and good will, felt unable to fill the posts. The AGM had also agreed that should that be the case a formal approach would be made to the WHS to merge with it, recognising that many of its members were also already WHS members. Indeed, many thought that at this time, this was the most appropriate way forward.

At the November 2020 WHS executive meeting this request was agreed, with the WHS becoming responsible for the residual assets and liabilities of Cirplanology. It was also agreed to grant one year's membership to those Cirplanology members who were not already in the WHS. We are thankful for those who birthed the society, and have sustained it over its sixty-five years.

DAVID LEESE (WHS General Secretary, Ashbourne)

8 *Cirplan*, issue 91, vol. 12, no. 3 (2000), 71.
9 *Cirplan*, issue 81, vol. 11, no. 1 (1995), 11.
10 *Cirplan*, issue 79, vol. 10, no. 7 (1994), 176.

WHS ESSAY COMPETITION: WINNER

'The Most Obstinate Belief': John Wesley, Hypochondria and Faith

In *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1996) Woody Allen's Mickey is convinced that he has a brain tumour. He is reassured by some medical tests, and runs out of the hospital, jubilant. But then he stops. He realises that death has not been averted, only delayed. He has gained life, but not meaning, and begins to flirt with various religions. Mickey has discovered that his scepticism towards the body can never give absolute, reassuring knowledge. His hypertrophied interpretative faculties at first produce paranoia, insisting that trivial symptoms portend serious illness, then (somewhat falteringly) faith, insisting with the same obstinacy that life cannot be a random collection of happenings, but must mean something.

Health is no less a belief than religious convictions are. Kant attempted to bring religion into the rational sphere of absolute knowledge, but despaired of having the same knowledge of his own body, conceding that someone 'can *feel* well (to judge by his comfortable feeling of vitality), but he can never *know* that he is healthy'.[1] Georges Canguilhem surmises from this that for Kant 'there is no science of health'.[2] Just as experience cannot confirm one's spiritual health, one's certitude of salvation, so does experience fail to give us an accurate picture of our physical well-being. The ongoing Coronavirus pandemic has returned privileged modern life to something of the fragility of the eighteenth century, and we would do well to turn to the methods of this period, especially those proposed by John Wesley, for dealing not only with mortal illness itself, but fear of disease.

Wesley's advice for hypochondriacs was to 'Use *cold Bathing*; Or, take an Ounce of *Quicksilver* every Morning'.[3] Wesley's interest in pharmaceutical, rather than psychological or spiritual, solutions to this nervous disorder hints at his own pragmatic turn of mind. But it also sheds light on the nature of hypochondria in the eighteenth century. Before physical diagnostics were widespread, the line between mental and physical maladies was obscure, sometimes non-existent. Hypochondria only became 'a belief about serious illness that lacked a basis in reality' when reality could be measured independently of a patient's feelings.[4] Until then, it was an extremely common nervous complaint, often centred on the patient's hypochonders, or upper abdomen.

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1 Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties* (1798), quoted in Georges Canguilhem, *Writings on Medicine*, translated by Stefanos Geroulanos and Todd Meyers (Fordham, NY: Fordham University Press, 2012), p. 44.

2 Kant quoted in Canguilhem, *Writings on Medicine*, p. 45.

3 John Wesley, *Primitive Physick, Or, An Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* (London: W. Strahan, 1761), p. 75.

4 Russell Noyes, Jr., 'The Transformation of Hypochondriasis in British Medicine, 1680-1830', *Social History of Medicine*, 24.2 (1999), 290.

John Wesley recognised that hypochondria was the product not only of the necessarily partial knowledge we all have of our own health, but also of physicians' limited understanding of the mind. In his essay 'On Nervous Disorders', Wesley notes wryly that the very term 'nervous disorder' is 'a good cover for learned ignorance'.[5] Though he did not believe that all mental illnesses were caused by spiritual malaise, Wesley did affirm a strong connection between spiritual and mental health, writing elsewhere that 'no man can be a thorough physician without being an experienced Christian'.[6] The inadequacy of medical knowledge in 'On Nervous Disorders' is implied to be a result of doctors' being 'strangers to religion' and therefore unable to recognise that nervous illnesses 'are often no natural disorder of the body, but the hand of God upon the soul'.[7]

Wesley's approach to nervous disorders, to disease and fear of disease, was not wholly pharmaceutical, but holistic and pragmatic. His concluding advice reflects his overall attitude to healthy living. He recommends eschewing alcohol and tea, exercising daily, not overeating nor oversleeping, and avoiding excessive passions.[8] Health, for Wesley, was wholeness: sympathy and concord between the organs of the body themselves, and between the body and the mind or soul. He argues in a sermon that an 'embodied spirit cannot form one thought but by the mediation of its bodily organ'.[9] Rather than dismissing the body as irreparably corrupt, Wesley recognised it as a vital instrument of the soul, opening up the rich and musical potential of the word 'organ'.

Wesley's advocacy of a sympathy between body and soul is most evident in his own receptiveness to the body's signs, particularly his well-known conversion experience, in which his heart was 'strangely warmed'.[10] Here a sign which could be dismissed as a trivial fluctuation of sensation is infused with spiritual significance. Both the context (hearing an epistle being read in a church) and the existing resonances of the 'heart' made Wesley sure that this was a sign of God's grace, but Wesley stopped short of explicitly ascribing his warmed heart to the Holy Spirit. The much-studied phrase is followed not by a 'by' or 'through', but a full stop. The workings of the body are at one with those of the spirit.

Being attuned to the body's fluctuations was regarded as a distinguishing, and disturbing, feature of Methodist devotion. Like hypochondria and its sister-condition hysteria, Methodism was often regarded as an *excess* of sympathy. Michel Foucault characterises hysteria and hypochondria as illnesses which overturn the Platonic hierarchy of body and soul, by establishing too strong a connection between them, either 'the revenge of a body that was too unrefined' or 'a result of excessive sensation'.[11]

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5 John Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley* (New York, NY: J & J Harper, 1827), X: 182.

6 Quoted in Paul Laffey, 'John Wesley on Insanity', *History of Psychiatry*, 12.48 (2001), 472. Laffey argues persuasively that Wesley recognised the differences between spiritual and mental conditions, as well as their co-dependence.

7 Wesley, *Works*, X: 182.

8 Wesley, *Works*, X: 185.

9 John Wesley, 'The Heavenly Treasure in Earthly Vessels'; quoted in Philip W. Ott, 'John Wesley on Health as Wholeness', *Journal of Religion and Health*, 30.1 (1991), 50.

10 Wesley, *Works*, I: 280.

11 Michel Foucault, *History of Madness*, trans. by Jean Khalfa and Jonathan Murphy (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 295.

Hysteria, in particular, was linked to 'an internal heat that spread throughout the body'.[12] There is only a small distance between Wesleyan sympathy between mind and spirit and a hysterical or hypochondriacal excess of sensation, between a heart strangely warmed by the Spirit and a heart strangely warmed by nervous pathology.

Both Wesley and the hypochondriac take great interest in the workings of the body, and provide hermeneutics for making sense of what would otherwise be random alterations in physical state. One hermeneutic is paranoid, finding death in the slightest cause:

> Such persons are particularly attentive to the state of their own health, to even the smallest change of feeling in their bodies; and from any unusual feelings, perhaps of the slightest kind, they apprehend great danger, and even death itself. In respect to all these feelings and fears, there is the most obstinate belief and persuasion.[13]

The other is hopeful, finding suggestions of the life to come in similar stimuli. Even in Cullen's description of the hypochondriac, it is easy to hear the echoes of religious conviction in their 'obstinate belief and persuasion', occasioned by 'unusual feelings' like Wesley's 'strangely warmed' heart. As Cullen observes, hypochondria is 'the gloomy and rivetted apprehension of evil', while Methodism is a joyful but no less riveted apprehension of goodness.[14]

The fixity of this apprehension is what lent Methodism its initially derogatory name. Attacks on Methodist practices in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century make much of the link between faith and nervous delusion. Leigh Hunt's *Attempt to Show the Folly and Danger of Methodism* (1809) suggests that Methodism is caused by nervous disorders, particularly hypochondria, as well as exacerbating them. He blames Methodist preachers for 'inflaming the fancies of the impassioned', exploiting the link between internal heat and nervous disease for rhetorical effect.[15] He criticises the Methodist tendency to 'make God the most immediate influence of their most indifferent actions', arguing that the movement takes divine providence to a ridiculous extreme whereby God minutely engineers even the most trivial event.[16]

The Methodist, as described by Hunt, is the hopeful inverse of the hypochondriac, over-interpreting the dross of embodied existence. 'The two great causes of Methodism', Hunt suggests, 'are ignorance and hypochondria.'[17] Superstitious Methodists 'fly to sensual reveries for relief as the common hypochondriac flies to his bottle, or to his mistress.'[18] Hunt's conclusion figures Methodism as a failed 'cure' for the failures of Anglicanism, a cure which is ultimately worse than the disease.[19] In a complex image, he unites medicine, disease and Catholicism by associating the vapour

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12 Foucault, *History of Madness*, p. 280.
13 William Cullen, *First Lines of the Practice of Physic*, 2 vols (New York, NY: I. Riley and Co., 1805), II: 385.
14 Cullen, *First Lines of the Practice of Physic*, II: 387.
15 Leigh Hunt, *An Attempt to Show the Folly and Danger of Methodism* (London, 1809), p. 2.
16 Hunt, *An Attempt to Show the Folly and Danger of Methodism*, pp. 32-4.
17 Hunt, *An Attempt to Show the Folly and Danger of Methodism*, p. 40.
18 Hunt, *An Attempt to Show the Folly and Danger of Methodism*, p. 55.
19 Hunt, *An Attempt to Show the Folly and Danger of Methodism*, p. 66.

of incense with both medicinal vapours and the pathological vapours which were believed to cause nervous illness: ‘[Methodism] is Popery deprived of it’s [sic] brilliance, it’s perfumes, and it’s volatility; a “vial of wrath,” hypochondriac in it’s vapour and caustic to it’s last dregs.’[20]

Hunt’s description of Methodism is, of course, extremely uncharitable, motivated in part by a distaste for any religion which sanctifies the body, rather than suppressing it. This distaste did not only reject Methodism, but even Scripture itself: Hunt describes the Song of Solomon as ‘a disgrace’ and ‘an indecent eclogue’.[21] But he captures something important for Methodist practice in its beginnings, and no less so today.

Methodism has often been defined *against* hypochondria, as a cure rather than a cause. In another uncharitable description, Freud recognised religion’s capacity to cure individual neurosis, though he believed it could only replace neurosis with ‘mass delusion’.[22] ‘Above all’ his other cures, Wesley recommended that the readers of *Primitive Physick* turn to ‘that old, unfashionable Medicine, Prayer.’[23] For Philip Ott, Wesley’s writings and sermons give the impression of ‘a spiritual clinician at work’.[24] They give the impression also that the lines between disease and cure, and between mental and spiritual health, are often obscure. The willingness to find a meaning for apparently trivial aliments brings Methodism disturbingly close to hypochondria. This similarity should not be hidden or explained away, but embraced. The current pandemic has made us all alert for the workings of a virus in our bodies. While our attention is so fixed, we might be alert for the workings of the Spirit there too.

PAUL NORRIS (Cambridge)

[20] Hunt, *An Attempt to Show the Folly and Danger of Methodism*, p. 67.
[21] Hunt, *An Attempt to Show the Folly and Danger of Methodism*, p. 58.
[22] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its discontents*, edited by Leo Bersani, translated by David McLintock (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2014), pp. 31, 26.
[23] Wesley, *Primitive Physick*, p. xviii.
[24] Philip W. Ott, ‘Medicine as Metaphor: John Wesley on Therapy of the Soul’, *Methodist History*, 33.3 (1995), 188.

NOTICES

Wesley Historical Society
New Constitution

A new WHS constitution has become necessary because the Society has accepted additional responsibilities in several areas. The society has recently become responsible for the *Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland*, previously edited by John A. Vickers, and details of this new venture have been integrated into the Constitution. The Constitution also has a new section on governance, and the present pandemic has alerted the Society of the need to have provision for conducting business in an emergency or at short notice. The 2021 WHS AGM will vote on the new Constitution.

The full text of the new Constitution is published as a supplement to this edition of the *Proceedings* (vol. 63.1, pp. xx-xx) and will be presented for approval at the next Annual General Meeting of the Society. If any member has comments to make on the new Constitution please email donaldhryan@hotmail.com by 30 April 2021.

DONALD H. RYAN (WHS Administrator/Data Protection Officer)

Wesley Historical Society
January 2021 Special Meeting Report

Having had the 2020 Annual General Meeting cancelled, a deferred Special meeting was held on 14 January 2021 via Zoom. The business of the meeting centred upon the following:

1. That the **updated WHS Constitution** circulated with this *Proceedings* for member consultation, would be an agenda item for the 2021 Annual General Meeting.
2. To host again the **WHS Essay prize competition** for 2021 with amended guidelines.
3. The appointing of the **officers of the society**, welcoming Derick Chambers as the elected member, and Simon Lewis as the Book Reviews Editor.
4. To plan a **residential conference** for summer 2022.
5. **2021 Events**, including the Annual General Meeting and the Annual Lecture, will be held online only, as detailed below.

The 2021 WHS Annual General Meeting for members of the Society will be held via Zoom on Thursday 8 July at 2.00pm. Members wishing to attend should contact distribution@wesleyhistoricalsociety.org,uk by no later than 1 July 2021 for a Zoom link.

The 2021 WHS Annual Lecture will take place on Saturday 10 July at 4.00pm (timed to assist overseas members joining). The speaker will be Dr Kate Tiller, Reader Emerita

in English Local History at Oxford University. She will speak on: '**Communities of Dissent: Methodist people, places and environments 1850 to 1930'.** Where and why did Methodism thrive or falter in English communities in the key period between the 1850s and the 1930s?

This lecture will also use the approaches of local history and the perspectives of family and community studies to discuss contrasting Methodist experiences of growth, maturity and decline and the factors which moulded them. It will reflect in particular on David Hempton's contention that Methodism thrived most where 'it forged a symbiotic fit with its host environments'. This is a public lecture and anyone wishing to attend should contact distribution@wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk by no later than 3 July 2021, for a Zoom link.

DAVID LEESE (WHS General Secretary)

BOOK REVIEWS

Felicity Jane Cain, *Mazes of Time: Sixteen Gregorys – the Story of a Methodist Family* (Oldham: Church in the Market Place Publications, 2020), pp. xvi + 264.
ISBN: 978-1-9989908-2-5. Paperback, £15. Available from felicityjcain@gmail.com.

As the historian Clyde Binfield has so ably demonstrated, Protestant Nonconformity was a strongly dynastic religion, underpinned by the vital role performed by key families and the networks that spread out from them. An entry heading search of the online *Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* reveals no fewer than 136 examples of prominent families credited with sustaining Methodism, in its various branches, over long periods. The Wesleyan Gregorys, whose contribution to the movement is holistically examined for the first time in this splendid and handsomely produced family history, were amongst the most notable of this elite. Four generations of them provided Methodism with sixteen ministers over 190 years, from 1799, when Benjamin Gregory (1772-1849) entered the work, until the death of Arthur Stephen Gregory (1895-1989). The author, the daughter of the latter and the great-great-granddaughter of the former, is a teacher of English by profession who describes herself as 'an inexperienced writer of lapsed Methodist commitment' (p. xi). Her labour of love since the early 1980s has been incrementally to compile this collective biography from printed primary and secondary sources, archives in institutional repositories, letters and papers held by the family, and information gleaned from pilgrimages to many of the places associated with her forebears.

These sixteen ministers were a very diverse band. Perhaps best remembered today, at least by Methodist scholars, is Benjamin Gregory (1820-1900), who rose to become connexional editor (joint from 1868 and sole from 1876, until 1893) and was elected President of Conference in 1879; he also wrote extensively (if somewhat verbosely) on history and ecclesiology, notably *Side Lights on the Conflicts of Methodism during the Second Quarter of the Nineteenth Century, 1827-1852* (1898). Other figures operating on the national stage were Arthur Edwin Gregory (1853-1912), successively Vice-Principal (1898-1900) and Principal (1900-12) of the National Children's Home, and Benjamin Gregory (1875-1950), who spent much of his life in city missions before editing the *Methodist Times* (1918-37) and immersing himself in ecumenical endeavours. There were two overseas missionaries, Theophilus Stephen King Gregory (1825-85) in the West Indies and Stephen Herbert Gregory (1869-1950) in north India, with chapter 5 introducing a non-Gregorian third, Henry Guard Price (1869-1943), the author's maternal grandfather, an Irish Methodist minister who laboured in south India. Two men became Methodist Episcopal Church ministers in the United States, John Robinson Gregory (1873-1949) and William Alfred Gregory (1878-1971), while Theophilus Stephen Gregory (1898-1975) is now often recalled for resigning the Methodist ministry in 1935 and joining the Roman Catholic Church. One of the others was George Osborn Gregory (1884-1972), whose granddaughter, Joanna Jacobs, was ordained as a Methodist minister in 1998, thus keeping the Gregorian dynastic flame burning bright.

Felicity Cain has a clear and engaging literary style. Her text is enlivened by frequent extracts from original correspondence, in quoting from which she seems most at ease, and is embellished by seventy-two illustrations, many of them in colour. The principal value (and enjoyment) of the volume lie in the outlines of each Gregory's education, ministerial career, personality, intellect, punishing workload, achievements, and the 'sheltering Methodist safety-net' of domesticity, with, amidst many contrasts between the men, the challenges of the itinerant system a recurring theme. Space is also found to consider the essential role played by the women in these men's lives, sisters, wives, daughters, aunts, mothers-in-law, and grandmothers. Once off this home turf, Cain has a tendency to shy away from setting her subjects in a broader Methodist historical context, something for which she feels less qualified. 'This is a personal story, not an academic study', she tells her readers, accordingly leaving 'the seeds of scholarship . . . for others to nourish' (p. xi). Her approach helps explain the absence of any footnotes or endnotes and the limited range of secondary literature that is mentioned.

There is one practical suggestion to make, just in case there is a reprint or revision at some future date. Family histories can often be difficult to follow for people outside the immediate family concerned, especially when the *dramatis personae* attain epic numbers, as they do in this book, and when so many of them are called Benjamin or Theophilus, as is the case here. Although the ministerial family tree on p. vi is helpful up to a point, there would have been an argument, in the interests of assisting navigation, for including a detailed index (there is none at all), as well as, in an appendix, a list of the stations (with dates) for each minister.

CLIVE D. FIELD (Birmingham)

Baird Tipson, *Inward Baptism: The Theological Origins of Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 205. ISBN 978-0-19-751147-3. Hardback, £64.00.

In recent years, historians of evangelicalism have focused increasingly on continuity rather than change, paying less attention to the 'innovative' or 'revolutionary' aspects of John Wesley and George Whitefield's ministries, and focusing instead on the origins of evangelicalism in Britain, America and continental Europe. By providing an accessible and consolidated account of the Reformation origins of evangelicalism, Baird Tipson's *Inward Baptism* (2020) makes a welcome addition to the secondary literature on transatlantic revivalism. Adopting a chronological approach, the book commences by discussing what was meant by 'conversion' in late-medieval Christendom. During this period, converting grace was believed to flow directly from the sacraments. Initially, it may, therefore, seem that, for medieval Christians, conversion was dependent on external rituals performed by the clergy. In fact, numerous laypersons maintained a vigorous devotional life that occurred internally via their private consciences. Clearly, the 'priesthood of all believers', which characterised the Reformation, had medieval antecedents.

The book proceeds to explore the ways in which 'conversion' was defined during the Reformation. Central to Tipson's thesis is the theological concept of 'interior' baptism, which was advanced by Martin Luther and propagated by subsequent Reformers, such as Theodore Beza (1519-1605). Unlike the 'exterior' baptism of water administered to infants, 'inward' baptism occurred during adulthood and culminated in the creation of a saving faith by the Holy Spirit. The ideas of Beza and other continental Reformers were embraced by Anglo-American Puritans, who are the focus of Tipson's subsequent discussions. Focusing particularly on the writings of William Perkins (1558-1602), Tipson explores Puritan conversion narratives, which usually followed a typical pattern. The first stage of conversion, according to Perkins, involved 'legal preparation', in which the unregenerate became increasingly guilty about their own spiritual and moral shortcomings. This was followed by a period of 'humiliation', in which the unregenerate realised that salvation could not be achieved through their own efforts and works (pp. 86-7). Once humiliated, individuals underwent an 'inflaming of the will', in which God spoke to them through their conscience, enabling them to embrace the 'gospel promise of mercy' (pp. 88-9). Their 'regeneration' was now complete.

Tipson's subsequent discussions of anti-Puritanism are, for this reviewer, the most stimulating aspects of the book. For much of the seventeenth century, the 'solifidian' soteriology espoused by Puritans was condemned by 'moralist' Laudians and neo-Laudians, who encouraged participation in the sacraments of the Church of England. According to these 'High Church' authors, most Christians experienced 'regeneration' during their infancy when they were baptised. Scholars have traditionally viewed *The Whole Duty of Man* (1658) – which is usually attributed to Richard Allestree (*c*.1620-81) – as the ultimate neo-Laudian antidote to Interregnum Puritanism. This devotional text was popular throughout the Restoration period and remained an influential text well into the eighteenth century. Intriguingly, however, Tipson observes various similarities between Allestree's book and the earlier devotional writings of Perkins. Both theologians recommended a strict regimen of fasting and works. Both authors also believed that humiliation served as a vital means of recognising one's sinfulness. Unlike Perkins, however, Allestree denied that humiliation led to despair. Rather, Allestree believed that humiliation encouraged individuals to strive more vigorously for a godly and moral life. It was within everyone's capacity to 'gird up their loins and bring their behaviour into line with God's commandments' (p. 131). There was, therefore, no need for individuals to experience the 'inward baptism' described by Perkins. As Tipson is aware, *The Whole Duty of Man* was subsequently attacked by Whitefield, who viewed it as a legalistic text.

During the Restoration, the teachings of Perkins and other Puritans were embraced by ejected Nonconformists, such as Richard Alleine (*c*.1611-81), to whom Tipson also devotes much attention. It was, according to Alleine, essential for regenerates to maintain a humble 'self-loathing' by constantly looking back to their 'unconverted life' (p. 135). The final chapter pulls all these discussions together by stressing the Reformation origins of evangelicalism. Rather than taking the easy route, and focusing entirely on Calvinist evangelicals, Tipson, to his credit, devotes much attention to the Arminian John Wesley,

who praised numerous Puritan authors in his *Christian Library* (1749-55). As with Perkins, Wesley 'beat down his audience with the law until they despaired of escaping divine punishment', only to then offer them a 'way forward' through Christ (p. 159). Tipson is, of course, aware that Wesley differed from Perkins (and Calvinist evangelicals) in the sense that he believed that humans could resist divine grace if they wished. Nevertheless, Tipson chooses not to 'overemphasize' these Calvinist-Arminian tensions. Instead, he stresses Wesley's 'Protestant' belief that 'God would convert when and where God pleased; it was only after the initial infusion of grace that humans had the ability to resist it' (p. 160). More attention could, however, have been paid to the various Roman Catholic and High Church influences on Wesley's theology.

Tipson's section on New England evangelicalism is, however, more nuanced. Indeed, his discussions of Charles Chauncy, a Congregationalist divine and anti-revivalist of Boston, show that there was no direct path from Puritanism to evangelicalism. Historians have traditionally dodged the obstacle of Chauncy's Puritan heritage by erroneously describing him as a crypto-Arminian, who was more influenced by the theology of Latitudinarian Anglicans than that of his Puritan ancestors. The picture painted by Tipson, however, is a more accurate one, which takes full account of Chauncy's reverence for Puritan authors. Citing Robert Bolton (1572-1631), Chauncy was concerned that the evangelical 'new birth' did not place enough emphasis on the practical 'marks of regeneration' (p. 163). Such teachings, Chauncy feared, would lead to a revival of the antinomianism propagated by Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643) and her followers. Jonathan Edwards, a moderate evangelical, agreed that regeneration needed to be evidenced by a person's behaviour. Edwards, however, diverged from Chauncy and other 'Old Light' Congregationalists by describing a 'new supernatural sense' triggered by the 'new birth', which was, therefore, 'insensible to non-Christians' (p. 166).

While Tipson offers little that is new to the historiography of evangelicalism, he is to be credited for providing an accessible introduction to the theological origins of the 'Great Awakening'. For non-theologians, who are more accustomed to studying this topic in the discipline of history, *Inward Baptism* would make an excellent introduction to the theological ideas that underpinned eighteenth-century evangelicalism.

SIMON LEWIS (Long Eaton/Book Reviews Editor: *PWHS*)

Joel Houston, *Wesley, Whitefield, and the 'Free Grace' Controversy: The Crucible of Methodism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), pp. xiii + 195. ISBN: 978-1-138-31735-2. Hardback, £120.

The Routledge Methodist Studies series has been publishing some of the most innovative doctoral work on Methodism in recent years, and this volume is no exception. Originating as a PhD thesis at the Nazarene Theological College in Manchester, Joel Houston's volume on the 'Free Grace' controversy of the 1740s approaches a well-worn subject in a genuinely fresh way, making it the best study to date on the debates over predestination in the first decade of the English Methodist movement.

The 'Free Grace' controversy has been returned to again and again by authors keen to stress either the Calvinist or Arminian roots of early evangelicalism. The controversy over predestination has been periodically revived and even re-fought. However, according to Houston, historians have tended to be blind to the 'social functions of predestinarian doctrine' (p. 4), and have not fully appreciated the ways in which the debates over predestination in the 1740s played a fundamental role in the shaping of early Methodist identities. Houston's aim then is to write a more complete account of the controversy 'that accounts for some of the personal and social realities that attend embodied doctrinal beliefs' (p. 8). There is much in this argument, though perhaps Houston overplays the uniqueness of his insight and approach at times. There have been others, including this present reviewer, who have argued that the 'Free Grace' controversy was the key moment in the defining of the various strands of early Methodism, and the distinguishing of the Wesleyan Methodists from the elect Methodists that looked to Whitefield for leadership in England, and that remained the only variety of Methodism in Wales throughout the eighteenth century. Indeed, I wonder whether some discussion of the Welsh context, and the contribution of Howel Harris to the development of Calvinist identity would have added a further dimension to this study?

Houston's develops his theme across six chapters, divided into two parts. Part one sets the 'Free Grace' controversy within the context of the development of English Calvinist/predestinarian theology. Seemingly indebted to Leif Dixon's work on the rise of English predestinarianism after 1590, Houston traces the development of English Calvinism in the seventeenth century, focussing in the main on the development of double predestination via Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva, and in England via William Perkins. A second chapter charts aspects of the critique of predestination, by an emerging community of English Arminians. There is much that is valuable in both these summaries, but neither chapter entirely does justice to the varieties of English Calvinism, High, Hyper, Moderate, evangelical, that had emerged by the later part of the seventeenth century, and that Whitefield proved so adept at negotiating.

Four chapters explore the 'Free Grace' controversy itself in considerable detail. Chapter 3 looks at the theological formation of Whitefield and Wesley, focussing on the latter's nurturing in anti-predestinarianism while sitting on his mother's knee, and Whitefield's emerging Calvinism via the Scottish seceders, Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine. The following chapter looks at the early Methodist societies, particularly in Bristol, where Whitefield felt more at home initially due to the significant dissenting presence in the city. As Houston suggests in his conclusion, more work needs to be done on the Bristol dimension of early Methodism, not least the kinds of people drawn to Whitefield's Reformed preaching by this stage (p. 185). It's in this chapter also that Houston's core argument, that the controversy over predestination was used by Wesley and Whitefield as a 'social demarcator', essential 'to developing a sense of identity under the leadership of the two men' (p. 10) comes into focus most clearly. Chapter 5 looks at the actual publications generated by the controversy, before a final chapter argues that the controversy did not end in 1742 or 1744 as has tended to be assumed,

but in 1749, once Whitefield had relinquished the leadership of his Calvinistic societies in London, and no longer posed a threat to Wesley's hegemony.

Slowly but surely something of a shift is occurring in studies of early Methodism. The long dominance of the Wesleyan perspective is beginning to give way to more variegated perspectives. The origins of this shift can perhaps be traced back to the work of W. R. Ward on the continental origins of the early evangelicals almost thirty years ago, and the study of early English Moravianism by Colin Podmore in 1998. More recently a renewed focus on Whitefield and Calvinistic Methodism is doing something similar. Joel Houston's excellent study of 'Free Grace' is an important contribution to this shifting focus, and is therefore to be warmly welcomed and richly commended.

DAVID CERI JONES (Aberystwyth/Editor: *PWHS*)

Sean McGever, *Born Again: The Evangelical Theology of Conversion in John Wesley and George Whitefield* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), pp. x + 248. ISBN: 978-1-683-59330-0. Paperback. £18.99.

In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in the life of George Whitefield, and his role in the forming and shaping of early Methodism. Slowly but surely, Methodist scholarship is beginning to reflect the different facets of the movement, Arminian and Calvinist, Wesleyan and Whitefieldian. One of the most fertile avenues of recent research has been the bringing of John Wesley and George Whitefield into close conversation with one another, on a whole range of issues and themes. It is precisely this that Sean McGever attempts in this extended exploration of Whitefield and Wesley's theologies of evangelical conversion.

McGever's argues that Whitefield and Wesley's understanding of conversion should be understood as 'inaugurated teleology with an emphasis on the *telos* of salvation rather than the *arché* of salvation' (p. 2). In other words, for both men conversion was best understood in terms of its end result, or goal, rather than the moment and circumstances of its beginning. Despite starting life as a doctoral thesis, McGever seems to have contemporary evangelical trends very much in his sights in this work. Modern evangelicals, he writes, focus on the inauguration (beginning) of conversion at the expense (or exclusion) of the teleological aspect found in Wesley and Whitefield (p. 219). 'Salvation', he argues, 'has become the entirety of the gospel for modern evangelicals (p. 221), who more often than not 'show the sanctification gap in their separation of conversion from discipleship' (p. 222). Whitefield and Wesley with their emphasis on sanctification or holy living as the corollary of genuine conversion, are therefore held up to modern evangelicals as an antidote to the problem of what Bonhoeffer famously called 'cheap grace'.

The main body of this study consists of four chapters outlining the theologies of conversion, first of Wesley and then Whitefield. With remarkable symmetry their theologies are reduced to a series of key motifs, and then a number of attendant or consequential themes. Similarities and differences between the two are teased out in

a chapter that follows. McGever distils Wesley's understanding of conversion to four motifs: by its very nature 'conversion means to convert *from* one state *to* another' (p. 13); should always be preceded by being convinced, convicted and awakened; is instantaneous; and results in good works, and possibly even perfection. In the second chapter on Wesley, McGever reflects on a number of themes raised by this theology. Wesley separated baptism from conversion, seeing it as the mark of one's entrance to the church, rather than as broadly equivalent to the new birth. In this he departed sharply from many of his fellow Anglicans of course. Some have argued that assurance was one of the hallmarks of evangelical religion, Wesley would likely not have agreed asserting that while assurance was desirable and available for all, it was not required of the genuine convert. When fitted together the various elements of Wesley soteriology, McGever argues, points towards a concept of conversion best understood in teleological terms.

As with Wesley, McGever identifies four key motifs in Whitefield's theology of conversion: there was again a turning *from* and *to*, but in Whitefield's case from self-righteousness to the righteousness of Christ (which was then imputed to the believer); being convicted, convinced, and awakened was rooted in a sense of one's personal sinfulness; before leading inexorably to the moment of crisis 'in which conversion arrives by faith in an instant' (p. 145). The reality of that conversion was proven by demonstrable evidence, something that was a practical demonstration of the new convert's election. This chapter is followed by a discussion of three attendant themes, broadly parallel to those explored in the corresponding chapter on Wesley. Again, Whitefield taught that baptism and conversion were far from synonymous, that assurance was the result of the direct witness of the Spirit, though not necessarily possessed by all believers, and that Whitefield's *ordo salutis* followed the classic Calvinist pattern, with sanctification and glorification the ultimate destination. Whitefield lived out the closing verses of Romans 8. Unsurprisingly perhaps McGever's comparative chapter argues that there was 'overwhelming continuity' between Whitefield and Wesley's views on the process of conversion. The differences between the two were the consequence, he argues, of Wesley's Arminianism and Whitefield's Calvinism, as well as Wesley's commitment to Christian Perfection. Neither of which, he asserts, affects the overall case for their commitment to an understanding of conversion as 'inaugurated teleology' (p. 218).

This study represents a useful discussion of how two early evangelicals understood the process of conversion. There are times when the book displays its origins as a doctoral thesis, and some editing of style might have made the study flow more easily. But this is also a study with a slight polemical edge, and is written in the hope that modern evangelicals brought up on such rudimentary conversion theologies as US Campus Crusade's *The Four Spiritual Laws* might 'reencounter the work of God, perhaps even a revival similar to what Wesley and Whitefield saw unfold in front of their eyes' (p. 226). Some of those understandings of conversion might be less prominent among British evangelical Christians, but perhaps the need for a revival of confidence in the possibility and reality of conversion remains no less pressing.

DAVID CERI JONES (Aberystwyth/Editor: *PWHS*)

Mark K. Olson, *Wesley and Aldersgate: Interpreting Conversion Narratives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 210. Hardback £120. Paperback £36.99. E-Book £33.29. ISBN 9780367587437.

Aldersgate has been a divisive issue among John Wesley's biographers. Some of his early biographers, such as Thomas Coke (1747-1814) and Henry Moore (1751-1844), stressed the significance of Aldersgate, but virtually ignored Wesley's allegedly 'legalistic' 1725 experience. This lesser known event occurred at Oxford, where – after reading Thomas à Kempis' (*c.*1380-1471) *Imitation of Christ* – Wesley chose to renounce the world and devote his life to Christ. Conversely, High Church biographers, such as the poet, Robert Southey (1774-1843), placed greater emphasis on Wesley's 1725 experience, while downplaying the more 'enthusiastic' event at Aldersgate. Throughout this stimulating book, Mark Olson stresses the importance of Aldersgate, while incorporating discussions of the numerous other significant events in Wesley's spiritual journey that preceded and succeeded it. Of crucial significance to Olson's study is the *Aldersgate Memorandum*, a conversion narrative, which contained Wesley's earliest recollection of the events of 24 May 1738. The *Memorandum*, which was initially distributed to Wesley's close family and friends, featured in the second volume of his *Journal* (1740). It charted various stages in Wesley's spiritual journey, including: (1) his 'legal' spiritual state as a High Churchman; (2) his return to England from Georgia in early 1738, when he admitted to his unbelief; (3) his friendship with Peter Böhler (1712-75), which influenced his decision to seek justifying faith; and (4) his Aldersgate conversion. As is noted by Olson, the latter was, in fact, portrayed in the *Journal* as a two-day event. On 25 May 1738, Wesley apparently awoke to a further mystical encounter with Christ, thereby solidifying his faith, albeit without eradicating fear and doubt. By comparing this account with conversion narratives by other evangelicals, Olson shows that the path to righteousness described in Wesley's *Journal* (legalism, unworthiness, and justification) was typical of this genre.

Olson is not, however, closed to the possibility that Wesley altered the *Memorandum* for inclusion in his *Journal*. More specifically, Wesley's admittance to lingering fears and doubts *after* Aldersgate would have been disagreeable to Böhler and the London Moravians, with whom he was associated throughout 1738. In the run-up to Aldersgate, Wesley had imbibed Böhler's belief that justification and sanctification occurred simultaneously, thereby removing all doubts and fears from the regenerate. However, as is clear from Wesley's personal correspondence – explored so thoroughly by Olson – Wesley was plagued by self-doubt throughout the Autumn of 1738, leading him to question his own conversion. By 1740, however, Wesley was describing justification as something which occurred in 'degrees' without ever removing the regenerate's vulnerability to doubt. This post-Aldersgate disenchantment with Böhler's soteriology was, as Olson argues convincingly, a precursor to the 'stillness' controversy, in which Wesley – and various other evangelicals – broke away from the Moravians because of their seemingly antinomian rejection of 'means of grace' (e.g. sermons and fasting). It is, therefore, possible that Wesley's feelings of doubt, expressed at the end of the

Journal account of Aldersgate, was a later, anti-Moravian addition, which did not appear in the original Memorandum.

Towards the end of the book, Olson explores the extent to which Wesley began to re-assess the significance of Aldersgate in his old age. By the 1770s, Wesley was describing his pre-Aldersgate days far more positively than he had done at the height of the evangelical revival. His 1725 experience, for instance, was no longer viewed as a transition from a 'natural' to a 'legal' state. Instead, the elderly Wesley viewed his 1725 dedication as the moment when he received a degree of saving faith, albeit only the 'faith of a servant' who remained in the legal dispensation. Aldersgate, on the other hand, represented Wesley's full spiritual awakening, providing him with the 'faith of a son'. As is noted by Olson, Wesley never altered his *Journal* account of what happened on 24 May 1738. Throughout his life, Aldersgate 'remained the crisis when Wesley became a real Christian' (p. 103).

The thoroughness of Olson's research is highlighted by the attention he devotes to contextual issues, including conversion narratives by other evangelicals, Wesley's wider reading, and the emergence of doctrinal controversies (e.g. the 'stillness' dispute). It did, however, feel that more attention could have been paid to the various factors which may have shaped Wesley's 'mature' interpretation of Aldersgate (e.g. renewed tensions between Calvinist and Arminian evangelicals during the 1770s). Nevertheless, Olson is to be credited for writing a fascinating book, which blends theology and history effectively. Anybody who thinks they are familiar with Aldersgate should consult this book. As with the reviewer, they will find that this event was far more complicated than they initially believed.

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CORRECTION

In the last edition of the *Proceedings* (Autumn 2020 ,62:6), in Brian E. Beck's article 'The 1839 Wesleyan Centenary Fund', p. 259. 'William Fuller Pollock' should read 'William Fuller Pocock'.

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ISSN 0043-2873 (Print)
ISSN 2632-4466 (Online)